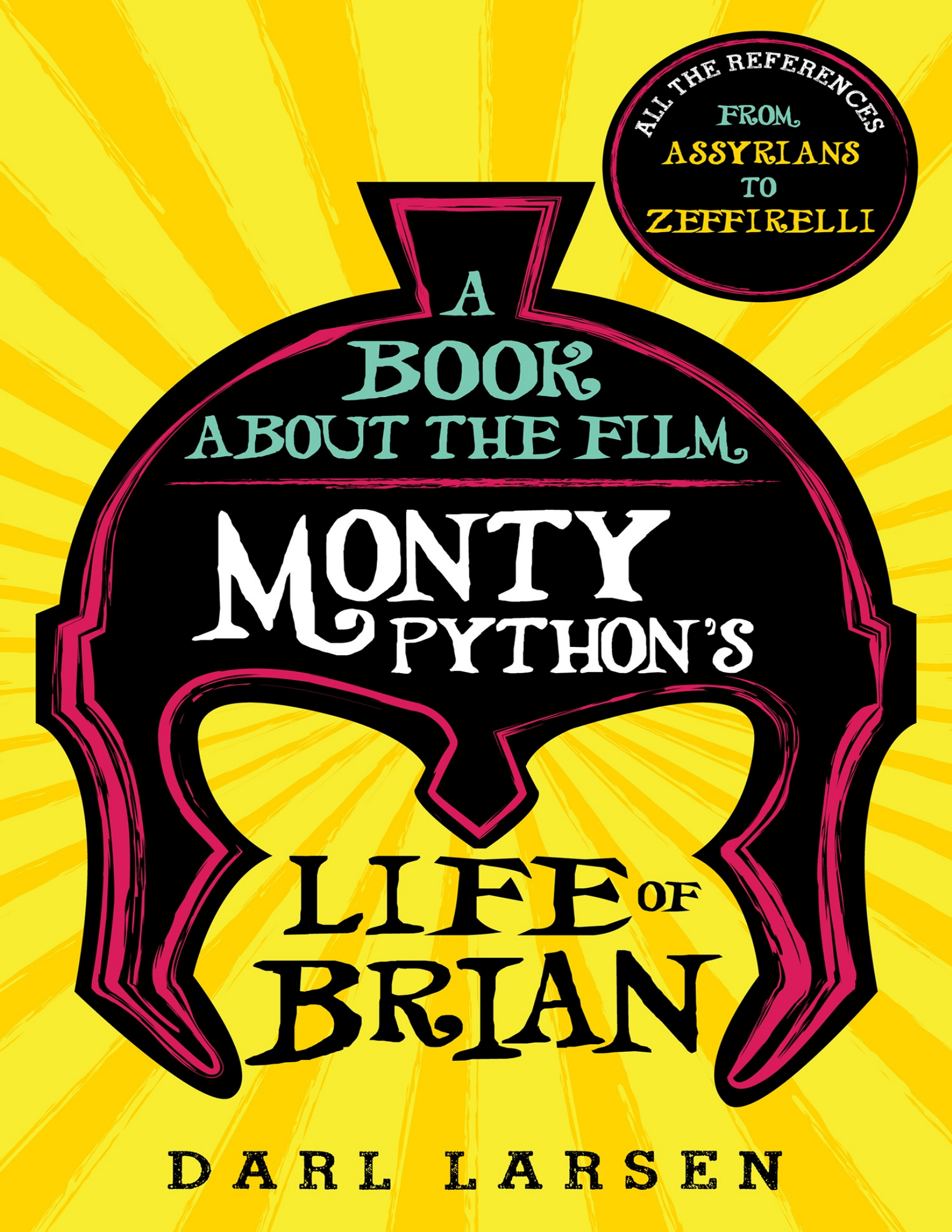
ALL THE REFERENCES
FROM
ASSYRIANS
TO
ZEFFIRELLI
A
BOOK
ABOUT THE FILM
MONTY
PYTHON'S
LIFE OF
BRIAN
DARL LARSEN

A Book about the Film *Monty Python's Life of Brian*

A Book about the Film *Monty Python's Life of Brian*

All the References from Assyrians to Zeffirelli

Darl Larsen

Rowman & Littlefield
Lanham • Boulder • New York • London

Published by Rowman & Littlefield
A wholly owned subsidiary of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.

4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706

www.rowman.com

Unit A, Whitacre Mews, 26-34 Stannary Street, London SE11 4AB

Copyright © 2018 by Rowman & Littlefield *All rights reserved*. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote passages in a review.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data** Names: Larsen, Darl, 1963– author.
Title: A book about the film Monty Python's Life of Brian : all of the references from Assyrians to Zeffirelli / Darl Larsen.
Description: Lanham : Rowman & Littlefield, [2018] | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2017033575 (print) | LCCN 2017051435 (ebook) | ISBN 9781538103661 (electronic) | ISBN 9781538103654 (hardback : alk. paper) Subjects: LCSH: Life of Brian (Motion picture)
Classification: LCC PN1997.L575 (ebook) | LCC PN1997.L575 L37 2018 (print) | DDC 791.43/72—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2017033575

™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

Printed in the United States of America

For Dad,
Norbert W. Larsen,
1935–2015

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments
Introduction
Abbreviations
SCENE 1: In a Bethlehem Manger
SCENE 2: Animated Title and Credit Sequence
SCENE 3: The Sermon on the Mount
SCENE 4: The Stoning
SCENE 5: Alms for an Ex-leper
SCENE 6: I'm Not a Roman, Mum!
SCENE 7: The Colosseum, Jerusalem
SCENE 8: The Peoples' Front of Judea
SCENE 9: The Latin Lesson
SCENE 10: The PFJ Plan Their Raid
SCENE 11: In the Palace Sewers
SCENE 12: In Pilate's Jail
SCENE 13: In the Court of Pontius Pilate
SCENE 14: The Space Movie Interruption
SCENE 15: Street Preachers and Haggling
SCENE 16: Hiding with the PFJ
SCENE 17: Brian Gives a Sermon
SCENE 18: Simon the Hermit
SCENE 19: "He's Not the Messiah" Panto
SCENE 20: Brian Is Arrested, Again
SCENE 21: The PFJ Discusses
SCENE 22: The Crucifixion Queue
SCENE 23: Pilate's Passover Address

SCENE 24: The Crucifixion Queue, Part II
SCENE 25: Pilate's Passover Address, Part II
SCENE 26: The Crucifixion Party
SCENE 27: Pilate's Passover Address, Part III
SCENE 28: Looking for Brian
SCENE 29: The PFJ Resolves
SCENE 30: Toward Calvary
SCENE 31: "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life"
Bibliography
About the Author

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This kind of book project doesn't happen without loads of help, so there are thanks to be given. A couple of years ago I was caught off guard by Doug Fabrizio of Radio West, who asked when a *Life of Brian* book might be expected. I'd just finished *A Book about the Film* Monty Python and the Holy Grail, so I was tired and maybe even cranky. I think I may have tactfully answered "Never." Just weeks later, that prompt turned into a niggling, then into the beginnings of this book, so a thanks to Doug is in order.

Stephen Ryan and Rowman & Littlefield were good enough to push the project through, and I'm grateful for their continuing enthusiasm. My BYU Theatre and Media Arts colleagues Wade Hollingshaus, Dean Duncan, Sharon Swenson, Tom Russell, Benjamin Thevenin, Brad Barber, Scott Christopherson, Tom Lefler, Kelly Loosli, Jeff Parkin, Megan Sanborn-Jones, and Amy Jensen helped make this book a reality; and Elizabeth Funk, Kyle Stapley, and the terrifically helpful front desk team all carried water—thanks. Profs. Roger Macfarlane and Rob McFarland assisted with Latin and German translations, respectively, and my research assistants Emily Bade, Jessica Cahill, and Helen Butcher provided wonderful, crucial material. Kimball Maw Jensen and Martha Rallison taught courses for me so I could have release time, while my dissertation advisor, mentor, and friend William Proctor Williams is ever in my corner, and I'm grateful. The Harold B. Lee Library and especially the resourceful people at Interlibrary Loan bent over backwards, again, to get me everything I needed for such an expansive subject.

Mom and Dad, Patricia and Norbert Larsen, continue to be as helpful and loving as can be imagined. My amazing wife, Nycole, my children and their spouses—Keir (Misti), Emrys (Cat), Brynmor (Chad), and Eamonn, Dathyl, Ransom, and Culainn—and granddaughter, Hayden, are constant fans who encourage me to work on what makes me happy. Thank you all.

INTRODUCTION

> It is a tale of unrelieved horror—of brutalities committed . . . by provisional governors . . . by the leaders of the Jewish insurgents. . . . It is a tale of hopeless revolts, of suicidal strife between rival gangsters and warring factions, of incredible heroism achieving nothing but universal ruin and destruction.
>
> —G. A. Williamson[1]

> We're giving Pilate two days to dismantle the entire apparatus of the Roman Imperialist State.
>
> —Reg

> This country's a worse risk than Cuba. You're a banana republic. You're a mess.
>
> —"Tony"

Tony is talking about Great Britain in the late 1970s; Williamson about Jerusalem in 70. In *Life of Brian*, Reg and the Pythons bring the two together, and we will, too.

In John Mackenzie's eschatological gangster picture *The Long Good Friday*, East London mob boss Harold Shand has run up against the new face of crime, the IRA, and the results are catastrophic. Shand (Bob Hoskins[2]) has been busy arranging his version of the future, a deal with the American mafia[3] for the legitimization of his corrupt empire, but after a series of bombings and assassinations, the Yanks are going home, their reasons mentioned above. The old way of doing things in the London crime world was coming to an end in 1979, the film tells us, as a more powerful, more vicious (and Rome-influenced) foreign element wrests control. The hints of epochal change were everywhere in the 1970s—across the Empire, in music and the arts, in the failing postwar "consensus" of Britain as a socialist utopia—and it's no surprise to find it in a Python film. Williamson's "insurgents" aren't the Peoples' Front of Judea but the Jewish Zealots, a fanatical sect that pricked the Romans (and Jewish theocrats) with a thousand pins before being crushed, their holy city and temple obliterated. But the PFJ *are* part of this tale. Promising brutalities against their hated governor, Pilate, the PFJ's revolt is a hopeless one, their strife suicidal.

They will struggle with rivals; one among them will act heroically and in so doing invite *discrete* ruin and destruction. For the Pythons, the PFJ are the Zealots, yes, but also the PLO, the SLA, and the RAF, all terror groups active in the 1970s, and all fighting against their versions of the "bloody Romans." Kidnapping for ransom, to force regime change, or for leverage to free political prisoners had become so common as to pass nearly unnoticed in first-century Jerusalem and the world of 1977. This heady mélange of ancient and contemporary history isn't new for the Pythons.

In *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, the Pythons presented a sub-Roman world populated by medieval filth and ignorance, but also characters mythological (King Arthur, the Legendary Beast), quasi-historical (tribe leader Arthur), and anachronistic (Dennis, policemen). The tensions between the fabular and the historical bits of Arthur, the early Middle Ages, and twentieth-century Britain threatened the integrity of the film at every turn, culminating in a police raid and an upended film projector. *Life of Brian* exhibits some of these tensions, but its connective tissue—a shadow version of the Christ story—keeps the narrative skeleton from collapsing, following Brian from his nativity to his stations of the cross in faithful, pilgrimatic steps. There are no direct-address moments in *Brian*, no helpful narrators, no acknowledgments of the artifice of filmmaking (it's almost never "only a model"). There are more made-up than historical characters in *Holy Grail* and *Brian*, with just Pilate and Jesus appearing from history in *Brian*, and Jesus making only a single, canonical appearance. Most others are just Bible types—lepers, sinners, tradesmen, disciples, Jews and Samaritans, Roman plutocrats, prefects, and soldiers; these figures appear in all biblical films, from *Ben-Hur* to *Jesus of Nazareth*. The period-appropriate dress, settings, and subject matter further situate the story in a believable biblical milieu. But this verisimilitude only creates a *more* classical Hollywood-type film than *Holy Grail*—purposely anachronistic language and references, irreverence for the spiritual, and a spaceship digression maintain the film's Pythonesque instability, its chimeric mode. And contrary to much clinkering fourth-estate scree, the film isn't really about Jesus, or things blasphemous—it's rather a Jesus-*type* story. In a millennial time of many claimant messiahs and healers and prophets, the Pythons present a baby mistaken for the "King of the Jews," and follow him as he grows, just off the way from where an actual Jesus is pursuing his ministry. *Life of Brian* is more about religious zealotry and terrorism in first-century Jerusalem and the twentieth-century world; it is about the British Empire as much as the Roman

Empire; it is about institutional power and the efficacy of Davids versus Goliaths in the religious, colonial, and political regimes of ancient Rome and modern Britain. For two centuries the British Empire has been mentioned in the same breath as the Roman Empire, good and bad, by university doyens, Sir Clark-like presenters, and Fleet Street columnists.[4] James Morris[5] calls his first chapter in *Pax Britannica* "The Heirs of Rome," referring to the sprawling, muscular British Empire of 1897—the spirituous time of Victoria's diamond jubilee—the title a play on "*Pax Romana*," the controversial, celebrated "Roman peace" that embraced much of the known world for decades.

In March 1975 during a recording session for a forthcoming album, the troupe decided that their next film would be a "Monty Python and the Life of Christ" lark, with Chapman as Christ and featuring characters like "Ron the Baptist."[6] This was agreed about a week before the London premier of *Holy Grail*, the impetus for the decision being the creation of a continuing revenue stream for Python Productions.[7] The *Carry On*–like "Ron the Baptist" character never did materialize, nor would Chapman play Christ, but the film project eventually came to be. The troupe's individual television, book, and film projects would push this group effort off to 1976 and 1977; it would be late 1976 before they began writing, then drafting and rewriting in 1977, and finally September 1978 by the time they reached Tunisia for shooting.[8] *Monty Python's Life of Brian* premiered in August 1979, more than four years after it was conceived.

This book project, then, is a close look at the social, economic, and political zeitgeist of Britain, her vanishing Empire, and a version of the Holy Land, the lens being a film, in this case *Life of Brian*. The Pythons are creatures of their time, but they are also educated university wits who have access to historical and philosophical referents—their work can be unpacked for synchronic and diachronic influences, for its ontological and phenomenological motifs. There is much in the writing and references, but there is also much beyond, the episodes and films being truly heteroglossic. We will study this film in its time—as it responds to economic and political headlines of the day—as well as across time, in relation to the biblical epics it models and spoofs, the acts of terror occupying the news in the 70s and 1970s, and even films from the Pythons' youth that very clearly imprinted on them, including one starring the "Forces' Sweetheart" Vera Lynn. My earlier works on *Flying Circus* and *Holy Grail* focus as much on the worlds and words that inform the troupe's writing and performing as on the television series and feature film created.[9] These earlier efforts are referenced throughout this current book, necessary given that the Pythons, like Shakespeare,

reflexively refer to themselves and their portfolio, trotting out favorite hobbyhorses for another go.[10] For *Life of Brian*, our time periods include first-century Jerusalem and late-1970s England, both caught on the horns of millenaric unrest involving collapses of leadership and economies, internal dissension, and crushing external forces. By the seventh decade, Roman rule had become intolerable to many, and those willing to fight, the Zealots, preached a messianic sermon with rabble-rousing, kidnappings, and murder. Just thirty-seven years after the death of Christ, Jerusalem fell to the Romans, its temple, homes, and palaces razed. Nineteen hundred years later, rule by Labour and the grasping British trade unions was not only becoming intolerable but unsustainable, with inflation undermining the economy's fortifications, and Thatcherism gathering to storm the breach in May 1979. The Jewish-but-philo-Roman historian Josephus paints a grim picture of the Jews advancing their own demise, not content to receive Rome's beneficence, not acknowledging what the Romans had "ever done for" them. Josephus points to the Zealots specifically, who brought deadly terror to the hearts of Romans and anyone supporting them across Judea; later, tabloid chronicles of the 1970s pitched bombings and kidnappings and hijackings committed by (or for) those who saw themselves as oppressed "have-nots," and generally targeting the "haves." The ultimate disaster for many as the 1970s waned—the fall of the Holy City, if you will—was the end of Labour's occupation of No. 10 for a good long time, and the myriad references to apocalypses and "Old Testament" prophets and a kind of "New Jerusalem" filled news shows and political diary pages. The Pythons brought Old and New Jerusalem together for *Life of Brian*, yes, but this terminology was everywhere, according to Peter Jenkins: Sir Keith Joseph had played the Baptist's role in Mrs Thatcher's coming. The analogy is apt because in conversations at that time he (like [Tony] Benn) had compared himself with a prophet come down from the mountains. Indeed, there was an Old Testament ring to his cries of woe from the wilderness as he urged repentance from the wicked ways of socialism and beat his breast in immolation for his own part in the betrayal of the ark of the Conservative covenant.[11]

All these players—Joseph, Benn, and Thatcher, Tory and Labour, Left and Right, wild-eyed and measured—we'll meet in the following pages.

Just months before Palin mentions the Pythons considering the life of Christ as their next project, Sir Lew Grade, his television network ATV, and director Franco Zeffirelli announced "with considerable fanfare" their *Jesus of Nazareth* six-part miniseries, slated for Easter 1976.[12] This certain "money-spinner"

followed many recent revisitations from Jesus and the Gospels, including the play and film *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and the play *Godspell*. The controversial poem *The Love That Dares to Speak Its Name* brought these new examinations of the imagined life of Jesus into the Old Bailey, where "blasphemy" was eventually proven and punished. Jesus even became something of a Zealot and conjuror himself in the film *The Passover Plot*, also from 1976.[13] The 1970s were a time for the reevaluation of iconicity, with Jesus Christ treated as contestedly as any. A number of searching books were produced in the middle part of the decade—just when the Pythons were beginning their search for a new movie subject—treating belief, Jesus, and the Gospels. Just a few include Desmond Leslie's *The Jesus File*, Oscar Cullman's *Jesus and the Revolutionaries*, Malachi Martin's *Jesus Now*, Peter De Rosa's *Jesus Who Became Christ* and *Come Holy Spirit*, and G. A. Wells's *Did Jesus Exist?*.[14] When actor Paul Nicholas took on the lead role in *Jesus Christ Superstar* in 1972, he brought threads together, much as the Pythons would several years later. Nicholas hoped "that audiences . . . will feel at the end Jesus as a freedom fighter . . . [s]omeone along the Che Guevara lines, getting the only accolade he knows will last, martyrdom."[15] This wasn't a standalone conceit—in the postwar years there had appeared dozens of books and articles asking about Jesus as a Zealot, a terrorist, a revolutionary, a political figure, a Jewish national hero; these books and their reviews and then responses to those reviews became a cottage industry in academia. The Pythons could have hardly avoided being influenced. The ubiquitous, Jesus-like photo of Che gracing dorm rooms everywhere after 1968 serves as a neat pictograph for the age, at least for those who saw themselves as the young progressives shepherding a fairer future. The Pythons also may have decided on the subject just because so many institutional others were taking on the Christ story, with the *Jesus of Nazareth* producers (including screenwriter Anthony Burgess) promising a catholic, reverent look at Jesus, not the "modern, hippy travesties" and "sociological notions" of *Superstar* or *Godspell*, nor the *révolutionnaire du jour* revisionisms of *The Passover Plot*.[16] The historical "reality" of King Arthur and Camelot were front and center in the news of 1973, when the Pythons put pen to paper on *Holy Grail*;[17] a polymorphic Jesus occupied the same spaces in newspapers, magazines, on television and movie screens when *Life of Brian* came into being.

It shouldn't be a surprise to find a fixation on the Middle East during the Pythons' lifetimes. Palestine had been administered by Britain since the end of World War I, and, by 1948, joined other members of the former British Empire

in the exodus from British domination. British territorial soldiers had toured, served, and died in the Holy Land, while British colonial administrators managed, erected, or reinforced cities and public works projects, all then left behind when the Mandate ended. Bernstein—acknowledging Britain's optimism after World War II—writes that the "Middle East, more than any other region, was an area where the British still saw themselves as a major player."[18] Those hopes were dashed in "the messiest of Britain's retreats from empire" just a few years later.[19] In 1956 the Suez Crisis exposed the frailty of the "sick man" Britain,[20] its influence in the region evaporating without the support of another former colony, the United States. In the 1967 and 1973 wars in these deserts, Britain had to watch from the bench as the new superpowers—the Americans and the Soviets—played the game. The Middle East was home base for a number of terror organizations of the day—Syria, Lebanon, Libya, and the teeming Palestinian refugee camps—becoming the last stop for many terrorists after high-profile hijackings or bombings. By 1973, an OPEC oil embargo would strangle Britain, helping bring down a Conservative government, and hobbling succeeding Labour administrations. This stagnation directly resulted in an anemic economy across the mid-1970s, its lifeblood drained by inflation, the powerful unions, and their unsustainable pay packet demands. By 1979, in the eyes of many, the death rattle of the "socialist commonwealth" wheezed out, and the "conviction politics" of Thatcherism frog-marched the country into an uncertain future. This is precisely where our film is situated—created 1976–1979, set in the heat of the Middle East, at the crux of radical change on a global scale, but also, ironically, shivering in the lowering cold of Britain's Winter of Discontent. In *Strange Rebels*, Caryl lays out the major world figures and events fulminating and culminating as the seventies came to a close: The forces unleashed in 1979 marked the beginning of the end of the great socialist utopias that had dominated so much of the twentieth century. These five stories—the Iranian Revolution, the start of the Afghan jihad, Thatcher's election victory, the pope's first Polish pilgrimage, and the launch of China's economic reforms—deflected the course of history in a radically new direction. It was in 1979 that the twin forces of markets and religion, discounted for so long, came back with a vengeance.[21]

These global changes, and those more local, will be revisited as we move forward.

The Pythons' Jerusalem is, like Britain, a "nation of shopkeepers,"[22] where (attempted) exchanges take place regularly, a favorite trope. In *Flying Circus*

there were tobacconists and chemists, vendors of cheese, sexual favors, pornography, “fishy” toilet requisites, books, dung, lingerie, arguments, ants, and so on. Transactions in the Pythons’ Jerusalem include the selling and buying of rocks for stonings, begging, the alleged exchange of sexual favors for sustenance, the vending of “imperialist titbits,” haggling for a beard, and then a gourd, and on. Many of the film’s scenes are shot in, or within earshot of, market sets, avoiding religious settings almost completely; government settings are reserved for Brian’s arrest, “trial,” and condemnation; and the few private spaces include Brian’s home and the PFJ’s hideout. The bulk of the film’s action takes place in arenas of transactions—fighting for life in the arena, begging for alms at the city gate, haggling for bargains in rocks, beards, and gourds near the soukh. The “twin forces of markets and religion” mentioned by Caryl come together throughout, coming to a head in the epically silly—a valueless gourd that Brian struggles to give away becoming “the Holy Gourd of Jerusalem.”

It’s worth asking what’s missing from this first-century story—meaning how near is *Brian* to being an orthodox, classical biblical tale, or a *Carry On*–like costume farce—and the answers are revealing. The reasons that the Romans treated the Jews differently from almost any other conquered peoples in their empire—the Jews’ monotheism and demands for ritual purity—are obscured in *Life of Brian*. The Pythons’ version of Jerusalem has no temple or cultus, the center of Jewish religious life. Foreign violations of these had provoked uprisings over and over again after Pompey’s time, but there’s not even the hint of a temple or synagogue. There is a single instance of slavery, even though slavery was common in cultures across Palestine, the Jews included; “Jew” and “Jewish” are mentioned only twice, this is more a “pre-Christian” tale told by white Church-of-England types; there is no obvious Sanhedrin—the “sacerdotal aristocracy” (the Jewish ruling class) are absent; the Sabbath is only mentioned once, and that in a *draft* of the script; we see just one Jewish official, at the stoning; there is no mention (beyond “Elders”) of any high priest, even though Caiaphas worked closely with Pilate for much of his prefectship; and, finally, there is no temple tax collection. But maybe there’s more evidence of accurate Roman life in first-century Judea? Marginally. There are centurions, a prefect, Romanized sculptures, and obvious Roman architectural hints, and there’s also Roman justice on display. There is no obvious praetor beyond the Praetorian Guard; no aedile, even though we are shown games; no censor, pontiffs, or augurs, and no obvious polytheism (everyone in the film, Roman and Jew, uses singular “God” epithets); and no sign of significant Roman public officials

beyond Pilate and those Romans lounging about at the Colosseum.[23] Roman emperors are mentioned, but not the current emperor, Tiberius. There are also no mentions of Roman contributions as important as concrete or arches (though public works will be listed, but not shown), and no tribute tax, no *publicani* (publicans), except in the script's draft form. Reasons for these conspicuous absences range from the practical (no looming Temple set needed to be built) to the cautious (why anger the Jewish world, too, with profaneness in relation to holy sites and sacred practices?), and will be discussed as we move along. The mise-en-scène looks as if it was mostly inspired by the various biblical epics the Pythons screened prior to making the film, with identifiable bits from *Ben-Hur*, *King of Kings*, and the recent *Jesus of Nazareth*, as opposed to scholarly work. In short, the Pythons haven't dug nearly as deep into the world they're populating—at least not as deep as they had for *Holy Grail*, where Palin and Jones's reading of scholarship on medieval Britain shone through. It could be that the topics of modern zealotry, rigidity of belief, and intolerance outweighed the demand for scholarly fastidiousness, the sets and characters merely useful backgrounds and vessels for the Pythons' talking points.[24]

The 1960s and 1970s was a fascinating time when much traditional social and religious thought and exercise came under scrutiny. The existence of a benevolent God had been under attack since the Bishop of Woolwich's *Honest to God* emerged in 1963; "Jesus freaks" appeared in Britain from America in 1971, and, to many Brits, there was one in the White House; Jesus and synoptic gospel stories were reimagined on Broadway and West End stages—Jesus as naif, as questioning, as political; and a spate of popular novelizations about Pontius Pilate (reassessing his role as a man between the Jews and Rome) problematized this already problematic figure. This was a self-flagellating period for Britain, when an emerging batch of "stand-by experts" set about to "decry common sense, defy public opinion and loathe hallowed tradition," ensuring a better, more progressive future by flaying the past.[25] It was also a period where serious films and poems looking at the physical, human life of Jesus raised blood pressures, hackles, and writs in London—"progress" wouldn't necessarily mean "anything goes." Comedy was a bit safer, yes. In a late 1972 *Flying Circus* episode, a Cleese character mentions following the Bergsonian theory of "laughter as a social sanction against inflexible behaviour"; for the Pythons, that generally meant poking fun at sociopolitical martinets, coxcombs, and middle England.[26] *Life of Brian* also embraces that conceit. We will laugh at the

“inelasticity”[27] of uptight Romans and Jews, of single-minded individuals and singly driven mobs, and at “silly sods” who kill themselves because they can.

In the region, the Israelis were embracing archaeology (ambitious digs in Masada, Jerusalem) to underscore the preeminent importance of the Jewish (as opposed to Palestinian) presence in Palestine, historically, but also reexamining the life and significance of Jesus for the jaded 1970s. Israeli school texts were updated in 1973, conflating, collaterally, the British and Roman empires. Students new to Jesus were understandably confused: “In their identification of Jesus as a rebel, they frequently committed slips of the tongue calling the Romans ‘British’ and Pontius Pilate the ‘High Commissioner,’ the title of the British official who was the last foreign ruler in Jerusalem before Israel’s independence.”[28] This “confusion” sets us up perfectly for the Pythons to mean the PLO or JRA when they say PFJ, and to examine their prime minister alongside a Roman prefect, the failing British Empire in relation to the mature Roman Empire, *etc.*

The idea of a smaller, weaker body trying to influence or even overthrow a larger one can be appreciated on several levels in the film, and especially in the nuanced period of postwar Great Britain. Apart from myriad anticolonial activities going on in the remaining “pink bits” of Empire and around the world, in December 1973 a determined coal mining industry brought Britain to a near standstill, forcing a three-day work week and rationing—Christmas lights and electric hearths went dark across the country—just as the Pythons were creating their “impoverished plague-ridden” *Holy Grail* world.[29] This was precipitated by the small, distant, and decidedly foreign OPEC enacting an oil embargo, forcing Britain to rely on coal, putting miners in the catbird seat. The Heath government fell just two months later.[30] In the film, the PFJ is fighting to unseat the Roman Empire, just as Rhodesia and India and Malaya had recently shrugged off the cloak of Britain’s empire; just as radicalized groups like the Japanese Red Army and the Red Army Faction struck against imperialist forces in their own countries; just as smaller, more radical sects of the Palestine Liberation Organization (viz., the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) lashed against its own parent group, against Israel and the West; just like shadow governments tilted in vain opposition at sitting governments in Britain; just as the clumps of Liberals and ministers from Ulster and Edinburgh tried to influence policy during Callaghan’s coalition government; and just like factions within the Labour and Conservative parties (the militant Left; the arch Right) attempted to force concessions from the center, *etc.* None of these actions came

off without misery and bloodshed, metaphorical or very real. Peter Marin (1972) calls the twentieth century a time of "botched revolutions," so it would be very much surprising to see Brian or the PFJ succeed.[31]

A "Decent Controversy"

In 1977, when *Gay News* was in the dock for publishing an allegedly blasphemous poem, the prosecutor admitted that such publications had freedoms within the limits of "decent controversy," but that didn't keep publisher Denis Lemon from a fine and a suspended jail sentence. Though protested, weakly, and railed against to a limited extent, *Life of Brian* failed to reach a level exceeding "decent controversy"—it avoided litigation, and managed to be a popular film. Indecency aside, annotations responding to the characters and references in *Life of Brian* matter as they do for any work of art. Many of the images and references included in *Flying Circus* and *Holy Grail* have faded with time, especially the more topical bits. Important names and faces, key legislation, and political alliances mean a great deal, even everything, within earshot of an event or era; but the brilliance of lightning rods like Marcia Williams, Reginald Maudling, or even former PM Wilson have diminished with passing years. Political diarist Bernard Donoughue—special advisor during this period to two prime ministers—understood this only as he reread his diaries prior to publication: "It is chastening to my generation to realise how matters which seemed of great import and common knowledge at the time—the 'social contract,' the 1975 pay policy and the EEC renegotiations are but a few major examples—are today beyond the recollection of all but a few readers with a special interest or experience."[32] Annotating these cultural artifacts matter, Donoughue underscores: "Although the events described in this diary are only a generation ago, many current media commentators show little interest in and even less knowledge of them. This is sad because that decade of the 1970s contains matters of great significance for our nation's history."[33] *Monty Python's Life of Brian* is one such artifact, born in and responding to the detritus comprising 1976–1978 Britain and the world. Add to this the explosion of violence from dozens of terror groups—sloughing off colonialism or attempting to overthrow capitalism or just lashing out from lives of privileged boredom and *ennui*—many so agitated being just rudderless youth given a heading thanks to Marxist pamphlets, socialist professors, and the availability of small arms. Scores of books emerged describing current terrorism and its history; many somber TV specials, as well; all trying to account for the eruptions of unrest and

violence. These same “matters” found their way into *Life of Brian*, and our task is to tease them out, revealing a “constellation of brilliant particulars.”[34]

Sources for this study include the finished film itself, as well as a bound version of the printed script.[35] There are a number of versions of the script available online, offering diverse drafts, so many without provenance that including them is fruitless. “Missing” scenes involving classrooms and shepherds and Otto were either written and not filmed, or filmed and edited out, and will be mentioned only as appropriate. Another draft is the script as read aloud by most of the Pythons in July 1977, and now available as an audio track on the Blu-ray edition of the film. This oral performance does not follow the printed version of the script precisely, and will be referenced as needed. The film as finished and distributed is our primary source material. Our work is broken up by scenes, start to finish, with annotations given in order of screen/page appearance. This means that the animated title sequence annotations, for example, appear just after the nativity scene, and just before the Sermon on the Mount. An entry preceded by ***(draft)*** is one brought over from a draft version of the script. As for secondary sources, I’ve found that a mixture of the scholarly and the more popular is best. For *A Book about the Film* Monty Python and the Holy Grail, for instance, scholarly works on Britain of the tenth through fourteenth centuries were used alongside the most recent Arthurian scholarship, alongside Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur* and even boys’ comic books from the Pythons’ youth. The goal in all this is an approximation of what the Pythons accessed in their writing, taking into account what they may have studied at university, for example. The latest academic scholarship available in 1976—on the Holy Land, the life of Jesus, Pontius Pilate, ancient and modern terrorism, etcetera—is key. But popular study is also crucial, since the Pythons often wrote based on what they’d read in newspapers, watched on TV, listened to on *The Goon Show*, and seen in *Private Eye*. This is why the critical works of scholars E. Mary Smallwood and Joachim Jeremias are important for “Jerusalem at the time of Jesus” information, as well as period journal articles from the likes of oft-published Solomon Zeitlin and S. G. F. Brandon. The work of Jewish scholar Josephus is crucial to understanding the period leading up to the fall of Jerusalem; his self-serving bias is acknowledged, but he’s also one of the very few sources for this fascinating period in Jewish history. The celebrated Williamson editions of Josephus’s work appeared in 1959 and 1964, and were well-received and much-discussed.[36] Josephus’s work—part of assigned reading lists at both Oxford and Cambridge for centuries—will be cited throughout.

British newspapers from the 1970s are a rich quarry for the latest, often overstated "discoveries" in relation to both the Dead Sea Scrolls and Holy Land and Roman archaeology, as well as salacious examinations of terror groups and their atrocities, and even the first "proof" of crucifixion. This last, for example, involved the discovery of bones in a Jerusalem neighborhood in 1968, bones that seemed to prove the practice of crucifixion in first-century Jerusalem. Surprisingly, despite the literary and filmic evidence depicting or discussing the use of crucifixion by Romans against Jews in first-century Judea—Josephus mentions it, as does the Bible, and many biblical epics revel in it—no archaeological evidence had been found to support the claims. This first-century victim had been buried, and then his bones reinterred into an ossuary, a metal spike still fixed through his ankle. This find was immediately written about in 1970, likely crucifixion "styles" presented, trumpeted in newspapers, then revisited with a bit more skepticism in scholarly journals across the 1970s and 1980s. As will be seen later, the Centurion's jibe about which way Brian wants to be crucified could well have come from the scholarly and public fascination with this single discovery. Historical fiction of the period is also useful. Books like Paul Maier's *Pontius Pilate* take existing scholarship and spin it into a readable tale that becomes sometimes indistinguishable, in the public mind, from the few hints left by history for such a significant figure. Newspapers of the mid-1970s offer an explanation for what seems to be a throwaway bit of background material, the glimpsed inscription "PILATVS IVDAEOS REGET OK" in Pilate's chambers. It seems innocuous, but it's actually referring to a current event covered in colorful tabloid detail. Finally, *Life of Brian* can fruitfully be described as *Jesus of Nazareth* meets *I'm All Right Jack*, the latter a 1959 Peter Sellers comedy satirizing unions and the working class in Harold Macmillan's Britain. The genesis of both Brian and the PFJ, at least, can be traced to this comedy. Long story short, to unpack a polyglot Python film, a mix of scholarship, popular media, tongue-in-cheek material, and popular (non-)fiction is just the starting point.

And Now for the Lacuna Quite a bit has already been written about this film, much of it pretty good. Kim Johnson's *Monty Python's Tunisian Holiday* **has plenty of day-to-day information about the film's production, while Julian Doyle's** *The Life of ~~Brian~~ Jesus* **spends less time on behind-the-scenes tidbits, rather deep thinking on the biblical world around Jesus and Pilate, the realities of crucifixion,**

and so on. The recent *Jesus and Brian* **explores "the historical Jesus" in relation to the film, and scattered entries in autobiographical works from Chapman, Cleese, and Palin are also available, and worth reading. Robert Hewison's** *Monty Python: The Case Against* **and John O. Thompson's** *Monty Python Complete and Utter Theory of the Grotesque* **both look at the scandal surrounding the production and release of the film. I mention all these just to indicate where this book won't spend as much time or energy. As with my earlier forays into studies of** *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* **and** *Monty Python's Flying Circus***, the dialogue and scenarios in the printed scripts and the eventual performance and production of those elements will guide and occupy us. Connecting this film to the Pythons' previous work is essential, illustrating what tropes have been carried over, and how this film fits into or chafes against other Python work. In** *Life of Brian* **the Pythons are drawing not only on their collective Sunday school memories of the life of Jesus, but the "Christmas and Easter" version of those same stories that populate holiday cards, television specials, and pews twice yearly. They are looking at religious fervor and the mob mentality, as well as terrorism of the first and twentieth centuries.** *Holy Grail* **was as much about 1970s Britain as the 930s;** *Life of Brian* **is occupied by the Roman and British Empires, the burdens and blessings of the Welfare State, and the dangers of radical thought in the Jerusalem of Pilate and pre-Thatcherite Britain.**

Notes

1. From Williamson's introduction to the 1970 Penguin edition of Josephus's *The Jewish War*, 7.
2. Hoskins's name will be used for a character appearing later in *Life of Brian*.
3. This is where Tony (Stephen Davies) comes in, along with Charlie (Eddie Constantine), representing organized crime interests in America.
4. Brendon, *DFBE*, xvii–xx; Sir Kenneth Clark was a well-traveled academic and presenter (Larsen, *MPFC: UC*, 1.374; Larsen, *BAFHG*, 300–301).
5. Now Jan Morris.
6. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 224.
7. Most troupe meetings during this period seemed to involve financial issues or protecting their brand, or both. None of them seemed to want to do more television series; *Flying Circus* had ended its original broadcast run in November 1974.
8. Palin, *Diaries*, *1969–1979*, 349 and 485.
9. *A Book about the Film* Monty Python and the Holy Grail (Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), and Monty Python's Flying Circus*: An Utterly Complete*, *Thoroughly Unillustrated*, *Absolutely Unauthorized* . . . (Scarecrow Press, 2013).
10. See Larsen, *MPSERD* (2003) for more.
11. Jenkins, *Mrs. Thatcher's Revolution*, 61.
12. "ATV in Alliance to Make £2.5m Series on Life of Jesus," *Financial Times*, 31 July 1974: 7.
13. Elements of all these projects and the time period will be discussed as we move forward.
14. See John Whale's *Sunday Times* article "In Search of the Saviour," 30 March 1975: 38.
15. See Jane Gaskell, "What It's Like to Play Jesus," *Daily Mail*, 29 September 1972: 7.
16. "ATV in Alliance," 7.
17. See *BAFHG*, 26–27, 39, and 54.
18. Bernstein, *Myth of Decline*, 88.
19. Bernstein, *Myth of Decline*, 107.
20. This is a phrase Thatcher would use in speeches.
21. Caryl, *Strange Rebels*, xiii.
22. Mentioned in "The Man Who Won the War," *The Goon Show*, by Frenchman Moriarty, but originally attributed to Napoleon. It first appears in print in the *Times* in October 1803.
23. See Richard, *WWAR*, 7.
24. More like Godard's garbage men in *Weekend* (1967) who complain about inadequate U.S. aid to the Congo, and Algerian oil company atrocities, while abusing their *bourgeoisie* guests.
25. Hitchens, *The Abolition of Britain*, 74. Hitchens is talking specifically about the move to comprehensive schools and the abandonment of grammar schools, but the fervor for change cut across society.
26. *ATW*, 2.35.166; *MPFC: UC*, 2.111–12.
27. Bergson's term (in translation). See "Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic."
28. "Friendlier Israeli Image of Jesus," *Times*, 22 March 1973: 9.
29. *BAFHG*, 76–78.
30. See *BAFHG*, 86 and 104 for more.
31. "Meditations on the Jesus Movement," 60.
32. Donoughue, *DSD*, 1.xii.
33. *DSD*, 2.5–6.
34. *DFBE*, xx.
35. *Monty Python's The Life of Brian (of Nazareth)*, 1979.
36. New editions of Whiston's *Josephus*, from which we cite, were produced in 1960 and 1974.

ABBREVIATIONS

AJ	*Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus
	The Archaeology of Sanitation in Roman Italy, Koloski-Ostrow
ASRI	
a.t.	Audio transcription
	Monty Python's Flying Circus: *All the Words* (two vols.), Chapman
ATW	
	A Book about the Film Monty Python and the Holy Grail, Larsen
BAFHG	
	British Broadcasting Corporation
BBC	
	British Cartoon Archive
BCA	
	Blood and Rage: The Story of the Japanese Red Army, Farrell
BRJ	
	Blood and Rage: A Cultural History of Terrorism, Burleigh
BRT	
	The Doré Bible Illustrations
DBI	

DDC *The Doré Illustrations for Dante's Divine Comedy*

The Decline and Fall of the British Empire, Brendon

DFBE

Downing Street Diary (two vols.), Donoughue

DSD

European Economic Community (Common Market)

EEC

Encyclopedia Judaica

EJ

Four Crowded Years, Waugh

FCY

The Holy Land in the Time of Jesus, Kotker

HLTJ

A History of Modern Britain, Marr

HMB

IMDb Internet Movie Database

Jewish Encyclopedia

JE

Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus, Jeremias

JTJ

The Jews under Roman Rule, Smallwood

JURR

JVL	Jewish Virtual Library
LBI	*Life in Biblical Israel*, King and Stager
MPFC: UC	Monty Python's Flying Circus: *An Utterly Complete, Thoroughly Unillustrated, Absolutely Unauthorized* . . . (two vols.), Larsen
MPSERD	*Monty Python, Shakespeare and English Renaissance Drama*, Larsen
NT	New Testament
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary*
OT	Old Testament
PSC	Printed Script Commentary
TAD	*Those about to Die*, Mannix
WJ	*Wars of the Jews*, Josephus (Whiston translation)
WWAR	*Why We're All Romans*, Richard

(*Terror group and political party acronyms are included in the body of the book.*)

SCENE ONE

IN A BETHLEHEM MANGER ***IN A BETHLEHEM MANGER***—(PSC) BETHLEHEM CONTINUES TO BE A POINT OF ARGUMENT FOR BIBLE SCHOLARS, AND EVEN THE GOSPELS DISAGREE AS TO ITS EXACT SIGNIFICANCE IN RELATION TO CHRIST'S BIRTH. LUKE'S ACCOUNT NOTES THAT JESUS'S PARENTS TRAVELED FROM NAZARETH TO BETHLEHEM, WHERE THE CHILD WAS BORN (2:4); WHILE MATTHEW AVERS THAT JOSEPH AND MARY ALREADY RESIDED IN BETHLEHEM (2:1).[1] THERE IS NOT COMPLETE AGREEMENT AS TO HOW OLD THE CHILD JESUS WAS WHEN THE MAGI FINALLY ARRIVED, EITHER, WITH MANY ARGUING THAT THE "INFANT" WAS TWO YEARS OLD OR MORE BY THE TIME OF THE VISITATION. WHAT THE PYTHONS ARE

APPROPRIATING AND THEN SENDING UP IS NOT SCHOLARSHIP, BUT THE CHRISTMAS CARD, HYMNAL, AND ACCRETED *TRADITIONAL* VERSIONS OF THE NATIVITY,[2] OFTEN AS DEPICTED IN FILMS, AND MUCH *NOT* PART OF THE GOSPELS ACCOUNTS: MARY RIDING A DONKEY, THE HOLY FAMILY BEING REFUSED A PLACE AT AN INN, THE CHILD BORN IN A STABLE, ANGELS SINGING TO SHEPHERDS, THE BABY JESUS NOT CRYING, OR EVEN THREE KINGS ON CAMELS, AND SO ON. THE BBC'S *WHO WAS JESUS?* SUMMARIZES THE GENERALLY ACCEPTED SCHOLARLY VIEW OF THE NATIVITY IN 1977, JUST AS THE PYTHONS WERE WRITING AND PLANNING *BRIAN*: OVERALL, THE MOST LIKELY CONCLUSION MUST BE THAT THE NATIVITY STORIES ARE NOT HISTORICAL. THEY DO NOT BELONG TO

THE PRIMITIVE TRADITION ABOUT JESUS, BUT WERE DEVELOPED BY THE EARLY CHURCH OUT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT. . . . THERE IS NO REFERENCE TO OX OR ASS IN THE GOSPELS. OUR MODERN VERSION OF THE NATIVITY STORY HAS BORROWED THEM IN JUST THE SAME WAY FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT: "THE OX KNOWETH HIS OWNER, AND THE ASS HIS MASTER'S CRIB."[3]

In this same year, though, the BBC also produced a "schools programme" for children on the series *Watch*. Filmed in studio and on location in Bethlehem and environs, the show took children on a "gently religious" journey through the nativity.[4] Joseph and Mary's arduous journey, their rejection at every inn, and the birth in a stable are all depicted or sung about. What's more, this program echoed a believer's sentiment to a great degree, especially cohost James Adair's songs: "His name was Jesus, he came to save us / Open your hearts, and let him come in."[5] Many Christian believers likely disagreed with the "accreted nativity" interpretation, while "permissive society" types balked at the BBC indoctrinating children with religious claptrap.

The Pythons' argumentative approach to the subject of the nativity is then based on centuries of these disagreements that seemed to be reaching a critical mass in the mid-1970s, just when the Pythons were penning *Life of Brian*. In a special letter to the *Times*, professor of theology R. P. C. Hanson discusses the "state of deep confusion" around Jesus: The articles and letters devoted to the origins of Christianity published in this paper during the past few months are

sufficient to demonstrate this [confusion]. Drastic and diverse and often contradictory interpretations of the evidence are put forward by people whose competence cannot be doubted by even the most sceptical or the most imaginative critic. Further, it is perfectly clear that this community regarded itself as entrusted with authority from God as a result of the career (or what is believed to be the career) of Jesus, and that this authority included the power to forgive or not to forgive sins, and to include in or exclude from its number and to further the expansion of the community itself by disseminating the good news about Jesus of Nazareth (whatever it may have thought that good news to be).[6]

Professor Hanson goes on to assert that active, believing Christian communities across Britain would be the answer to this disconnect and disagreement.

Secondly, in late February 1976 the Church of England released *Christian Believing*, a report discussed in an article by Lord Hailsham. The conservative Hailsham saw three main problems with the tract. First, the absence of much discussion about the existence of God, or the spirit world in general; second, the use of "highly metaphorical, or almost unintelligible" language when making doctrinal statements ("What is, or can be meant by . . . 'conceived' by the Holy Ghost?"); and third, any thoughtful, scientific discussion of the "allegedly miraculous" events that pepper the Old and New Testaments, including the belief that the world is a mere six thousand years old.[7] The dangers of not drilling deeper into these areas include, for the first, an embrace of materialism rather than spirituality; second, confusion of terms leading to fractiousness; and, third, failure to even attempt to reach the "scientifically-minded modern man." Fittingly, the last such report had been issued in 1938, just as Hitler was busy annexing parts of Central Europe, a prelude to the horrors of World War II. In 1976 there followed a number of theologians who wrote in support of the new report, as well as a number (including the religion correspondent for the *Times*) who found the doctrine troubling. In short, after *Time* magazine had asked in 1966 "Is God Dead?" and after the race riots, political assassinations, kidnappings, acts of terror, predictions of environmental apocalypse, and years of economic malaise of the following decade, it's no surprise that letters to the editor tended to wax pessimistic, especially in regard to God, faith, and the more supernatural aspects of Christianity.

That being said, the Pythons' nativity account seems to have been mostly inspired by Luke, likely because it is better known than others in the Gospels. The Lucan isn't even the earliest gospel account, though the synoptic gospels share a good deal of material.

THREE WISE MEN on camels—The camels and magi are dressed very similarly to those seen just months earlier in Franco Zeffirelli's version of the Christ story, *Jesus of Nazareth*. The three kings wear flowing, draped robes that hang down well below their stirruped feet, and the camels they ride are similarly festooned. These "exterior" scenes were shot back at Shepperton Studio, west of London, while the manger scenes were filmed near Carthage.

A star leads them towards BETHLEHEM—This special effect star is actually moving across the night sky, and stops directly over what appears to be an image of *Jerusalem* (not Bethlehem)—from the viewers' point of view, meaning the Wise Men would have a different angle entirely. (Cinematically, a perspectival alignment would be confusing, so purposefully bad perspective actually looks better on film.) In this version of the Jerusalem silhouette, the Dome of the Rock can be glimpsed, which is the film's first, likely incidental anachronism. This Islamic structure wasn't completed until about six hundred and sixty years *after* Christ's crucifixion. This is the type of greeting-card Jerusalem image captured by dozens of Western artists in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. If the Pythons (and most likely Gilliam) had chosen to use an image of Jerusalem, *circa* 33, audiences would likely not recognize the very different cityscape.[8]

Already missing from the film is a shepherd scene. They talk about the loveliness of sheep, except at shearing, and in their inattention, miss the star visiting other shepherds.[9]

Visual beanfeast with inspiring music—(PSC) In the 1977 recorded table read for the script (one of many script "drafts") Palin actually reads this as "*beau* feast," meaning he and writing partner Jones likely did not write this section. Aside from being mentioned by Veruca Salt[10] in her self-serving song from *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* (1971), a beanfeast is popularly a dinner given by an employer for employees. Appropriately, though, it also refers to the annual feast the night before Twelfth Day, also known as Three Kings Day. Politically, the term was often used in British newspapers when either party wanted to lambast the other over profligate spending proposals.[11]

(draft)* NARRATOR: *(Audience thinks 'They're really doing it!' Uneasy tittering. Catholics gather their belongings)—(PSC) From the moment the Pythons mentioned the possibility of doing a Christ or New Testament–based story they knew there would be many, even fans of the *Flying Circus* and *Holy Grail*, who would be offended by the irreverent treatment of sacred subject matter. At this point, however, the setting and treatment are quite on point,

which, to Python-acculturated viewers, certainly meant that an undercutting was the other shoe waiting to drop. These asides have become common in Python scripts, though there are relatively few in this finished version of the *Brian* script. See the entry "*Or, could a shaft of light . . .*" below for more.

The Pythons only mention the Catholics as likely to be offended by this treatment. Perhaps they assumed that Anglican adherents wouldn't care enough to be offended, nor would Jews, and that American faiths would ignore the irreverence, as well. What they're presenting is a more catholic version of the sacred event, and it seems less likely to offend Christian viewers. As it turned out, it was often the more fundamentalist flocks within the larger, heterogeneous faiths that reacted most strongly. The Church of England, per se, wasn't against the film, but Mary Whitehouse and her more activist fellows reacted to any increase in the depictions or discussions of sex and amorality in schools, on television, and in films. There was nowhere near the eruption of public antagonism in regard to the forthcoming *Life of Brian* as there had been for the announced Danish film *The Sex Life of Jesus Christ* in 1975–1976.[12] There were minor protests against *Brian*, including one outside the Plaza in Lower Regent Street, though none terribly well-attended.[13] The real difference between *Life of Brian* and other projects decried as blasphemous (the film *The Sex Life of Jesus Christ*;[14] the poem *The Love That Dares to Speak Its Name*[15]) is the fact that the Pythons purposely avoided implicating Christ in any irreverent or sacrilegious setting. In *Brian*, both depictions of Jesus are straightforward and sober, with the Sermon on the Mount being almost reverent (before the camera pulls away from Christ, revealing a bickering flock at the back).

the town is very full—(PSC) This from the original printed script, as read. As the Wise Men enter the city in the finished film there is no indication of any other person, but the pathways are lined with stacks of goods and such, perhaps indicating a host of sleeping people. This sequence was shot long after location shooting, and back at Shepperton, to boot. British extras would have cost much more than the handful of dinars paid to extras in Tunisia, so a late-night setting and the cover of darkness cloaked the otherwise empty (studio) streets.[16]

plumb line from the star—(PSC) A plumb line and bob are used to determine the verticality of a structure; here, the indication is that the line and bob would reach from the star to the manger, meaning a fake star hanging above the manger set. This level of context-smashing—only suggested here in the scenic description—will be on display in the Pythons' final film, *Meaning of Life*. In the closing sequence, "It's Christmas in Heaven," another nativity scene is

depicted during a musical number, and a nimbed Mary eventually bursts through the stable roof, singing full-throat.

(Or, could a shaft of light shine, suddenly, directly on the roof of the stable?) (Think about it)—(PSC) Likely referring to the many illustrations of the nativity where such obvious, typographical elements are employed, including nimbs, spiritual radiances, and shafts of heavenly light.[17] In the painting of the nativity at the Church of the Shepherds in Bethlehem, for instance, the light does indeed shine *directly* from above, through cherubs on clouds and a star-like Chi Ro, onto the nimbed and glowing holy family.

This is one of only a handful of intertextual comments made by the scriptwriters to themselves, a carryover from both the *Flying Circus* and *Holy Grail* scriptings.[18] In the first television episode as written and recorded, the animated title sequence is described in the script as being "possibly connected with the stretching of owls" and "proceeding from a bizarre American's fevered brain."[19] Gilliam's animated contributions are often described this way, since the Pythons generally didn't see them until the day of the show's taping.[20]

A fairly typical manger scene—(PSC) The more "typical" the scene is, of course, the more effective the Pythons' undercutting of the moment will become. This is more like a St. Francis–type nativity scene, one staged before a cathedral or church during the Christmas season, or those appearing in paintings since about the fourth century.[21] The bright nimbs are disappearing from painted nativity images by the late fifteenth century, and may be used here since they are so iconic (and blindingly bright). This also resembles the very popular rehearsal of mystery plays at York (which Palin and others may have grown up seeing), though the mystery plays tended to use medieval costumes as opposed to first-century costumes. Gilliam will borrow a version of the baby Jesus from one such "typical" Doré work. See the entry for "*infant Brian on a cloud*" below for more.

Incidentally, there was also a very recent mystery play adaptation by Tony Harrison playing at National Theatre in 1977 and 1978. There, portions of the Wakefield, Coventry, York, and Chester cycles were performed in a new setting, with plenty of working-class tradesmen-actors and lots of broad northern accents and verbiage. The accent of Mrs. Big Nose (heard later) doesn't sound nearly as out of place after watching this remarkable play.

THREE MEN approach the manger (audience shift uneasily)—(PSC) The "shift uneasily" bit means the Pythons are also aware of what a Python audience might bring to the cinema—seeing just how far into reverent orthodoxy the boys

will go before pulling the rug out from under the scene. There's almost a "Wait for it!" moment (heard much later) implied in this tension.

The First Wise Man is "blacked up" for the role, which the Pythons employed more than once during the run of *Flying Circus*.[22] The Goons also mention "blacking up," as well.[23] There had been a long tradition of blackface performances on British stages and screens, and the Pythons had called for blackface performances in Eps. 20 and 29. The popular *Black and White Minstrel Show* was, coincidentally, taken off the air just as the Pythons were producing *Life of Brian*. This depiction may also be simply another borrow from the recent *Jesus of Nazareth* film, where black American actor James Earl Jones plays one of the Wise Men (along with Donald Pleasance and Fernando Rey[24]), or one of hundreds of paintings, altarpieces, and frescoes that have depicted the nativity since about 500. A number of such images do depict a wise man of color (Balthazar, who generally represents Africa), though many also present three fair-skinned magi and the occasional black servant or slave carrying one of the gifts. By the time the Pythons are producing their final feature film *Meaning of Life*, the nativity is being broadcast on TV in heaven, Mary and Joseph are dancers, and the Three Wise Men are *all* black and pushing shopping carts loaded with their gifts.

(draft) (No ocelots. This bit is serious please.)—(PSC) Part of the Python humor has always been the appearance of normalcy and somber sobriety in both character and setting, followed by a transgressive intrusion that completely undercuts the situation. The more real the medieval world of *Holy Grail* looked and sounded, the funnier the moments of deflation. Well into the film, when frocked monks walk together through a small, filthy town, chanting, nothing seems amiss—it is a scene drawn from *The Seventh Seal*, and perfectly medieval. This is undercut when they whack themselves in the foreheads with large planks of wood—the Pythons' version of flagellant monkery.

The ocelot, as a New World animal, would qualify as an out-of-place manger inhabitant, thus spoiling the "serious" tone. The Pythons often telescope history and create anachronisms, of course, including coconuts in medieval England, "orangutans," "fruit bats," and "breakfast cereals" in the holy scriptures of the same period, and so on. In *Flying Circus* Ep. 25, a perfectly dramatic, realistic World War I scene—where a young private is trying to tell his sergeant of life back home—has to be cut short thanks to a sheikh, a mermaid, and a spaceman in the shot.[25] In the nativity scene as completed in *Life of Brian*, only a cow stands beside the manger (though a chicken can be heard at points).

The mother nods by the side of the child—This is Mandy, played by Terry Jones. She is never called Mandy in the film. In *Holy Grail* Jones played Dennis's mother, and she was draped similarly. There, her name was also never mentioned, nor was her relationship to Dennis. Most assumed they were husband and wife. "Mandy," incidentally, was the street name for Mandrax, a methaqualone and antihistamine recreational drug mix popular in the 1970s in Britain. In Ep. 41 of *Flying Circus*, Michael Ellis's mother (also Jones) mentions the drug as one to which her son's pet tiger is addicted.[26]

She wakes from a lightish doze, sees them, shrieks and falls backwards off her bale of straw—The Third Wise Man's response to this is an exaggerated eye roll, meaning the bloom of sacredness is already off this rose. This gestural acting is likely a nod to farce films, classic British TV, and even the music hall stage, where such gestures were necessary when playing to the back stalls. In *Holy Grail*, Arthur's first encounter in the film—with the battlement sentries who digress into swallow minutiae—ends with Arthur raising his eyes "*heavenwards*."[27]

She is a ratbag—(PSC) This description is a Python portmanteau reference for the slovenly Pepperpot-ish woman seen a number of times in *Flying Circus*, and then *Holy Grail*. "Ratbag" means frumpy and unattractive, a reader of the *Express* or *Telegraph*, and likely a racially insensitive Tory; the pejorative is used in Eps. 9, 16, and 21.[28] During the run of *Flying Circus* Jones specialized in playing this type of character, culminating in the outrageous mother character in Ep. 45's "*Most Awful Family in Britain*" sections. In *Holy Grail*, Jones plays yet another ratbag, this time mucking around in the filth as the mother of Dennis, the so-called "constitutional peasant."[29] Of the decision to cast Jones in *Life of Brian* as this recurring Python character, Palin wrote the following: "Casting completed this morning. Most of the main parts reaffirmed. Brian is Graham (unchallenged), Terry J Mandy (John being the only other one in the running, but it was felt that a motherly rat-bag was needed, and TJ's women are more motherly than JC's long, thin, strange ones), Eric Otto, me Pilate, and so on."[30] Palin would add a clarifying footnote to an entry from 1972, on the occasion of hearing Jones's mother had passed away: "I had got to know Terry's mum well in the days when I visited the family home in Claygate, Surrey. She was an endearing lady and we were very fond of each other. Some of Terry's drag roles on Python were uncannily like her, though absolutely not Mandy in *The Life of Brian*."[31]

FIRST WISE MAN—None of the visiting magi are given names in the printed script or in the finished film, they are just "Three Wise Men." Clearly, though, the Pythons are mimicking the most popular Christian tradition for these depictions, offering two "white" characters (Gaspar and Melchior) and one "black" (Balthazar). Many medieval manuscripts produced in Western Europe—such as the St. Albans Psalter and the St. Wulfram's Gospels—depict three very European-looking magi. Occasionally, the Gothic illustrators gave one Wise Man a darker beard, likely to indicate African ancestry.

THIRD WISE MAN: "We are astrologers. We have come from the East"—These visitors from the "East" only appear in Matthew's version of the Christ story: "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem."[32] There isn't a number provided there, and the astrologers aren't given names in the best-known versions of the story. It's also unclear where they came from, precisely, excepting somewhere east of Palestine. It's likely that since there are three gifts enumerated—gold, frankincense, and myrrh—it was assumed three men carried them.

MANDY: "Is this some kind of joke?"—In Ep. 41 of *Flying Circus*, the odd behavior of the clerks behind the ant counter prompt a complaint from Chris (Idle), and the Real Manager (Jones) tells him their "performances" are part of the store's "rag week": "A university tradition where students help raise money (via sideshow-type performances) for charities. Both Cambridge and Oxford participate in the long-standing 'raising and giving' tradition. The student fun and games during rag week could be rather over the top."[33] This explanation is actually able to elicit a donation from Chris for the store's charity; Brian's skeptical mother is able to (momentarily) collect charitable donations from the visiting magi.

FIRST WISE MAN: "We wish to praise the infant"—There are several versions of this scene in Matthew, chapter 2, that the Pythons could have used as their scriptural foundation. Both the Revised Standard Edition (1952) and the New International Version (1973) agree almost completely with the King James Version: 9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

> 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.
>
> 11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh.

> 12 And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

See the next entry for the Pythons' word choice. Pilate's wife will also be warned in a dream that her husband should release Jesus; he does not follow her advice.

MANDY: "Homage!! You're all drunk . . ."—A Pythonesque misunderstanding, certainly. Perhaps Jones is riffing on the medieval, knightly definition of the term, meaning the acknowledgment of a vassal-lord relationship. Even though Jones is an avid and published medieval historian, it's more likely that Mandy simply hears "homage" and "balm" in her own way. In *Flying Circus* Ep. 5, a management training interviewer (Cleese) interprets an applicant's simple, seemingly obvious and normal gestures (sitting down, standing up, sitting down again, answering "Good morning") in aberrant, mystifying ways. The applicant (Chapman) has no way to interpret the odd goings-on during the interview, and eventually has a tantrum. In a later episode a character must learn to talk faster or slower, higher or lower (in register), louder or softer, just to facilitate a police report.[34] Communications in the Python world are very seldom straightforward, and often the characters involved have to work out, in scene, how to effectively communicate:[35]

> The importance . . . of communication in [*Flying* Circus] is a significant trope. In Ep. 14, the Minister delivers his answer in his "normal voice, and then in a kind of silly, high-pitched whine." Other characters only speak parts of words, so that only in a group can they utter complete sentences; one character speaks in anagrams; and one insults the listener with every other sentence, *etc.* In a nicely visual twist on the trope, in Ep. 30, gestures are offered to denote "pauses in televised talk."[36]

Mandy won't know what the magi mean by "Wise Men," "homage," "myrrh," "balm," "praising," and "Capricorn," and her interpretation of being "led by a star" is being "led by a bottle," a more human, earthy metaphor that's closer to her character's range of understanding and experience as a "ratbag" Pepperpot. She immediately comprehends when the Wise Men offer her gifts, however, specifically when they've mentioned "gold." She also understands "astrologers" and "star signs," like Mrs. O and Mrs. Trepidatious in Ep. 37 of *Flying Circus*. They—along with closet mice (Ep. 2), "Ideal Loons" (middle-Britain Conservatives; also Ep. 37) and awful British tourists abroad on package tours (Ep. 31)—read the *Daily Express* for its horoscope and sordid human interest stories.[37]

Most of the major versions of the Bible available to the Pythons as they wrote do not use the word "homage" in relation to the nativity. In one or two versions

(e.g., the RSV for Catholics) “homage” appears in the Gospels, but only when Christ is being tortured and humiliated, and then only in Mark.[38] This might be one of the most identifiable influences, then, of the Zeffirelli version in *Jesus of Nazareth*. In the scene where the Wise Men are in the manger, and they’ve all agreed this is the king they were sent to find, they speak of their praising and gift-giving in this way: Balthazar: Accept these poor tokens of our homage. Incense, to perfume the holes in thy feet.

He places the vessel on the floor at Mary’s feet.

Melchior: Gold, for kingly rule.

He places the box on the floor.

Gaspar: Myrrh, the most precious herb of the east, and the most bitter.

He places the vessel on the floor.

The very seriousness of this moment, followed as it is by Melchior’s warning to Mary that Herod is likely a threat to her son, means it’s ripe for the Pythons. In most editions of the Bible, the Wise Men “worship” (also “worship,” “worshipped,” and “worshipping”) the baby Jesus. The Pythons’ version of the Three Wise Men will do this, as well, in unison, in a moment.

MANDY: “. . . some tale about Oriental fortune tellers . . .”—They are “from the East,” and Mandy’s decided that means the Orient, which was a generalization of the period. Babylon had been the center of Oriental trade, and the Jews had been exiled in Babylon, though this exile had ended some six hundred years prior to the film’s stated time. Both frankincense and myrrh would have necessarily found their way to Jerusalem via the “Incense Route,” as perhaps would tales of “Oriental fortune tellers.” And since both frankincense and myrrh were burned as holy incense in the temple in Jerusalem, regular and dependable sources would have been crucial.[39] Mandy doesn’t know what myrrh is, she’ll admit in a moment, and that may mean she has no knowledge of the inner workings of the temple—a lack of knowledge likely shared by many everyday Jews (and perhaps especially female Jews) of her time.

MANDY: “Go and praise someone else’s brat! Go on!”—This bossy, over-the-top characterization is typical of some of the Pythons’ ratbags, but there is also a character in *Jesus of Nazareth* they likely drew from. In the manger scene, the woman taking care of Mary after the birth takes charge rather authoritatively, giving Joseph instructions and seeing to the new mother’s needs. At this point shepherds appear at the manger door, and she immediately tries to give them the bum’s rush: “Who’s that? What do you want? This is no place for you! Get out! Get out, do you hear me?” At this point she aims to physically hustle them back

out the door, like Mandy with her visitors: “Off! Off with you! Can’t you see? The poor girl has just had a child!” After revealing by what means they were led there (a star, not a bottle), the shepherds are invited in by Joseph, *without* the promise of gifts.

MANDY: “Led by a bottle, more like”—The possibility of drinking spirits from a glass bottle was real during this period, though the more likely container for wine could have been amphora or oak barrels brought in by hated Romans. Later, the Peoples’ Front of Judea will count imported Roman wine as one of the positive things about the Roman occupation.

FIRST WISE MAN: “Gold, frankincense, myrrh”—Wine mixed with myrrh will be offered to Christ as he is placed on the cross, in a passage found in Mark 15, “but he received it not.” Myrrh was used in Roman times as a fairly effective painkiller, as well as for its fragrant properties.[40] The shepherds who visit the child in Harrison’s *The Mysteries* miracle play bring gifts, as well: “a bob of cherries,” a bird in a cage, and a tennis ball for the child to play with. And even though it sounds like a Pythonesque anachronism, the gift of the tennis ball comes from very old versions of the Wakefield cycle.[41]

THIRD WISE MAN: “It is a valuable balm”—This is an answer to Mandy’s question “So what is myrrh, anyway?” a question many have likely asked over the years. The Johannine account tells of Nicodemus bringing a myrrh mixture to anoint Christ’s body after his crucifixion, and with Pilate’s approval.[42] Myrrh had both medicinal and sacerdotal applications, meaning it would have been both valuable and available in Jerusalem during this time.

MANDY: “What are you giving him a balm for? It might bite him”—It might seem that at first Mandy may have heard “bomb,” and we could assume that in her world there are “Holy Hand Grenade”–type devices as there had been in *Holy Grail*.[43] She takes the reference sideways, of course, thinking a “balm” is some kind of wild animal. She’s already assumed that “homage” is “disgusting,” so her version of malapropery is betrayed. Misunderstandings and failures of communication are wrecking balls in the Python world, smashing contexts and diverting narratives onto seemingly unintended paths. In *Flying Circus*, the Pythons had merely carried on a long-standing English dramatic tradition of the “comic misunderstanding,” leading to silly or (narratively) fatal results. In the first episode of the TV series, an Italian language class is underway, being taught to, of course, Italians: It’s already clear that almost everyone in the classroom is Italian, and only the teacher seems to have missed this point. The irony of teaching introductory, conversational Italian to native Italians is the obvious

joke, and it's compounded by Python's characteristic "comic misunderstanding" trope, thanks to the teacher's failure to recognize his students' nationalities. This comic misunderstanding occurs when peasants refuse to recognize kings, in the Python world, or when Thomas Dekker's lower-class characters consort with upper-class characters on the same social level, and without self-consciousness, in *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599). The tradition is also carried on in myriad eighteenth-century plays (e.g., Sheridan's *The Rivals*) and novels (Fielding's *Tom Jones*).[44]

Cleese's Centurion and Palin's Nisus Wettus will struggle mightily as they try to communicate later with jailers, both fairly unhelpful, narratively speaking. Also in *Flying Circus*, a tobacconist's signs may or may not be sexual *double entendres* ("chest of drawers," "a bit of pram"),[45] and a man asking to be married at the Registry Office is mistaken for/as proposing *to* the Registrar. By the time that scene is complete, five men are happily married to each other.[46] Brian's mother's misunderstandings might simply be a comment on her ratbag rusticity, and her inability to differentiate between reality and what she might have dreamed.

MANDY: "Yes, it is. It's got great big . . ." *(she gestures)*—Tim the Enchanter (Cleese) describes the beast waiting for the knights should they approach the Cave of Caerbannog in a very similar way, including using his fingers to indicate the creature's "nasty, big pointy teeth."[47]

THIRD WISE MAN: "No, it isn't, it's an ointment"—In the printed script Mandy fingers the jar (offered by the helpful First Wise Man) to get a feel for the ointment, but in the finished film that "grubby finger" moment is elided. They obviously shot this moment, as well, then edited it out; all that's left in the finished film is Mandy enigmatically holding up her index finger, as if she's testing the breeze. Not being a woman of wealth, Mandy might be excused for not appreciating expensive unguents. If she had been wealthy and interested in perfumes, she would have "known that scents and 'ointments' were greatly in vogue, and often most expensive (Matt. 26:7). The latter were prepared of oil and of home or foreign perfumes, the dearest being kept in costly alabaster boxes."[48] As the film plays out, only Gregory and his wife, those Romans and preferred servants of Pilate's household, and the assembled Roman audience at the Colosseum would have ritually availed themselves of these luxuries.

MANDY: "Or did I dream it?"—The dream as portentous is common in the scriptures. In the New Testament, dreams related to the Savior include: the aged Zacharias being visited in a "vision" by an angel who told Zacharias that his son,

John, would be “great in the sight of the Lord”;[49] in Matthew, Joseph’s concerns about putting away Mary “privily” are assuaged by the visitation of an angel;[50] and Joseph will be visited again with a supernatural prompting to take his wife and child out of Herod’s reach.[51] Just prior to this last visitation, the Three Wise Men will also receive a message from God to “not return to Herod,” but “[depart] into their own country in another way.”[52] Later, Matthew 27:19 tells of Pilate’s wife warning her husband to have “nothing to do with that just man,” meaning Jesus—her dreams had made her “[suffer] many things.”[53]

Mandy’s dreams of a biting animal called a “balm” sound more like the visions given to John and recorded in Revelations, where there are myriad dragons and beasts. There is a “behemoth” mentioned in Job, but “he eateth grass as an ox,” so isn’t likely to bite anyone, as well as “leviathan” mentioned in Isaiah, Psalms, and Job.[54] With the vagaries of medieval translation noted, there are also unicorns, cockatrice, and even satyrs. These fanciful creatures can be seen in the margins of Gothic illuminated manuscripts, and on maps from the same period, when some of the major biblical translations were being accomplished.[55]

MANDY: “So you’re astrologers are you?”—In the Zeffirelli film *Jesus of Nazareth*, just prior to finding the baby Jesus at the stable, the Wise Men gather with their astrologer’s paraphernalia (maps, charts, etc.) and discuss the signs and meaning of the coming miracle.

MANDY: “What star sign is he?”—This “star sign” talk appears earlier in a Pete and Dud sketch from their 1968 BBC series *Goodbye Again*, when Dud visits the doctor (he fears he’s been cursed by an angry palmist): Dud: So I said “I am the Ram” . . .

Pete: Ares.

Dud: Ares. “Mercurial, quixotic . . .”

Pete: “. . . tempestuous—tempestuous. Given to sudden flights of fancy . . .”

Dud: (*laughing*) For Valerie Pearson at four in the morning . . .

Pete: Exactly.

Dud: Uh, “outgoing, ingoing, avoid brunettes, lucky number four.” . . .

A number of tabloids, including the *Daily Express*, *The Sun*, and the *Daily Mirror*, boasted popular horoscope sections. In Ep. 37, “What the Stars Foretell” sketch in *Flying Circus*, two ratbags (Chapman and Idle) discuss star signs (“. . . the zodiacal signs, the horoscopic fates, the astrological portents, the omens . . .”), reading especially from the *Daily Express*.[56]

FIRST WISE MAN: “. . . Capricorn”—Simply meaning that these Wise Men assume (and so do the writers of the film, and much of the world) that

Christ was born sometime between 22 December and 20 January. This reference likely pricked the astute, younger audience members' memories, given that seven years earlier American singer and songwriter Kris Kristofferson had released the song and album "Jesus was a Capricorn":[57]

> Jesus was a Capricorn / He ate organic food He believed in love and peace / And never wore no shoes Long hair, beard and sandals / And a funky bunch of friends Reckon we'd just nail him up / If he came down again.

There are many opinions as to when Christ was actually born, differing for Jew, Christian, and pagan, though a winter birth seems unlikely given the cold weather. Arguments against a December nativity do include the cold—shepherds would not have been in their fields with flocks overnight, for example; also, the Augustan census was underway, which would have been scheduled in better travel weather to ensure a higher, more accurate count, etcetera. Calculating against Christ's cousin John's birth puts the blessed event sometime toward the end of September. If the date is set toward the end of September, then Brian (and Christ) would have been Libra, not Capricorn.

In December 1976, the Pythons were meeting fairly regularly to share story and scene ideas for the forthcoming film. On 10 December, a small story appeared in the *Times*, "Astronomy: The Star of Bethlehem," which was itself adapted from an article appearing the previous day in the scientific journal *Nature*. For the articles, D. W. Hughes of Sheffield University examined all the available information explaining the Star of Bethlehem, whether a comet, a nova, or even a particularly bright planet Venus. None of these match the astronomical situation of the period (about 7 BC), and he proposed instead a "triple conjunction," wherein Jupiter and Saturn moved very close together three times over a space of six months, appearing incredibly bright. He finds that the "triple conjunction (in the constellation Pisces) had been calculated and predicted" in Babylonian cuneiform tablets, and astrologers like these magi would have known (or even been responsible for) these predictions. And, "astrologically, the event could have been full of significance for Babylonians steeped in Jewish tradition. Not only is Pisces associated with the Jewish people, but in traditional Jewish astrology Saturn protected Israel. In addition, Jupiter was considered to be a lucky and royal star."[58] The "guided by a triple conjunction" explanation may have elicited the same response from Mandy ("You're drunk!"), but at the time the Pythons were actually writing the movie, it was the most recent and most defensible scientific explanation for the Star of Bethlehem.

FIRST WISE MAN: "He is the Son of God. Our Messiah"—Beginning in January 1976 George Lucas and the large film crew that would create *Star Wars* began work at Elstree Studios in Borehamwood. The *Star Wars* novelization[59] and first trailer appeared later in December 1976, when the *Brian* screenplay was still in its early stages. Parallels between the emerging Luke character and Brian, as eventually realized, can easily be drawn. The image of the young, infatuated naïf who aspires to greater things is common to both, for example. Palin's version of Brian and his trajectory read quite familiar: Today we decide on . . . the rough pattern of Brian's life—a bastard with a Roman father, toys with joining various Messiahs, is disillusioned, joins, or dabbles, with the resistance, is caught, escapes from the Romans, disguises himself as a prophet and gains a large and devoted following which he also tries to escape from.[60]

Luke follows the Joseph Campbell–inspired path of the mythic hero: He is introduced to the "problem" (the empire taking over the universe) but he demurs, for domestic responsibilities, until his family are killed and he is free to escape home and join the rebellion.[61] Brian must defy his mother to join the rebellion, he is thrust out of the (safety) of the community—he is hunted and eventually captured—and then he himself is the sacrifice. These aren't mirrored narrative journeys, but the Pythons were obviously very aware of the *Star Wars* world. (Both Luke and Brian eventually fly in spaceships, as well, a surprising but acknowledgeable coincidence for a scene intended to lampoon the special effects–laden space blockbusters of the day.) It's also hard to miss the *visual* similarities between Luke and Brian. Both are dressed in tunics that are light-colored, textured and woven, gathered at the waist, setting them apart from most of the characters around them.

It is noteworthy that the Pythons were thinking along the same lines as George Lucas at this point, though the historical, archetypal elements of these characterizations are probably clear anyway. Frank Herbert's 1965 *Dune* had also posited a bastard-type, insider-cum-outsider-cum-savior in young Paul Atreides.[62] There were plenty of messiahs in the news of the day, too, and of all stripes: from Charles Manson to Tony Benn to union activist Derek Robinson to Ted Heath—the epithet was used often and widely. Similarities to *Star Wars*' character and narrative construction become more possible after the Pythons begin principal writing in January 1978, when they were together in Barbados.[63] *Star Wars* had become a worldwide hit, released in the UK at Christmas 1977 to long lines and much hype. Palin specifically praises the film in his diaries, which

he'd screened for the first time just days before heading to Barbados and the final group writing for *Life of Brian*.[64]

SECOND WISE MAN: "King of the Jews"—This is the title that Pilate applies to Jesus as he is sent to the cross. The priests who saw to Jesus's condemnation objected to the sign that Pilate had made, "The King of the Jews," and, in a Pythonesque bit of semantics, asked that the sign be changed: "Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews."[65] Pilate refused to change what he had ordered written. In Matthew, the Wise Men ask around to find "he that is born King of the Jews";[66] elsewhere in the NT, the phrase is *only* used in relation to Jesus's appearance before Pilate.

MANDY: ". . . Brian"—There's no sign of a Joseph figure here, and we'll soon learn that Mandy was raped ("at first") by a Roman soldier, who is Brian's alleged father. It's certain that Mandy, as the mother, will name Brian, which goes along with tradition, according to Susan Ackerman: "In the Hebrew Bible, mothers are more often said to name their children than fathers."[67] But Ackerman also goes on to mention the significance of the name itself, discussing "Micah," which when fully extended means "Who is like God?": "Therefore, an Israelite audience would likely have understood that the mother had bestowed upon her son a name that celebrates Yahweh as the object of her religious devotion."[68] This last section is significant, at least for a Python audience, since it means Mandy has gone well away from a devotional naming, unless she is somehow devoted to Prince Charles (known as "Brian" in the pages of *Private Eye*), or the Brians mentioned below. Of Irish and Celtic origin, "Brian" is very familiar to Python fans: A Brian-named character appears in [*Flying Circus*] Eps. 2, 4, 9, 11, 13–14 (three characters), 19 (four characters), 20–23, 29, 36–37, 40–41, 43, and 45. There are many possibilities for the high status this name seems to occupy in Python, including [*Flying Circus*] staff member Brian Jones, and various BBC television commentators sharing the name. . . . The most likely, however, refers to Captain Brian Trubshaw, British test pilot and first pilot of the Concorde SST, whom the Queen referred to openly as "my Brian."[69] One can also factor in popular cricketer Brian Close, sports commentator Brian Johnston, footballer Brian Clough, and boxer Brian London—each of these Brians is mentioned more than once during the run of *Flying Circus*. In the pages of *Private Eye*, Prince Charles was often referred to as "Brian," while his mother the Queen was known as "Brenda."

There are a number of seemingly out-of-place names in Jerusalem today like "Wilson's Arch" and "Robinson's Arch," ancient structures named for later imperialist adventurers who "discovered" them.

MANDY: "Oh! Well, if you're dropping by again do drop in"—According to the Gospels, the magi went home a different way to avoid having to report to Herod. From Matthew: "And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way."[70] These won't be "dropping by again," certainly.

MANDY: ". . .thanks a lot for the gold and frankincense . . . but don't worry too much about the myrrh next time . . ."—Given that the smoke of "frankincense and many other aromatics" were common "methods of controlling insects," Mrs. Cohen should have been quite happy to receive the resin—she is, after all, living in a stable. The "mosquitoes, flies and other insects" would have starved for oxygen in proximity to the smoke, and the rough room would have smelled much more pleasant.[71] Earlier, in Peter Cook and Dudley Moore's live stage show *Behind the Fridge*, newspaper correspondent Matthew (Moore) interviews a Shepherd (Cook) about the nativity events, and the shepherd mentions that the "atmosphere was very, very smelly" in the stable. The shepherd also points out that he thought the Wise Men were actually "bloody idiots" who gave the Christ child gold—"fair enough, a little nugget of gold always comes in handy"—but the gift of frankincense and myrrh was thoughtless: "What is a little kid gonna do with frankincense and myrrh? Myrrh is the stuff what poofs put behind their ears!"[72]

Lastly, Mandy clearly doesn't know the relative value of the gifts her child's being offered. In ancient Rome, myrrh was said to be valued much higher than frankincense. She's holding *three* treasures, at least for a few moments. In a draft version of the script Mandy "*gives them the presents back and receives a gift of cash*." This is an example of a "flog back" where a prize (won on a game show) could be traded for cash. In the *Flying Circus* sketch "*It's a Living*," the Compére (Idle) recites the show's rules: "The winners will receive an additional fee, a prize which they can flog back and a special fee for a guest appearance on *Late Night Line Up*."[73] The equating of a visitation to the blessed Son of God and a modern game show transaction should be noted, of course. This isn't a surprise, though, given that elsewhere in *Flying Circus* historical figures including Marx, Lenin, Mao, Che Guevara, John the Baptist's head, Genghis Khan, St. Stephen, Richard III, Julius Caesar, and King Edward VII all participated in TV game shows.[74] The Pythons regularly drag both respected and

reviled persons of history out of their historical contexts and into the modern world of film and television.

MANDY: "Out of their bloody minds . . ."—The coarse accent is the first sign, but the use of "bloody"—a particularly English epithet—sets the tone for the rest of the film. These are various English men and women in the Holy Land setting, with no pretense of period language or accents. This practice had become *de rigueur* in Hollywood films, for example, with the mixing of American and British accents in films like *The Ten Commandments*, and the use of British accents in place of German accents in many Hollywood World War II films. *The Goon Show* had really led the Pythons here, no surprise, placing very British characters—including a "Nomad Arab" who'd gone to Cambridge to study Cockney—into Middle Eastern settings.[75] The various *Carry On* films, including *Carry on Cleo*, employed various British accents and mannered speech, from the high camp of Kenneth Williams (as Caesar) to the rough Cockney of Sidney James (as Marc Antony).

The use of "bloody" had also come of age in broadcasting and the movies as the Pythons came to be. A BBC internal document published in 1948 (and still in effect when the Pythons took to the air in 1969) laid out standards and practices on the use of expletives ("Bloody, Gorblimey, Ruddy"), with a "serious dramatic setting" being the general underpinning.[76] Though not beholden to the BBC, the British Board of Film Classification shared opinions with the Beeb as to expletives, and it wouldn't be until the advent of New Wave films and, specifically, Angry Young Men raging across screens in the late 1950s that words like "bloody" found their way into more common parlance at cinemas. In *I'm All Right Jack*, a comedy produced in 1959, Mr. Kite's wife rails at him for his stubbornness and politics: "Oh, yes, you're chairman of the Works Committee, don't we all know it. I'm sick to death of you and your Works Committee! Union this, union that. And your—blasted Soviet Union!" When saying "blasted," Mother Kite obviously curbs her own tongue, as she clearly (pausing, the "*b*" on her lips) wants to say "*bloody* Soviet Union." She doesn't, replacing it with her own "innocuous expression," but she could have just a few years later, even in a comedy.[77]

Later in *Life of Brian*, at the back of the crowd during the Sermon on the Mount, Mr. Big Nose hears "bloody" and tells Mr. Cheeky to not "swear" at his wife; the Ex-leper will also complain about "bloody donkey owners" and that Jesus, who healed him, is a "bloody do-gooder"; and Ben, hanging in Pilate's

jail, is grateful that the Romans have brought discipline to the Jews, otherwise there'd be a "right bloody mess."[78]

(draft) They turn and we see an identical Manger Scene in the other corner of the barn—(PSC) Not so, precisely. This would perhaps have been even funnier, given that the actual infant Jesus and his nativity scene were just a head-turn away as the silliness with Mandy and Brian unfolded. In the finished film, Mary and Joseph are in a nearby manger, just across the way. Coincidentally, in a 1977 issue of *Private Eye*, the "November Books" column advertises a new book, *The Ted Heath Book of Bethlehem*: "The former Prime Minister tells the familiar Christmas story in his own inimitable style, with cut-out nativity figures, pop-up Xmas tree and free, giveaway record of well-loved Yuletide carols."[79]

MARY and JOSEPH and JESUS with haloes—There is a common mixing of depictions here, since Matthew mentions only Jesus's mother in attendance as the Magi visit. These nimbed versions of the nativity are plentiful, and Gilliam even used several (angels and perhaps a Mary figure) in the animated opening credits of *Holy Grail*.[80] Gilliam earlier included two versions of the Madonna and child imagery in *Flying Circus* animations, using Bellini's *Madonna of the Meadows* in Eps. 19 and 25, and di Credi's *Virgin and Child* in Ep. 26.[81]

Like the Sermon on the Mount scene earlier—at least that portion of it featuring Jesus—this is one of the few scenes in *Brian* played straight. This may have been why the Pythons chose to remove the proper nativity from the same manger where Mandy and infant Brian are found. Lifted right from popular versions of the Gospels, these scenes, if removed from the Pythonesque context, would fit into a completely orthodox production of the nativity. Here the holy family is in place, the proper animals are gathered, and the Wise Men approach and kneel just as they should, as if posing for a mystery play tableau. There is no other shoe waiting to drop, no undercutting. (That happens when we cut back to Mandy and Brian, and she slaps him for crying.) This was one of the earliest ideas for the entire film, where a "St. Brian" just misses the miracles, the events of the Passion, etc., always arriving too late.[82] It is perhaps the very reverent and traditional nature of these scenes as conveyed—both including the Savior—that inflamed public opinion against the film, given the language, nudity, and/or irreverence in scenes before and after. It's equally possible, though, that a straight-ahead lampoon takes "the curse off it."[83] A sort of *Carry On Jesus* would have likely been clucked at but largely ignored. *Private Eye* had, in September 1977, offered a story from their "World of TV" section depicting

presenter and host Bamber Gascoigne[84] as a Christ figure, complete with disciples, mentions of fishermen and famous Jews, and a sermon on the mount in rural Spain: "It was on a hillside very similar to this, on the outskirts of the little town of Granada, that Bamber first delivered his immortal challenge to his little group of young disciples. 'Here,' he told them, 'is your starter for ten.'"[85] A few months earlier the magazine had lampooned the BBC 2 documentary *Who Was Jesus?* in an article entitled "Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up and Be Counted!"[86] The article tends to poke fun at the presenters and the show itself, and not Jesus. Peter Cook and Dudley Moore had treated stories from the Gospels several years earlier for their show *Behind the Fridge*, and sent them up.[87] In one scene, as an obviously iconic Jesus (Cook) walks on the water, his disciple (Moore) walks just behind him, chronicling the miracle, slowly sinking deeper and deeper (to audience giggles), until he splashes out of sight. Cook even finished with his arms outstretched, a gesture that could have offended, it seems, more sensitive viewers. Cook and Moore's approach to the Gospels was a lampoon, start to finish, and without nudity or cursing.

. . . pushing MANDY over—The obvious jerkiness of this movement results from the removal of a handful of frames from the action, causing a noticeable "jump" in the otherwise fluid motion. This effect has been used since film began, from Georges Méliès' "trick-film" *fin-de-siècle* shorts through Gilliam's *Time Bandits* and beyond.[88]

This unflattering, unattractive depiction of women is the Pythons' métier. By the final episode of *Flying Circus*, all stops are out. In Ep. 45 Jones plays a screeching, appalling mother figure (wearing a dress and wig but called "Dad") in the "Icelandic Honey Week" sketch. In that same episode, the mother (Idle) is equally appalling; she screams every bit of dialogue and worries about honey giving Dad "plop-plops"; the salesman is a man dressed in *female* Icelandic traditional costume, and hates his job but it gets him away from "gloomy" Iceland; and the son (Gilliam) is also cross-dressed and wearing garish makeup. Everyone here is cross-dressed at the actor level (four male actors dressed as females), while at the level of the fiction, the sketch, Jones's "Dad" character is a man dressed as a woman; Idle's "Mother" character is a woman dressed as a woman; the honey salesman (Chapman) is a man dressed as a woman; and the son (Gilliam) looks like he is a man dressed as a schoolgirl (school tie, cap, blazer, and skirt).[89]

MANDY and her brat—These characters have gone from being the holy mother of the Savior and the Messiah himself to a "ratbag" with "brat" rather

quickly, as is customary in the Python world. This setting is beginning to feel much more like the world of a Snoo Wilson play, perhaps especially *Vampire*, which premiered in 1973, and was then rewritten and restaged in 1977.[90] One of Wilson's obituarists described him as "often overtly political, Snoo was a Marxist '*tendance* Groucho'; more subtly subversive and humorous" than other post-1968 British playwrights.[91] Wilson characters in his 1976 and 1977 plays included Afrikaners and ghosts, vampires and punks, and even "real" people like Eugène Marais, Lynda Marchal, and Enoch Powell as a bloodsucking vampire.[92]

(draft) (MANDY pokes it with a long pole)—(PSC) In the finished film, Mandy actually slaps the crying baby.[93] This off-camera slap was earlier used in Ep. 4 of *Flying Circus*. There, two art-loving mothers (Chapman and Cleese) visit an art gallery where their children (never seen) allegedly have "smeared tomato ketchup all over Raphael's *Baby Jesus*," manhandled a "Baroque masterpiece," smashed an entire contemporary sculpture exhibition, spray-painted Vermeer's *Lady at a Window*, and "eaten most of the early nineteenth-century British landscape artists."[94] As the mothers tell each other of their children's bad behavior, each slaps her child several times, with sound effects provided by someone offscreen.

This seems to be a nearly direct reference to two recent and much-ballyhooed royal births—for Princess Anne and Mark Phillips,[95] and for the daughter-in-law of the Duke of Gloucester. The Phillips's child Peter was born 15 November 1977, and the papers carried information about his mother's normal pregnancy, the boy's weight and health, and even who his nanny would be. Quite interesting for us is an official statement made on 9 November, just days before the royal birth. The Palace announced that the royal child would *not* be awarded a title, and that he should be known as "Master Phillips." His un-royal father, Captain Phillips, would not receive a title, either, nor would his mother, Princess Anne, be created a duchess.[96] This was page-one news in most broadsheets and tabloids of the day. The *Sunday Times* went so far as to remind everyone that Master Phillips, grandchild of the Queen, was "technically a commoner"; just five days later, and in the same hospital, the daughter of the Duchess of Gloucester, Birgitte (van Deurs), was born *with* title, and officially known as Lady Davina Windsor.[97] The pregnancies had coincided with April announcements, July–August "retirements" from public engagements, then nearly-aligned November deliveries. *Private Eye*'s resident caustic Auberon Waugh[98] characterized the event in "lowly stable"–like terms: Rumours which continue to reach me that there is something terribly wrong with Master Peter Phillips can only be

strengthened by the Queen's decision to have him improperly christened in a drawing room at Buckingham Palace instead of publicly in Church, as his religion demands. . . . First reports that the lad was born with five legs can surely be discounted. It is quite normal for the male organ to appear disproportionately large in new-born infants. The truth may be simpler, that the Princess Anne Dame Anne Phillips has given birth to a centaur. If so, it is hard to decide whether one should congratulate her on her good fortune or commiserate with her. It happens in the best families.[99]

So, baby Peter Phillips, grandson to the Queen, was slapped by the Palace, the peerage, and the press as he lay swaddled in hospital, the wise men of the day taking his gifts and moving off to a nearby birth of more significance. Fascinating.[100]

The music sweeps—desperately—The lyrics were principally written by Palin, well away from the rest of the troupe. Palin self-deprecatingly records that when the orchestrated version of the song was played for the group, it went over fairly well: "Played the Bassey *Brian*. Good reaction, especially from JC. All full of admiration for André's arrangement, though not for my lyric particularly. I agree."[101]

Notes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, Bible citations will be drawn from the King James Version.
2. In this book I will spell both “nativity” and “temple” without capital letters (except as part of a title or quote), with the understanding that they each refer to a singular event (Christ’s birth) and structure (the temple in Jerusalem).
3. Cupitt and Armstrong, *Who Was Jesus?* 46; Isaiah 1:3.
4. Louise Hall-Taylor went on location; Adair made cutouts and sang songs in the studio. The show also presents canonical angels appearing to the shepherds, and the Three Kings’ visitation with gold, frankincense, and myrrh, all guided by a star.
5. Audio transcription (a.t.) from the program.
6. “The Living Reality of the Christian Community,” *Times*, 24 January 1976: 14.
7. “Urgent Questions Awaiting a New Doctor Angelicus,” *Times*, 21 February 1976: 16.
8. A detailed model of first-century Jerusalem was built for the Holyland Hotel in 1966, and could have served as a photographic model, had the Pythons demanded period authenticity. Pictures of the large model were splashed across many British newspapers (i.e., *The Illustrated London News* 24 December 1966: 26–27). The 1976 film *The Passover Plot* used shots of this model as establishing shots.
9. Various DVD versions offer the missing scenes that were photographed, including “Shepherds,” “Pilate’s Wife,” “Otto,” “The Sign That Is the Sign,” and “Souvenir Salesman.”
10. Played by English actress Julie Dawn Cole.
11. “Labour Expected to Reject Secret List of MP’s Interests,” *Times*, 24 April 1973: 4.
12. Discussed in more detail later in the “Stoning” scene. Other period films, like the biblically themed and homosexual-oriented historical thriller *Sebastiane* (the life and death of St. Sebastian), directed by Derek Jarman, raised no fuss.
13. “Python Film Protest,” *Daily Mail*, 9 November 1979: 19. Hewison’s *Monty Python: The Case Against* covers these reactions thoroughly.
14. In the 1 October 1976 issue of *Private Eye* the film becomes “*The Sex Life of Her Majesty the Queen*,” which “include[s] ‘hard-core hand-waving scenes’, and explicit, no-holds-barred close-ups of the royal hat” (12).
15. Also discussed in the “Stoning” scene.
16. Palin mentions the pay rate of extras for shooting in Tunisia (*Diaries 1969–1979*, 491–92).
17. This shaft of light is glimpsed behind the chatting shepherds in the elided “Shepherds” scene.
18. See Larsen, *MPFC: UC*, 1.21 for a discussion of this practice.
19. *ATW*, 1.2.15.
20. *MPFC: UC*, 1.5.
21. St. Francis began the practice of staging somewhat elaborate nativity scenes as early as the first quarter of the thirteenth century.
22. For the “blackface” and “blacked-up” moments in *Flying Circus*, see *MPFC: UC*, 1.104, 313, 315, 324, and 344; and 2.42, 46, and 209.
23. The “blacking up” moments (and references) are found in *Goon Show* episodes “Red Fort,” “The Nasty Affair at the Burami Oasis,” “The Raid of the International Christmas Pudding,” “Ill Met by Goonlight,” and “The Great Regent’s Park Swim.” *Private Eye* also occasionally employed blackface moments (18 March 1977: 13).
24. Jones had voiced Darth Vader in *Star Wars* this same year, and plays the traditional role of Balthazar here. Pleasance plays Melchior, and Rey plays Gaspar.
25. *ATW*, 2.25.20–21; *MPFC: UC*, 1.371–84.
26. *MPFC: UC*, 2.173.
27. Larsen, *BAFHG*, 64; also, 70n117.
28. *MPFC: UC*, 1.151, 260 and 335; 2.135.

29. See the entries for the “Dennis the Peasant” scene (*BAFHG*, 94–160).
30. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 434.
31. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 91.
32. Matthew 2:1.
33. *MPFC: UC*, 2.174.
34. *ATW*, 1.12.154–55.
35. *MPFC: UC*, 1.85.
36. *MPFC: UC*, 1.191.
37. See the index in *MPFC: UC* under “newspapers: *Daily Express*” for more. *Private Eye* would regularly run a snippet from the *Daily Express* horoscope section, poking sophomoric fun, like the following, for Gemini: “Uranus adds a touch of novelty to what you’re doing this evening” (2 September 1977: 5). In *Private Eye*, the *Daily Express* was often the *Daily Getsworse*.
38. Mark 15:19.
39. See Cohen, “A Wise Man’s Cure: Frankincense and Myrrh.”
40. See Freese, “Medicinal Myrrh”; also Jeremias, *JTJ* 4, 8–9, 28, 95, and 121. In the 1976 film *The Passover Plot*, this offering is mixed with a sedative that Yeshua accepts, convincing attendants that he has died on the cross.
41. See Gillmeister’s *Tennis: A Cultural History*, 27–28.
42. John 19:38–40.
43. “Bomb” is also a sixteenth-century term, so out of time here.
44. *MPFC: UC*, 1.12.
45. *MPFC: UC*, 1.165–66, 225–26.
46. *MPFC: UC*, 1.289, 299.
47. *BAFHG*, 437–40. Arthur and his knights simply mark the Enchanter’s “eccentric performance,” and go to the cave anyway.
48. From “Pharisees: Their Dress,” *Bible History Online*.
49. Luke 1:5. Zacharias was very old, as was his wife, and he had to be struck dumb by God to convince him of the dream’s accuracy. The Pythons *don’t* include any John the Baptist, forerunner-type character. (The Baptist appears in both *The Passover Plot* and *Jesus of Nazareth*.) The hermit Simon is similar, but he has no connection to Brian, other than being stepped on by him.
50. Matthew 1:19–20. The Pythons also do without a Joseph-type character, rendering Brian’s conception a few steps below “immaculate.”
51. Matthew 2:19.
52. Matthew 2:9. There are no dreams, visitations, or visions depicted in the finished film. The nearest extranatural moment comes when Brian is accidentally swept into the *Star Wars*–type space dogfight.
53. Pilate’s wife is included as an active character in the script, and there were even scenes shot featuring the actor, John Case, in the role. None of these scenes made the final cut.
54. Job 40:15 for the behemoth; Isaiah 27:1, Psalms 74:14 and 104:26, and Job 41:1 for the leviathan mentions. In one draft of the script, Pilate’s wife is described as a “Leviathan” rising from her bed.
55. Discussed in relation to *Holy Grail* in *BAFHG*.
56. *ATW*, 2.37.197; *MPFC: UC*, 2.139.
57. Kristofferson had been in London in June 1972 appearing on Rolf Harris’s very popular TV show, and he would return to British television in December of that same year.
58. *Times*, 10 December 1976: 19.
59. Ghost written by Alan Dean Foster.
60. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 355.
61. Lucas demands this of all his major characters in his early films—*THX 1138*, *American Graffiti*, and *Star Wars*.
62. A “Kwisatz Haderach,” the universe’s super being, is prophesied (and manipulated) by the Bene Gesserit order. Paul becomes this being earlier than predicted, and outside of the Bene Gesserit order’s

control. In *Star Wars*, Luke's assumed position as the second-most-powerful Jedi in the universe, to his father Darth Vader, is also hijacked by Luke's choices.

63. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 428–34. In the United States, *Star Wars* was still in first-run cinemas until almost November 1978. In late 1978, *Star Wars* was playing in London at the Dominion.

64. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 428. Palin would attend a party with Carrie Fisher, Mark Hamill, and Harrison Ford, among others, in June 1979 as the *Star Wars* cast worked in England on *The Empire Strikes Back* (559–60).

65. John 19:21.

66. Matthew 2:2.

67. Ackerman, "Women in Ancient Israel," unpaginated.

68. Ackerman, "Women in Ancient Israel."

69. *MPFC: UC*, 1.28–29.

70. Matthew 2:12. This is the KJV translation, which isn't remarkably different from the RSV, excepting in the KJV the warning is said to come "of God."

71. Neufeld, "Hygiene Conditions in Ancient Israel," 60.

72. *Behind the Fridge* was a live show shot in Australia in 1971, an offshoot of the popular *Not Only . . . But Also* television series (BBC 2, 1965–1970). This setup looks much like *Brian*'s elided "Shepherds" scene.

73. *Flying Circus* Ep. 19; see *MPFC: UC*, 1.294.

74. See the index for these names in *MPFC: UC*, as well as entries in Eps. 1 and 13 for more on where history and game shows intersect.

75. "The Gold Plate Robbery," February 1959.

76. *MPFC: UC*, 1.50.

77. Mr. Kite is allowed to say "bloody," however.

78. In Ep. 17 of *Flying Circus*, a BBC Man (Palin) lists the words not allowed on the BBC, including "bum," "botty," "pox," and "knickers" (*ATW*, 1.17.231; *MPFC: UC*, 1.264–77). The BBFC provided the Pythons with a list of words and images that could be removed from *Life of Brian* (and earlier, *Holy Grail*) if the Pythons wanted a lower rating. They eventually remove a swear from *Holy Grail*, but decided to keep the swearing in *Life of Brian*.

79. 11 November 1977: 10. Also, *Monty Python's Previous Record* features a "Teach Yourself Heath" demonstration.

80. This sequence is annotated in *BAFHG*, 265–69.

81. See *BAFHG*, 74, 290, 372, and 386. Haloes are a *pagan* addition to Christian iconography by Roman artists, part of the Romanization of the Church (Richard, *WWAR*, 275).

82. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 310–11.

83. On the Pythons' *Contractual Obligation Album*, an ad man (Cleese) is spit-balling ideas for a "string" sales pitch, proposing a nude woman in the bath with the string. "Too sexy," he concludes, and decides that putting an archbishop in the bath with her "will take the curse off it."

84. Gascoigne, host of the very popular quiz show *University Challenge*, has been mentioned earlier by the Pythons in *Flying Circus* Ep. 45 (*MPFC: UC*, 2.202).

85. "The Long Search for Things That Really Matter," *Private Eye*, 30 September 1977: 13.

86. 29 April 1977: 10.

87. The stage version of *Behind the Fridge* (directed by Joe McGrath) was playing at the Cambridge Theatre from November 1972 through fall 1973. The Pythons had lampooned McGrath as "McRettin" in Ep. 23's "Scott of the Antarctic" (*MPFC: UC*, 1.353–54).

88. In *Time Bandits* (directed by Gilliam; cowritten by Gilliam and Palin), one of Robin Hood's Merry Men sucker punches each of the poor as they receive gifts from the grinning Robin (Cleese). The punches are made all the more egregious with a crunchy sound effect.

89. *ATW*, 2.45.331–32; *MPFC: UC*, 2.202–10.

90. Contemporary reviews in the *Spectator* and the *Times* were enthusiastic for Wilson's mid-1970s work;

“Marais Resurrected,” *Times*, 4 February 1976: 9, and “Blue Rooms,” *Spectator*, 25 March 1977: 26.

91. Dusty Hughes, *Guardian*, 5 July 2013.

92. Marais was a South African naturalist; Marchal (later Lynda La Plante) was an actress (*Coronation Street*) and author; and Enoch Powell was an MP during this period, and not leading the party. Coincidentally, Carol Cleveland was lifelong friends with La Plante (“The Monty Python Pin-Up Carol Cleveland,” *Daily Express*, 13 January 2014).

93. Having now shown the actual Christ Child elsewhere, this is a point where the film demonstrates Brian is the Son of Mandy, not the Son of Man. The balance of the film follows the Brian-is-*not*-Jesus thread, which many critics missed or ignored.

94. *ATW*, 1.4.42–43.

95. In 1974, Princess Anne had also been the subject of an attempted kidnapping, which will be discussed in “The PFJ Plan Their Raid” scene. When asked to get out of the car at gunpoint, she reportedly retorted, “Bloody likely.”

96. “No Title for Princess Anne’s Baby,” *Times*, 9 November 1977: 1; “No Title for Royal Baby,” *Telegraph*, 9 November 1977: 1. Had Captain Phillips been offered and then accepted a peerage, he would have been titled, and his offspring could use courtesy titles. This was hashed through many times—beginning the day the pregnancy was announced—over the following months prior to the birth (“Princess Anne to Have a Baby,” *Times*, 9 April 1977: 1).

97. “A Girl for the Gloucesters,” *Sunday Times*, 20 November 1977: 1. Now married, she is Lady Davina Lewis; her father is Prince Richard, Duke of Gloucester.

98. Waugh’s “diaries” discuss primarily news of the day along with politicians, novelists, and journalists. He also contributed to the *Spectator* for many years, and bashes the royals often.

99. Waugh, *FCY*, 31 December 1977.

100. Less than a year earlier the Pythons had cemented the *Brian* idea; just days before baby Peter’s appearance they’d settled on Tunisia for location shooting (Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 442).

101. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 443. The Shirley Bassey–like song was sung by Sonia Jones.

SCENE TWO

ANIMATED TITLE AND CREDIT SEQUENCE **SHOT 1** ***(CLOUDS)—ENGRAVING-TYPE CLOUDS AND SHINING SUN***—FOR THE ANIMATIONS IN *FLYING CIRCUS* AND *HOLY GRAIL*, GILLIAM BORROWED FROM PHOTO REPRODUCTIONS IN ART, HISTORY, AND TECHNICAL BOOKS, AND COLLECTIONS OF WORKS FROM BOSCH, BRUEGEL, AND ALBRECHT DÜRER, AMONG OTHERS. FOR *LIFE OF BRIAN*, GILLIAM FOCUSES ON BIBLICAL-LOOKING CHARACTERS AND SETTINGS INCLUDING, AS WILL BE SEEN, A NUMBER OF GUSTAVE DORÉ AND GIAMBATTISTA PIRANESI IMAGES. DORÉ ILLUSTRATED EDITIONS OF THE BIBLE AND DANTE, WHILE ARTIST AND ARCHITECT PIRANESI SKETCHED THE RUINS OF ROME. THE CLOUDS ACROSS THE BOTTOM, LEFT-CENTER, AND LEFT

OF THE FRAME, FOR EXAMPLE, ARE COPIED (AND TOUCHED UP) FROM DORÉ'S "DANTE, IN A DREAM, CARRIED OFF BY AN EAGLE" ILLUSTRATION IN CANTO IX OF THE *PURGATORIO*.[1]

For *Holy Grail*, Gilliam would often cut and paste portions of one illuminated manuscript with another for a desired scene, like the "arse trumpeters" sequence, or the later "Springboard Novitiates" and "Passing Seasons" animations. In this last sequence, Gilliam uses up to six separate illustrations or portions of such to create his imagined world.[2] Here, Gilliam will piece together this cloud scene from several Doré prints.

Seen at the end of the credits, as well, this sun looks like it is also from the print "Dante . . . Carried Off by an Eagle," offering these same clouds, a brilliant sun, and a winged creature climbing skyward.[3]

"Brian" title song—Bond-like in its composition and presentation, this is meant to sound like the *Goldfinger* (1965) and *Diamonds Are Forever* (1971) title tracks written by John Barry and sung by Shirley Bassey. Bassey and friends had already lampooned themselves in 1967 with the recording of the *Goldfinger*-esque *The Liquidator* title track song. The actual "Brian Song" was sung by young Sonia Jones and written by Andre Jacquemin and Dave Howman. Jacquemin will work with Pythons again on *Ripping Yarns* (1979), *Live at the Hollywood Bowl* (1982), and Gilliam's *Zero Theorem* (2013); Howman will contribute the music to "Every Sperm is Sacred" for *The Meaning of Life*.

HandMade Films presents—HandMade Films belonged to former Beatle George Harrison and was run by Denis O'Brien. The company was set up specifically to distribute the seemingly undistributable *Life of Brian*. EMI Films had originally planned to finance and release the film, but backed out when public response to the film's allegedly blasphemous content began to heat up. HandMade would also distribute *The Long Good Friday* (1979), *Time Bandits* (1981), and *Withnail and I* (1986).

Monty Python's—This is in multicolored neon, likely to stand out from the biblical setting as much as possible. The title is plugged into another AC outlet on a cloud, though the receptacle appears to be the standard two-prong North American version, and not the three-prong version used in the UK. Gilliam would have been familiar with both, of course.

Shot 2 ***(stone letters) including camera move— "Life of Brian" stone block letters***—Also used in *Flying Circus*, the "New Cooker Sketch," where Gilliam was clearly trying to match the epic promotional titles of *Ben-Hur* (1959) for something as trivial as the arrival of a new gas cooker. The cover of the original soundtrack album for the William Wyler film features the title laid out just like Gilliam's version of *Life of Brian*—stacked, made to look like stone carvings, perspectively displayed—as does the cover of the promotional *The Story of the Making of Ben-Hur* picture book also released by MGM. Posters for the 1961 film *King of Kings* copied this layout quite accurately.[4] There are also a number of low-budget Hammer Studio films whose producers knew a good thing when they saw it, borrowing the majestic look for their titles. Midnight movie posters with identical lettering include *She* (1965), *The Brigand of Kandahar* (1965), *One Million Years B.C.* (1966), *When Dinosaurs Ruled the Earth* (1970), and *At the Earth's Core* (1976).

infant Brian on a cloud—This image is of course a version of the Christ-child, not Brian, this one borrowed from Doré, specifically "The Nativity" engraving from his illustrated Bible collection (c. 1866). Gilliam has colored the child's hair brown and given him some "flesh" tone, since the original is a black-and-white etching. The child is also nimbed in the Doré original, with a fiery glow as opposed to a halo-type nimb. In other illustrations from this same series, Joseph and Mary are both nimbed (conventionally), and baby Jesus bears the fiery glow.

It's likely that Gilliam pulled all of these biblical Doré illustration examples from the same book, *The Doré Bible Illustrations* reprinted by Dover in 1974. For *Flying Circus* and *Holy Grail*, he had also used Dover publications.[5]

falling "B"—This type of animated sequence is a Gilliam trope, where one portion of the animation can detach and affect following portions. In the opening credits for the first season of *Flying Circus*, for example, a corseted model's head pops off, upward and out of frame, hitting a cherub floating above, who then falls into another frame and onto a wheeled Cardinal Richelieu, who is crushed into a hole.[6] In the *Brian* credits, as the block title rises into the sky (and the camera "pulls back") the monolithic "B" in "BRIAN" somehow catches on the upper diegetic frame edge and is dislodged. This is Gilliam acknowledging

the “edge” of the diegetic world, as well as his knowledge of cinematic history, but also a nod to the artist for much of his inspiration for these titles, Piranesi (discussed in a moment). In the “Pink Elephants on Parade” sequence in *Dumbo*, the elephants at one point march in line along all four edges of the film frame, drawing attention to the built-in (but almost never focused on) proscenium created around the mise-en-scène when the camera is static. The edge of the film world is rarely acknowledged in traditional, classical film and animation; it is in the context-smashing worlds of avant-garde film, and the animated films of Tex Avery, for example, that the *formal* elements of film itself are highlighted.[7] In Ep. 28 of *Flying Circus*, an animated medical drawing walks out of the frame and off the film stock itself: This is not unlike the self-reflexive cartoon *Duck Amuck* (1953), where Daffy is confronted with the artificial and plastic nature of his ink and paint world, or many of Tex Avery’s cartoons (at Warner Bros. and MGM). In one Avery cartoon (*Screwball Squirrel*, 1944), Screwy Squirrel lifts the edge of the frame he’s in to see what’s going to happen to him next, for example, and in *Duck Amuck*, Daffy ends up getting in a fight with an adjoining frame’s version of himself. Most precisely, in the Tex Avery cartoon *Dumb-Hounded* (1943) the wolf character runs off the frame right, past the racing sprocket holes, and into offscreen white space for a moment, before scampering back into the world framed by the film. These cartoons, with their hyperviolence, speed, and reflexivity, obviously had a profound influence on the Goons, first, for radio, and later on, the Pythons and the often-cartoony world they created for television [and film].[8]

The “B” will fall and disappear into oblivion, out of frame, and we will follow the falling Brian cutouts, instead. (There is no indication why just the “B” manages to snag the frame edge, while the others slide past without a problem.) The “B” does not reappear in any of the lower portions of the “caverns” created by Gilliam.

The Piranesi connection is an interesting bit of context tampering, setting the stage for Gilliam’s own “coloring outside the lines,” as it were. In some of his elaborate Roman architectural drawings, Piranesi would allow a chunk of broken foundation or the foot of a tourist or, yes, even a loose clump of plinths to hang over the “front” of the frame, casting a shadow across the descriptive caption beneath. In his “Plan and View of the Tomb Supposedly of Alexander Severus,” for example, parts of collapsed ornamented frieze project out of the drawing and into the world of the viewer, a remarkable acknowledgment of the edge of the picture frame and its tenuousness in relation to the viewer’s position.[9] This bit of

playfulness will be seen again in the "foundation view" rendering discussed below; another bit of fallen masonry lurching out beyond the flat page.

falling Brian baby—This image is different from the previous child image, but also borrowed from Doré. This "crouching" child is cropped from "The Deluge" flood scene from Doré's Bible series, and can be found directly in the middle of the picture, the child clambering at the top of the rock. Gilliam is likely counting on the viewer *not* making the connection between the original work (where the child will likely either drown or be eaten by the mother tiger and her cubs already on the rock) and the infant Brian falling, safely, onto the "Starring" credit block.[10] This same print will provide the next Brian figure, discussed below.

Shot 3—*("Starring")* "Starring & Written By . . ."—Michael Palin, Terry Jones, Eric Idle, Terry Gilliam, John Cleese, and Graham Chapman, from bottom to top. The troupe often wrote in discrete units. Cambridge grads Chapman and Cleese wrote together (and had for years), while Oxford alums Jones and Palin also were a long-term team. Idle had often written on his own, then contributed to the group effort. Gilliam generally worked on the outside of the group, since he was primarily an animator and then bit actor; his contributions as an actor increased as the series matured. As their biblical film was being written, they tended to keep to these clusters, with Palin and Jones working together on their scenes and characters (including the Three Wise Men), and Cleese and Chapman meeting and writing together (Ex-leper; Stoning), as well. They'd all come together for semi-regular read-throughs, where all ideas were on the table.[11]

This layout—employing Renaissance perspective, for example—can be seen in many of Piranesi's drawings of Rome, but, as mentioned above, also copies the title sequences for both *Ben-Hur* and *King of Kings*.

earthquake and fissure—Though not associated with Christ's birth, an earthquake may have coincided with his death. Thanks to accounts in Matthew 27:51–54, Mark 15:38, and Luke 23:45,[12] an earthquake that tore the temple veil has been identified as accompanying Christ's death on the cross.[13] In Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth*, a storm is used at the time of Christ's death, but no earthquake; earlier, in George Stevens's *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965), a raging rainstorm accompanies his death, along with a hint (rumblings, birds spooked into flight) of earth tremors; and in *Barabbas* (1961), an actual eclipse during filming allowed for an eerie, stony silence and semidarkness, followed by wind as Christ's body is removed from the cross.[14]

In a semi-related event, the temple's foundation in Jerusalem had begun to settle and partially collapse the structure above almost as soon as it had been finished, and in the years leading up to the revolt in 66, repairs were planned (to employ as many potential insurrectionists as possible) but never realized after the chaos of revolt set in.[15] Jewish historian Josephus (or Joseph ben Matthias[16]) mentions that the stones used for the temple were massive, measuring 25 cubits by 8 cubits by 12 cubits[17] (or 12.5 by 4 by 6 *yards*), reminiscent of the enormous blocks of letters Gilliam arranges for the title. These types of blocks are seen in DeMille's *The Ten Commandments*, as the Pharaoh's monumental works are being erected.

infant Brian is catapulted—It's the "AN" from "CHAPMAN" that bounces on "STARRING," sending the infant Brian into the Dantean abyss. The pile of monumental blocks left over from the collapsed names resemble the piles sketched again and again by Piranesi on his treks to Rome and Roman ruins. A number of these "fantastic" works are depicted in his *Prima Parte* series, the *Grotteschi* images, and images like "The Foundations of the Theatre of Marcellus," from *Antichità*.[18] The last image offers enormous cut blocks both in situ and lying about, and interested eighteenth-century men clambering and gesticulating.

Shot 4 ***(downward camera move)— "falling" shot***—The backgrounds as the infant (and then boy) Brian falls are borrowed from photos and illustrations of ancient architecture, including significant Roman ruins, as well as places not so Roman, as it turns out.

background one—The first visible background is a retouched interior shot of a lower hallway arcade in the Flavian Amphitheater, Pozzuoli, Italy. Gilliam has removed some of the ceiling and openings at the top of the archways, inserting a blue-sky background. The lower section of this same shot is simply an upside-down image of the amphitheater hallway. The rocks inserted at the top right of the screen (perhaps to mask a caption found on the original) are borrowed from the same Doré print used for clouds elsewhere in this section, "The Tomb of Anastasius." The rocks have been turned upside down from their original position at the bottom left of the Doré print.[19] Gilliam has fused separate images into new buildings and vistas before, most notably in the animated sequences for *Holy Grail*. In the animated titles sequence for that film, Gilliam performs this same legerdemain, adding and obscuring as needed.[20] Earlier still, in Ep. 27 of *Flying Circus*, Gilliam creates a world inside a criminal's body from inverted, retouched images of Greek temples and the Panthéon (in Paris).[21] Kitted out with

his own decorations—hand-drawn and airbrushed "entrails" and fluids—as well as sound effects (digestive noises), the scenes become quite authentic as animated policemen chase the bad guy, hoping to get out before he eats or, worse, has a bowel movement.

As for a source, there is a very nice, full-page photo of the tunnel section of the Flavian amphitheater in William MacDonald's *The Architecture of the Roman Empire*, published in 1965. The photo is the final plate in the book. Perhaps tellingly, some of the bright sunlight stripes on the original image can also be seen in Gilliam's version.

"With"—The baby falls past stones with cast member names inscribed on them, each somehow floating as Brian falls.

Terence Baylor—Actually a misspelling of "Bayler."[22] New Zealand-born Bayler was an early decision by the Pythons as a dependable extra.[23] Bayler had appeared on Idle's *Rutland Weekend Television* in 1975–1976, and *The Rutles: All You Need Is Cash* in 1978, also with Idle. He will also appear in Gilliam's *Time Bandits*.

Carol Cleveland—A longtime Python chum, Cleveland appears in the earliest publicity photos produced by the BBC for *Flying Circus*, though for a time she only contributed her female-ness to the show. She had likely only been included to broaden the new show's potential demographic, capturing young females as well as the requisite males, where possible. By the second season, though, Cleveland was often allowed to act with the boys and showcase her comedic gifts (along with her physical assets).

new falling Brian, youth—The block featuring Cleveland's credit hides the transition from the falling baby Brian to a falling youth Brian. Gilliam clearly wanted a Brian figure somewhere between child and adult. This new figure comes from Doré's Bible work "The Deluge," wherein drowning parents attempt to save their children by hoisting them onto exposed rocks. A tiger and her cubs are already waiting there, meaning the children might not last long. Gilliam has simply copied out the uppermost child, and turned him upside down.

Kenneth Colley—Veteran actor Colley would appear in *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi* in 1980 and 1983, respectively. He also appeared in Gilliam's *Jabberwocky*. In *Life of Brian* he is tasked with playing Jesus Christ, which he does with restraint and feeling, especially in comparison with Jeffrey Hunter's somewhat affected performance in *King of Kings*, or the fiery rebelliousness of Zalman King in *The Passover Plot* (1976).

Neil Innes—Idle's friend and collaborator, the musician and actor Innes had appeared in the final season of *Flying Circus*, as well as *Holy Grail*, *The Rutles*, *RWT*, and earlier with his band and Palin, Idle, and Jones on *Do Not Adjust Your Set* (1969). Innes would also appear with the Pythons for their *Live at the Hollywood Bowl* shows.

projecting rock—Off to the right at this moment is a slab of rock (not original to the setting) that juts out into the cavern, serving no apparent purpose. It won't be until the end of the credits, when we are in this setting again (with different characters and titles), that it becomes apparent this background was designed for two uses. In the second iteration toward the end of the credit sequence a giant will be using the rock as a platform. See the "*stretched human*" entry below for more on this giant.

Charles McKeown—Just younger than the Pythons, McKeown had appeared on *Fawlty Towers* with Cleese, and would appear in *Ripping Yarns*, then *Time Bandits*, *The Missionary* (1982), and *Brazil* (1985).

John Young—Known to most Python fans as the "Famous Historian" who loses his life to a *Holy Grail* knight on horseback, as well as another memorable character: "In the 'Cast List' included as part of the printed script in [*Monty Python and the Holy Grail (Book)*], Young's characters are described as 'The Dead Body That Claims It Isn't,' and 'The Historian Who Isn't A.J.P. Taylor At All.'"[24]

Gwen Taylor—Taylor was originally being considered for the role of Judith, as were many others. According to Palin, they watched tape for actresses Gilda Radner, Kika Markham, and Penny Wilton, then "Judy Loe . . . Maureen Lipman, Diana Quick" and Taylor, and finally Sue Jones-Davies, who won the role. They'd met Radner on various *Saturday Night Live* forays; and while Markham was a serious actress, her politics, as a member of the radical Workers' Revolutionary Party, gave the Pythons concern about life on the set.[25] Judy Loe would get the call for *Meaning of Life*; Penelope Wilton missed out on *Brian* but made it comfortably into the popular *Doctor Who* and *Downton Abbey* series later; and Lipman later found fame in *Educating Rita* (1983), and had been part of the earlier *Doctor at Large* (cowritten by Chapman and Cleese; 1971). Finally, the leading contender for the role from the outset had been Diana Quick, who obviously read well and wowed all of the Pythons, according to Palin. Quick could be consoled by her casting into the popular *Brideshead Revisited* (1981), voice work on *Doctor Who* (2003), and a long career in British television. Gwen Taylor eventually lost out on the Judith role because, in Palin's

mind, they needed a “stroppy feminist” type, and Jones-Davies fit better after months of reading and consideration. Taylor had worked on *RWT* and later on *Ripping Yarns*.

Sue Jones-Davies—Her Welsh-tinged reading of Judith’s “stroppy feminist” lines won the role for Jones-Davies. This casting took them more than half a year, according to Palin.[26]

Shot 5 ***(downward camera move)— background two***—This transition is a jump cut, essentially, with no real attempt to match the backgrounds, rather the vertical camera movement, which is continuous.

This second far background photo—a hodgepodge of small, rough doorways and wooden porches with laundry lines attached by Gilliam—is in fact the stacked, retouched image of an ancient Berber granary in Qasr al-Haj, Libya. The structure dates to much later than the Roman or Asian images seen in the rest of the title sequence.

new falling Brian, older—This version of Brian is provided by Doré, as well, but from an Old Testament source. This figure is one of the teasing children being set upon in *The Children Destroyed by Bears* (1866) illustration from 2 Kings (2:23–24). The prophet Elijah—whom the children had called “baldhead”—looms darkly in the background, his back half turned from the slaughter.[27]

Peter Brett—Veteran actor (and now writer) Brett had appeared in *Flying Circus* and *Fawlty Towers*, and earlier in *Dixon of Dock Green*, *Softly, Softly*, and *Doctor Who*, the last three common shows for casting calls with *Flying Circus*.[28] He was married to Carol Cleveland 1971–1983. Brett’s name and roles do not appear on the *Dramatis Personae* list in the published version of the script.

figurative column—The “column” at the right is actually a photo of one of the Assyrian winged bull (*lamassu*) carvings at the Gate of All Nations, found at Persepolis, Iran. These gates date to the late fifth century, meaning well past the time of Christ, but old enough and exotic enough to pass muster for Gilliam background material. A little worse for the wear for time and the elements, these carvings are still in place. This historical site had been much in the news in the early 1970s when the Shah of Iran[29] decided to celebrate his family’s achievements in association with the twenty-five-hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Persian Empire at Persepolis. The picturesque ruins became the backdrop for what Caryl calls “the jetset event of the century.”[30] Many international figures, including the American vice president, the Duke of

Edinburgh, Princess Anne, and Liberal Party leader Jeremy Thorpe, attended the lavish event.[31] Myriad stories and photos of Persepolis and the elaborate tent cities erected for the celebration (to which Iran Air promised smooth, comfortable flights) appeared in major British newspapers in 1971.

This background, coupled with the claustrophobic crowding of the bestatued columns at screen right and the laundry lines strung between buildings is more reminiscent of a "modern" British inner city than a Roman one of the first century.[32] The crowded and decrepit Victorian terraces had featured such images for decades, while areas like City Parish of Glasgow offered vistas just like Gilliam recreates. Frederick Engels would write that he "did not believe, until [he] visited the wynds [side alleys] of Glasgow, that so large an amount of filth, crime, misery and disease existed in one spot in any civilised country."[33] Some of Doré's London illustrations (c. 1872) were also clearly the basis for Gilliam's version of Brian's first-century Jerusalem home. The tower blocks that would replace many of these more awful Victorian slums held great promise but quickly decayed into sky-high versions of the same slums.[34] Gilliam seems to be creating a combination of these Victorian and Modernist living conditions, revealing their towering darkness as Brian falls and falls. The pages of Thomas Annan's *Photographs of the Old Closes and Streets of Glasgow* are replete with such images. Importantly, a Dover reprint of this same book appeared in 1977, just as the Pythons were putting *Life of Brian* together.[35] Gilliam has, of course used Dover reprints before, as mentioned earlier.

SINGER: "He had arms. And legs. And hands. And feet . . ."—Gilliam had made a career manipulating, moving, and removing arms and legs and hands and feet for his animated characters. In this opening credit sequence alone we will see severed heads, moving arms, legs dismembered from torsos, disembodied lips and heads, and a human body stretched to banner size. Gilliam's work in *Flying Circus* set itself apart in this way[36]: Recognizable faces from the world of politics (Nabarro, Heath), sport or entertainment (W.G. Grace, Greer Garson) are given new, often grotesque bodies and/or abilities in Gilliam's world, and normal, unknown folk from traditional family photos also appear. The wholeness of the human body is the [audience's] expectation, and Gilliam takes every opportunity he can to dismember and make strange and monstrous that formerly sanctified figure. This "body horror" phenomenon isn't new to Gilliam or the Pythons, having crept into feature films (Hammer horror, bloody Peckinpah Westerns, George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, etc.) and on the nightly news as the color images from the day's fighting in Vietnam was reported.[37]

Parts of an entire episode of *Flying Circus* (Ep. 22) are devoted to identifying bits of the body. Later in *Brian*, pieces of combatants are strewn across the coliseum sand, the PFJ want to cut all Pilate's wife's "bits" off, and still later one of Brian's followers will parse the physical form in its potential godliness, calling for people to read Brian's sign as a providential direction to "think not of the things of the body but of the face and head." The Pythons and their characters tend to be corporeally-obsessed: They spend significant time referencing saliva, urine, vomit, mucous, fecal matter and bowel movements, as well as buckets and geysers of blood (*MPFC: UC*, 1.160). Characters in this carnivalesque and grotty world . . . can cough up blood (Ep. 29, "Salvation Fuzz"), spew aortal geysers of blood (Ep. 33, "Sam Peckinpah's Salad Days"), or die dramatically with blood arcing gracefully, even poetically from the chest (Ep. 23, "Scott of the Sahara"). In this world of corporeality, one can gob at great works of art (Ep. 4, "Art Gallery"), smell the pong at Victorian poetry readings (Ep. 41, "Es schmecken wie ein Scheisshauss!"), take delivery of dung and nearly dead Indians (Ep. 19, "Dead Indian"), and meet families like the Gits who don't exist except to revel in "warm pus" and "vomit and catarrh" (Ep. 21, "Mr. and Mrs. Git"). By Ep. 45 . . . wiping "the cat's doo" on the bread, toxic flatulence, diarrhea ("plop plops"), and monumental bowel movements define the Garibaldi and Jodrell families, both vying for the "Most Awful Family in Britain" award. Most of these situations had nothing to do with medieval times, either, meaning the Pythons were simply fascinated by excremental humor (or "fundamental" humor—humor of the lower parts of the body). In this they were neatly following in the footsteps of their literary predecessors Jonson, Voltaire, Rochester, Swift, Dryden, Smollett, Hogarth, et al., not to mention a number of New Wave filmmakers, including Pasolini, Polanski, Nagisa Oshima . . . and Walerian Borowczyk.[38]

This fascination likely comes from their heroes, the Goons, whose character Bluebottle (Sellers) ended many episodes by being "deaded"—blown to pieces, electrocuted or squashed, or simply having his knees fall off.[39] Like his cartoon antecessors, Bluebottle was always back hale and whole for the next episode.

John Case—Case was edited out of the film in the role of Pilate's enormous and dangerous wife, but remained as the looming Burt in the "Harry the Haggler" scene. His casting is a nod to the old Keystone tradition of hiring freaks and acrobats for their striking screen presence (tall and short, fat and thin, contortionists, etc.). Burt is also left off the semiofficial *Dramatis Personae* cast list in the printed version of the script.

Chris Langham—Langham is an actor and writer who wrote for *The Muppet Show* but also appeared, memorably, as the eager new MP Hugh Abbot in *The Thick of It* (2005). Langham was married to fellow *Brian* actor Sue Jones-Davies for a number of years.

Andrew McLachlan—The credits (in hanging laundry) spell this name incorrectly, as well, which means mistakes memorialized in stone, cloth, or film stock will remain forever. Scottish-born MacLachlan would reappear in *Time Bandits*, *Meaning of Life*, Cleese and Palin's *A Fish Called Wanda* (1988), and Jones's *Erik the Viking* (1989). MacLachlan had attended St. Edmund Hall, Oxford, Jones's alma mater.

Bernard McKenna—McKenna has a long list of writing credits, many with Chapman, including *Doctor in the House*, and *Yellowbeard* (1983). He also wrote for and with Ronnie Barker, Peter Cook, and Douglas Adams.

Spike Milligan—The Pythons' creative genie, *Goon Show* creator Milligan had already made a vocal appearance during Ep. 19 of *Flying Circus*, where he shouts from offscreen during *Election Night Special*.[40]

lamassu feet—The temple on which the *lamassu* stands is an inverted version of the Bacchus Temple at Baalbeck, Lebanon. This temple will appear later in the credit sequence, as well. There are a number of Doré prints in the Bible illustrations featuring these figures (*lamassu*) as gateway sentinels.[41]

etched cloud formation—This particular bit of cloud is copied out of Doré's work, specifically "The Tomb of Anastasius" found in his illustrations for Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Gilliam likely copied the image out of the 1976 Dover edition of *DDC*, page 31.

Roman columns—The columns to the right are inverted versions of the columns found at the Roman Theater of Merida, in Spain.

Shot 6 ***(falling between columns)— statue head***—This is an image of the head from the Roman "Colossal statue of Constantine" now found in a courtyard at the Musei Capotilini in Rome. The statue was originally created for the Basilica of Maxentius. This fourth-century head and the hand are the only complete parts of the large statue left. The falling Brian (see below) is pushed along now by the statue head.

new clinging Brian—This version of Brian—clinging to the statue's head—is a new version, also from Doré. This is a tiny version of David from "Saul Attempts the Life of David" found in Doré's Bible illustrations collection, page 76. In the print, young David clings to his harp as Saul prepares to skewer him

“even to the wall” (1 Samuel 18:11). Gilliam has swapped the harp and wall for the statue’s head.

Shot 7 ***(lion statue and column)*** **—** ***cave ceiling rock***—Gilliam lifted this section of “ceiling” from Doré’s *Dante* work “The Gate of Hell,” found on page eight of *DDC*. He’s left a barely visible glimpse of the “All hope abandon, ye who enter here” sign at the top of the cave opening, and flipped the rock face image. Gilliam’s cropped the cave mouth completely, except as the “ceiling” begins to fall the entrance to Hell can be seen, briefly. As it falls, the images of Dante and Virgil would be seen, had Gilliam not removed them, as well. Above this ceiling—as the columned surface above is revealed—the rocks from “The Tomb of Anastasius,” used earlier, reappear.

lion statuary—This looks to be not a Roman lion (a Medici, for example), particularly, but perhaps a Greek-produced work (or copy); its pose—paws forward, together, and not on a sphere—and its facial features appear similar to earlier Greek statues from the fourth century BC. There is an example of such a statue at the Louvre, in the Roman section.

“horizon” rock—The surface upon which the lion stands isn’t from the same source as the ceiling rock above, except that it is, oddly. Gilliam seems to have flipped the original image and is using a retouched version of the clouds as the new ground on which the lion stands. He has done this throughout *Flying Circus*, taking recognizable structures and settings and, with some simple manipulation, rendered them unfamiliar.

column and basis—The column on top of the lion appears to be a Roman Tuscan column, one perhaps pieced together by Gilliam. Similar columns will be seen later, in the “Julian Doyle” titled scene. The collapse of this scene brought on by the removal of the column support features characteristic cartoon physics. The support is removed, there is a pause, the lion glances upward, then back at us, and then there’s a collapse. See the entries for the “stonemason” below for more on this cartoony effect.

Director of Photography—Peter Biziou—Biziou has lensed two dozen films, including *Time Bandits*, *Pink Floyd: The Wall* (1982), and *The Truman Show* (1998).

Shot 8 ***(statues and columns)*** **—** The transition to this shot involves a wipe, where the new shot “falls” over the old one. In the shot, the cave ceiling above the lion collapses, revealing the surface above, where the columns are placed. This transition is accomplished in just a handful of film frames.

headless statue clutching severed head—Another Doré inclusion, this from his *Divine Comedy* illustrations published beginning in 1861.[42] The figure isn't a statue, as Gilliam has depicted, but the beheaded baron Bertran de Born, placed into the eighth circle of Hell by Dante for his schismatic influences. The trumpets his images bear are reminiscent of the ones Gilliam created for the title credits to *Holy Grail*. See the notes for the Title Sequence Animation (Scene 12) in *BAFHG*. This (live-action) trumpet theme will reappear in the "Colosseum" scene later in the film.

Shot 9 ***(multiple statues and columned building)— columned building***—The columned background building is a retouched photograph of the Bacchus Temple at Baalbek, Lebanon. Since this side of the building's columns (the southern side) have been partially collapsed for centuries, it's not as often photographed.

new etched cloud formation—This cloud is also sourced from the 1976 Dover edition of Doré's *Divine Comedy* prints, page 31. See the entry for "*etched cloud formation*" above.

man on horseback—At the bottom right of the frame are two tiny horses, one bearing a rider. The ridered horse is rearing up slightly, as well. These figures don't actually move and only the red coat attracts the eye to this far corner of the frame. This tiny bit of ephemera, almost marginalia, is not from a photograph but from one of Piranesi's prints originally drawn in Rome in the eighteenth century. "The Forum of Nerva" is part of Piranesi's celebrated *Views of Rome* series.[43] Piranesi almost always included human figures—tourists, gesticulating guides, and every day Romans—providing perspective for the massive remains he was capturing. It appears that Gilliam felt compelled to do the same, even though the images are separated by much time and geography.

Camera Operator—John Stanier—He would also work as a camera operator on *Midnight Express* (1978) and *Pink Floyd: The Wall*.

1st Asst. Director—Jonathan Benson—Assistant director and first assistant director on many films, working with the Pythons, Ken Russell, Paul Morrissey, and Franco Zeffirelli.

Continuity—Brenda Loader—Loader was a busy script supervisor for television commercials, TV movies, and feature films, from *Doctor Who* to Paul McCartney's *Give My Regards to Broad Street* (1984).

Dubbing Mixer—Hugh Strain—Having worked earlier on *Holy Grail*, Strain can claim dozens of sound projects, including *Britannia Hospital* (1982) and *Withnail & I*, as well as television work.

Dubbing Editor—John Foster—Along with Strain and Doyle (and Gilliam and Jones), Foster had worked on the *Holy Grail* postproduction sound team. Foster also worked sound on *Superman* (1978).

spinning statue—When the trumpeter spins, he has been replaced by a crude, Gilliam-drawn version of the headless figure, since Gilliam only had one angle to work from. As part of his work on *Flying Circus*, Gilliam would often redraw portions of a cut-out image for ease of movement.

Shot 10 *(pull back camera move)*— Editor—Julian Doyle—On *Holy Grail* Doyle had helped seed the film, then, with the Pythons, carried it through production and postproduction. Doyle continued to work, with his wife and with Jones and Palin, after the film's budget ran out. He was clearly a sine qua non in regard to completion of *Holy Grail*.[44] By December 1978 the Pythons were summoned to the Sapphire Theatre to watch Doyle's first cut of *Brian*, and Palin reports very positive responses.[45] Doyle would later write a book based at least partly on the experience, *The Life of ~~Brian~~ Jesus*.

six columns—These are different from other columns used throughout. They appear to be made of Egyptian porphyry, a darker, shinier stone material. Roman columns were made from granite, marble, travertine, and even tuff. The entablature perched atop these columns is the very thing indignant Welsh coal miners in *Flying Circus* Ep. 26 argued about, eventually going out on strike. See the entries later in relation to Pilate's audience chamber for more on these architectural bits.

arch plinths—These appear to be plinths for a Roman arch, perhaps the cobbled-together Constantine arch seen later in the credit sequence. The columns above them have been installed by Gilliam, and aren't part of any Roman arch.

Sound Recordist—Garth Marshall—Marshall had also been sound recordist on *Holy Grail*, then continued his sound career on the documentary *The Song Remains the Same* (1976), *Meaning of Life*, *Prospero's Books* (1991), and *Outlanders* (2007).

SINGER: "And his face became spotty. . ."—A euphemism for acne, the Pythons are taking us through the part of Brian's life that is missing almost entirely from Jesus's life in any of the Gospels. We know of Jesus's birth, his encounter with the temple elders when he was about twelve (only found in Luke), and then when he begins his ministry as an adult. The many years between are a mystery. This song offers us at least some of the life experiences that Brian encountered before his short time in the sun commenced.

Shot 11 ***(statue face close-up, then pull back)***— **Makeup and Hairdressing**—**Maggie Weston** is Gilliam's wife, and a makeup artist who worked on *Flying Circus* and appeared in *Holy Grail* (it's her hand turning the pages of *The Book of the Film*). **Elaine Carew** has continued to work in makeup, most recently on Idle, Palin, and Jones's *Not the Messiah: He's a Very Naughty Boy* (2010).

carved face—The face this bubble emerges from is one of many found at a Roman ruin at Leptis Magna in Tripoli, Libya.

etched cloud—This cloud is a recolored but also slightly manipulated version of two separate cloud patterns found in *Doré*'s "The Tomb of Anastasius," from which Gilliam has already sourced both clouds and rocks.[46]

multi-windowed background—This warren of openings is also from a Piranesi print, "View of the Upper Ruins of the Baths of Diocletian."[47] Gilliam has taken part of the large image, reversed it, and then copied and reduced portions for more background. To add height, Gilliam took bits of the structure further in the background—since it's perspectively smaller—and attached those to the top of the new structure. In his animations for *Holy Grail*, Gilliam would also piece together frames of illuminated manuscript pages to create new borders and new worlds.[48]

three ruined columns—The pillars in the left background appear to be from Persepolis, Iran. There is an image of these oft-photographed columns taken from the very same angle in Hammerton's 1952 book *Wonders of the Past*.[49]

Shot 12 ***(archway monument; camera move downward)***— ***archway monument***—This monument is a retouched version of the Arch of Constantine in Rome, and it has been copied and stacked on top of itself to add height. A section of this monument will become separated and race through the animation, nearly to its end. All these names have been "etched" onto the monument. Gilliam has removed one of the Dacian statues from atop the columns and centered it, and added one or two more statues historically separate from the arch. (This arch is a bit of a jumble anyway, as will be discussed later.) **Costume Department**—**Nick Ede** has had a long career as a costume designer, most recently working on the television series *Close to the Enemy* (2016); **Bill Pierce** also worked on *Jabberwocky* and *A Room with a View* (1985); **Sue Cable** had been with the crew on *Holy Grail*, and would also work on *Jabberwocky* and Ridley Scott's *Legend* (1985); **Zouleikha Ktari** is credited with two additional titles, both Spanish films; and **Leila Turki** also worked locations for *The English Patient* (1996).

SINGER: “And things started to grow”—This kind of lyric reflects Gilliam’s animation *modus operandi*, frankly, where one thing can become another thing, and where plants, animals, humans, and even structures can grow and grow. The very first images offered to viewers as *Flying Circus* took to the air in October 1969 were sprouting flowers that blossomed into the title “*Monty Python’s Flying Circus*.”

For Brian, of course, this is connected to his physical and sexual maturation, referenced later as his mother chides him about always thinking of sex and the size of his manhood. The frankness of this display and discussion of emerging sexuality (and the freshness of the later “Are you a virgin?” question) is likely due to the influence of the sex education material made available to many youth in Britain in elementary and secondary schools. A 1970 sex education documentary depicting a sexual act between a husband and wife (and shown in schools), and a radio broadcast for children called *Growing Up* that described masturbation for boys and girls had many parents, clergy, and educators up in arms.[50] And like the pernicious foreign influence of the promised film *The Sex Life of Jesus Christ*, something equally disturbing was coming from the continent. *The Little Red Schoolbook* (1971) was a translation of a 1969 Danish book written for children, prompting youngsters to become more empowered, to see adults as “paper tigers,” and to question every authoritarian institution. This was dangerous enough. The book also covered topics from classroom etiquette and homework to peer pressure, and from sex (with matter-of-fact, real-life descriptions of sexual acts) and drug use to drinking and smoking. There is even a long section on the significance of “marks,” and a description of the British school system, with its inherent biases and discriminations—all incendiary stuff. The book was imported, then translated and rewritten for British schoolchildren, and was immediately blasted by Education Secretary Margaret Thatcher, the Pope, and campaigner Mary Whitehouse, who was able to bring a prosecution against the book under the Obscene Publications Act. In late 1976 the book was still in the news, with a British publisher claiming both human and civil rights were in play if the book was banned.[51] On the whole, however, sex education and the depiction of nudity and sexuality across European and British culture was much more liberal than during the same period in the United States. (Which is why the full-frontal nudity alone qualified *Brian* for an “R” rating—and opprobrium—in the United States.) **Props Department**—**Peter Grant** was part of the art departments for *Time Bandits*, *The Abyss* (1989), and *The Adventures of Young Indiana Jones* (2000); **John Margetts** had worked on *Target of an*

Assassin (1977); **Geoffrey Hartman** has only *Brian* to his credit; **Arthur Wicks** has worked steadily as a prop master, including *Jeeves and Wooster* (1991) and *Gangs of New York* (2002); **Gordon Phillips** later dressed props for *Memphis Belle* (1990); and **Darryl Patterson** has moved from the Pythons to blockbusters, working as assistant prop master on *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015) and *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014).

Make Up and Hairdressing Departments—Susan Frear is now Susan Ignatius, recently doing makeup for *Jack the Giant Slayer* (2013); **Kenteas Brine** worked on *Chariots of Fire* (1981); **Diana Webber** worked on *Film (A Screen Play by Samuel Beckett)* in 1979; **Fatma Jaziri** continues to work in eastern film, most recently as a makeup artist on *Hedi* (2016); and **Faouzia Choura** has only *Brian* to her credit.[52]

Art Department: Asst. Art Directors—John Beard has moved into production design on larger films like *The History Boys* (2006) and *The Lady in the Van* (2015); and **Mohamed Abdennadher** previously worked locations in Tunisia on *Sergeant Klems*, in 1971.

Production Buyers—Peter Dunlop also worked on *The Winds of War* miniseries in 1983, and *Outland* (1987); and **Hassine Soufi** was also Tunisian production manager for *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981).

SINGER: "He was suddenly no/ No girl called Brian"—A comment on the maturation of Brian's male reproductive body parts, signaling his masculinity and emerging sexuality. Just after the stoning scene, Brian's mother will tell him to stop fixating on sex.

The sexually charged subjects of hermaphroditism and sex changes will be discussed later. The world's first well-known sex reassignment patient had been Christine Jorgensen; her story was somewhat badly told in the feature film *The Christine Jorgensen Story*, which appeared at the London Pavilion in September 1970.[53]

a newer clinging Brian—This version of Brian somehow clings backwards to the statue head. The head is moving quickly through these scenes, so a freeze frame is necessary to identify the source of the figure—yet another Doré. This figure is from the apocryphal work Maccabees, and the Doré print is known as "Mattathias and the Apostate."[54] The purloined figure is the Jew who attempted to sacrifice on the Modin altar, and he's just been mortally wounded by Mattathias. He clings to the altar and the upper step.

Construction Managers: John Patterson would work in the art department for *Casualties of War* (1989); and **Lotfi Layourni**'s only art credit is for *Brian*.

Set Dresser: Hassen Soufi—Another North African local who would work on *Raiders of the Lost Ark* two years after *Brian*.

working stonemason—There are many images of ladders up against ruins and monuments in Piranesi's myriad works of Rome, some featuring workmen, some inquisitive tourists with canes and tricorn hats. In the Piranesi etching "Tomb of the Household of Augustus," ten or so gentlemen wander around the catacombs, staring at the ancient wonders, and two ladders are visible leaning against a central arch support.[55] There are also ladders in the crucifixion scenes in Doré's work. Gilliam's stonemason appears to be a combination of figures from Doré, including the plates "Nailing Christ to the Cross," "Erection of the Cross," and "Descent from the Cross" in his *Bible* series.[56] Gilliam has combined upper and lower body portions, added a head covering and a hammer, etc.; Gilliam will put several bodies together for the final Brians seen in the next scenes.

There is also a pause here, just after the lower section of the arch is removed by the traveling lips/column/head/Brian, and before it falls, crushing the worker. This is clearly the influence of animation, especially Warner Bros.' Wile E. Coyote cartoons. In *Zoom and Bored* (1957), Wile E. has run off a cliff, but a cloud obscures the fact; he won't fall until he realizes there is nothing beneath his feet. Tex Avery's often context-smashing cartoons employed these "holds," as do those directed by fellow WB creator Robert Clampett. In *Falling Hare* (1943), the Gremlin holding Bugs's carrot disappears, but the carrot remains, suspended for a beat, then drops to the ground. Both the Goons and the Pythons employ this kind of cartoon physics. Apart from appearing with WB feature films in cinemas[57] for many years, characters like Bugs Bunny, the Roadrunner, and Wile E. Coyote had been seen on British television since at least 1959, when *The Bugs Bunny Show* began airing on ABC Midland and Northern TV.[58]

Shot 13 ***(bridge and stone head; camera track up, pull back)***—What follows is a very busy shot, with several layers of animation that move, and with a camera movement, as well.

rope gang—The men raising the head are borrowed from the Doré engraving "The Erection of the Cross," also from his Bible illustration sequence.[59] Gilliam has removed the cross, all other bystanders and the backgrounds, and put the rope in place.

The hook and rope seen to the right appear to be drawn from Piranesi's "Methods of Raising Travertine Blocks . . . for the Tomb of Caecilia Meralla," found in his collection of Rome studies. There are also many such contraptions

in Piranesi's *Carceri* drawings (where the later ring images will appear), though Piranesi generally depicts rope hanging from enormous block and tackle.[60]

statue head being raised—This may be Balbinus, a three-month Roman emperor (165–238). There were five other emperors in 238.

etched cloud pattern—Variations of the same cloud drawings, Gilliam had borrowed these for his *Animations of Mortality* book, which was published in 1978. The clouds can originally be found in Doré's *Dante* illustrations, "Marco the Lombard," page 98.

Hazel Pethig and Charles Knode—Pethig has been a Python associate from the earliest days, working on *Flying Circus*, *Holy Grail*, *A Fish Called Wanda*, and all the way up through *Not the Messiah*. Julian Doyle credits Pethig for making the vagabond and penniless *Holy Grail* work.[61] "Charlie" Knode has also worked over and over again with the Pythons, appearing in *Holy Grail* as a minstrel and castle guard, and as a leper in *Brian*, and as an award-winning costume designer for *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Braveheart* (1995).

inscribed arched bridge—The background behind the rising bust is a version of the Pons Fabricius, the oldest bridge in Rome. Gilliam has reversed the image so the readable inscription is backwards.[62] Gilliam has included the smaller center arch as well as a larger arch. It looks as if he used the Piranesi etching as his original, coloring and adding brick façade for the new lettering above the archways.

The inscription is technically graffiti (graffito), or "scratchings" in the stone, and is common throughout the Roman Empire. Brian will later create his own version, with paint, as he tries to insult the Roman occupiers in clumsy Latin. Painted signs and posters were common in this period, often as advertisements for political candidates, upcoming games, and businesses and services. Versions of these came to London in 1977 as part of the *Pompeii AD79* exhibit at the Royal Academy of Arts.[63] More on graffiti later, when Brian's "Romans Go Home" artwork is being discussed.

monolithic rock abutment—This looks to be a mountain, and it's not original to either Rome or the Piranesi sketches; Gilliam has likely sourced it from a "natural wonders" book of some sort. It may be a scene from the Petra, Jordan area (perhaps the Rum Wadi), where monumental structures were carved into the native sandstone. During postproduction of *Holy Grail*, Doyle needed a mountainous forest backdrop as an establishing shot for Sir Robin's scene, and, with no budget remaining, improvised with a still from a picture book.[64]

Roman emperor statue—This statue of Augustus (63 BC–AD 14) can be found as part of the Vatican Museums collection. The image has been reversed; the original holds out his right hand. This is one of the handful of figures included by Gilliam actually dating to the time of Christ.

portion of arch monument—This is again a portion of the Constantine arch, the same attic portion that was knocked free in the previous shot. The arch itself dates to the fourth century. The late date of this monument is part of the reason it's a bit hotchpotch, Richard mentions, and why it might be particularly appropriate for Gilliam's type of attentions: "By this point in Roman history, the emperor could no longer find enough skilled sculptors, so he was forced to loot panels from various Flavian and Antonine monuments with which to ornament his arch, his features replacing those of Hadrian, Marcus Aurelius, and others, while some subsidiary figures were expanded."[65] Gilliam does the same thing, frankly. The last falling Brian figure actually looks up after he's finally landed, looking at the camera, and that face appears to be a tiny version of an actual human (photographed) face. Gilliam's *modus operandi* pieces animated sequences together from often disparate images that span time, though most of these, and we've seen, are at least culled from the ancient Mediterranean world of monumental statues and buildings. Gilliam has pulled apart, xerographed, and put back together again the Arch of Constantine[66]—manipulating it, stacking it on itself, essentially—ironically creating a finished product that is remarkably similar to the magpie original.

bridge interior framework—Drawn from Piranesi's "A View of Part of the Intended Bridge at Blackfriars London" (1764), which was based on an architectural drawing Piranesi requested of a friend.[67]

Shot 14 ***(tracking shot left)***— This shot begins immediately tracking left, and quickly, past several structures, all drawn from Piranesi's versions of the remains of the Diocletian baths in Rome. Portions of these etchings appear earlier in the animated sequence. Here, the traveling monument-and-lips-and pillar-and-statue-and-clinging-Brian goes through a window seen at about the middle of the original print. Gilliam's copied the top of the window and added it to the bottom.

colonnaded wall—This is a classic Gilliam conceit. He has taken a xerographed copy of a portion of the Roman aqueduct,[68] copied it over and over, colored it, inverted the top half of the image, and connected all the portions, in diminishing perspective, as if the wall is disappearing into the distance.

etched cloud pattern—Yet another cloud from yet another Doré illustration, this lonely cloud is copied from "Marco the Lombard," a print made up almost entirely of clouds. This particular cloud is at the furthest left, and toward the top of the print.[69]

Shot 15 ***(Brian falling; tracking downward, then pull back, then zoom in)—another new clinging Brian figure***—A jump cut reveals a new figure, fully robed and with his hands stretched above his head. This figure comes from the page 198 print in the Doré Bible illustration source book, and is titled "Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem."[70] Gilliam has here chosen a bystander who is clearly praising Christ as he rides into town; if it is Brian, then he's supportive of this dangerous man/king.

The show so far: The illustrated Doré images chosen by Gilliam to represent the growing Brian have included (1) the baby Jesus himself; (2) an infant sure to drown in the Great Flood; (3) another, older child also sure to drown; (4) an image of the young David, about to be murdered; (5) an apostate Jew killed at the Lord's altar; and (6) and (7) (see below) two of Job's family mourning Job's losses. All of these come from *The Doré Bible Illustrations*.

SINGER: "And have one off the wrist"—Meaning to masturbate. In *Flying Circus*, a reference to masturbation as a hobby was censored, one of a handful of such outright elisions. In Ep. 31, in "The All-England Summarize Proust Competition," competitor Harry Bagot (Chapman) lists his hobbies as "strangling animals, golf, and masturbating."[71] The first two hobbies remained in the final version of the episode. This bit of censorship was also one of the few demanded from the BBC leadership, specifically Duncan Wood, head of Light Entertainment.[72] Masturbation had also been hinted at as early as Ep. 2, there as one of the perversions of mice-men.[73]

Art Director—Roger Christian—Christian would work on *Alien* (1979) as an art director, and then as a second unit director on several *Star Wars* films, and would direct the cult flop *Battlefield Earth* in 2000.

new falling Brian figure—This new Brian clutches his head, and is a bit of a hybrid. There are two figures in one Doré print, "Job Hearing of His Ruin," that Gilliam seems to have combined for this version of Brian. Both figures are at the left of the print, one lying on the ground, hands on her head, and the other just to her left, kneeling, one hand on her head. Neither figure is facing the viewer. Gilliam seems to have used the upper torso and arms and hair from the prostrate character, and the robe and lower limb(s) from the kneeling character. Both

figures appear to be female, originally. Gilliam has combined these into one figure, hands on head, whose right foot is trailing and upraised, as if falling.[74]

The combination is made certain when the figure hits the ground. At that moment, Brian's position goes from both hands on head to one hand on head and one hand thrust to the side, just like the kneeling figure from the original. When the feet come to rest, it's clear that the lower half of the figure is from the prostrate character in the original; the upper half from the kneeling character. Gilliam has simply used two similarly dressed and helpfully posed figures to create two versions of one character, Brian—one in motion, and one at rest.

In the *Flying Circus* episode "Full Frontal Nudity" (Ep. 8), Gilliam employed Victorian nudes in various seated and standing positions, many sequential, to create the illusion that the cutout character was actually changing poses.[75]

Associate Producer—Tim Hampton—Hampton had production managed the very large *Superman* shoot in 1978 (also finished at Shepperton), after having performed postproduction chores on the Pythons' *And Now for Something Completely Different* (1971).

massive foundation wall—This is a version of yet another Giovanni Piranesi print, likely from a later printed version of his *Le Antichità Romane*, first published in 1756. This image is drawn from the "Foundations of the Mausoleum of Hadrian" etching, completed c. 1755.

Looking closely, Gilliam has left the tiny human figures Piranesi included—to evidence the massive scale of the foundations—beneath Hampton's name. These figures are so small and blending they're nearly impossible to see. Gilliam has also added another layer of the foundation, perspectively smaller, on top of the original etching. This is another Piranesi rendering featuring a bit of ruin masonry projecting out of the frame.

gateway arch—At the bottom of this foundation wall Gilliam has inserted a gateway arch; the original etching depicts only massive blocks and a ledge at that point. It's on this ledge that several tiny figures can be glimpsed in the original print, dwarfed by the enormous structure. The arch itself is actually the center portion of a Roman fountain façade as depicted by Piranesi in "View of the Fountainhead of the Aqua Felice."[76] The ring has been added by Gilliam (and will be pulled momentarily), and only one lion from the original four is included. Many of these rings appear in Piranesi's *Carceri* drawings. These same kinds of rings will appear later as part of the set decoration for the Colosseum, complete with ropes and chains draped from and between them. Gilliam and his team

likely used the Piranesi prints as inspiration for the monumental set decorations throughout the film.

statues and obelisks—The congeries of artifacts at both the bottom right and left of this frame are also found in the pages of Piranesi's Roman etchings. Referred to as the "Idea of the Ancient Via Appia and Ardeatina," this 1756 work is stuffed with funerary objects. The lantern-shaped statue at the far left of Gilliam's frame occupies the same space in the original, while the half-statue, obelisks, and mausoleums are on the far right, but reversed, facing into the frame. The legs and torso of the half-statue on the pedestal off to the right appear to be from an Antinous statue, smashed apart in mid-torso, with remains at its feet.[77] The smaller obelisk has been moved into the frame, as well, by Gilliam; the far right side of the original etching, featuring Ardeatina road, has been cropped. As this was the frontispiece of this second volume of Piranesi's work, the title was included on the plinth, which Gilliam has cropped out.

Roman chariot—The Romans tended to use chariots for racing, not warfare. The chariot doesn't appear to actually run over the prostrate Brian, *Ben-Hur*-like. Gladiatorial games might have used these in staged battles (often against slaves, captured prisoners, etc.) **SINGER: "And go out and get pissed"**—Slang, meaning to get drunk. In the Pythons' "Bruce's Song," it was Socrates who was both "permanently pissed" and "a lovely little thinker but a bugger when he's pissed."[78] *Private Eye* would use the phrase "tired and emotional" instead of "drunk" to avoid writs for defamation.

hand—Just prior to being squashed by the falling wall/gate, the prone figure looks up at the camera. Like in many cartoons and silent comedies, the first disaster is averted (a "phew" moment), only to be immediately followed by the cruncher. In the Buster Keaton short *One Week* (1921), a house that Buster and wife have been towing to a new lot is stuck on railroad tracks, as a train bears down. The couple give up and leap to safety, only to have the train roar by on a parallel track. Relieved, they hug, just as a second train, coming from the other direction, smashes the house to splinters.

Shot 16 ***(rising flower, stone balloons)***— **Design and Animations: Terry Gilliam**—Gilliam purposely stepped away from director's responsibilities on this film to concentrate on acting and the overall design of the film. He has worked as a writer and director ever since.

Shot 17 ***(rising flower, gargoyle)— gargoyle face***—This appears to be part of an ancient fountain. The beard may indicate this is a faun or satyr character.

Shot 18 ***(rising flower, giant)***— The background is the same background from the beginning of the credits, a reworked version of the Flavian amphitheater corridor in Pozzuoli.

headless "thinker"—From Doré's *Divine Comedy* work, this headless, contemplative character appears virtually unchanged (save coloring) from the original Doré print. Others in the original scene are limbless, or just suffering violently.[79]

Executive Producers George Harrison & Denis O'Brien—This film wouldn't have been distributed without the assistance of these two men, and likely never recouped its significant production cost. Film distributor EMI (*King Kong* [1976] and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* [1977]) had agreed to back *Brian*, but eventually backed out. Harrison and O'Brien created HandMade Films to raise money for and then distribute *Life of Brian*.[80] O'Brien had been Harrison's attorney since about 1973. Harrison will make a brief appearance in the film as Mr. Papadopoulis, which will also be spelled "Papadopoulos" when he is introduced later. (Likely not a running gag; just a mistake.) ***stretched human***—The stretching figure is borrowed from another Doré illustration, "The Suicides."[81] The character in the original is "naked and scratched," and attempting to flee through a forest. His body position is similar to Gilliam's finished animated character, just not so stretched. This human sign is being stretched by yet another Doré creation, the Giant Antaeus from his *Divine Comedy* series. Gilliam has reversed the image for this scene, removing (almost completely) the tiny human characters (Dante and Virgil) from his large hand. This image is also found in *DDC*, there on page 66.

Shot 19 ***(jumbled block letters)***— **Produced by John Goldstone**—Goldstone's name is posted to a dingy billboard, even though he's not a typical Hollywood producer. Goldstone produced the Python films,[82] post-Python films and TV efforts, cult hits like *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), and most recently the documentary *The Ghost of Peter Sellers* (2017).

In this scene we are back to where we started, with the jumbled block letters that once spelled out the names of the Pythons. Our trajectory is worth mentioning. We have "fallen" with Brian through the earth, until he finally lands and is squashed. Then the flower and stem raises Brian back up, out into the sunshine, and when the flower opens an angel (Brian?) emerges. This area of jumbled ruins now looks like the Via Appia area where the landscape, as depicted by Piranesi, teems with funerary monuments, and consonant with a "resurrected" Brian.

Shot 20 ***(blooming lotus, winged angel)***— **Directed by Terry Jones**—Jones would go on to direct *Meaning of Life* and *Erik the Viking*. Both the winged figure and Jones's name emerge from the lotus flower. Hindu and Buddhist spiritual characters are often depicted seated or standing on a lotus flower; interesting that Gilliam has placed his Christ-like character on this non-Christian symbol, perhaps purposely, given Brian's cry for self-reliance and tolerance (in the face of organized Western religion) in his sermon.

cloudscape—These are the same clouds as seen in the first shot of the credits, from Doré's "Dante, in a Dream, Carried Off by an Eagle." We have returned to the precise point where we started. The *Holy Grail* credits progressed along a linear path, one that culminated in the film's title, and with no repeated images. Here the title has come first, and the rest will be a Dantean (and Messiah-like) journey from above to a Hell below and back. As will be seen, the image of Dante being lifted by the eagle will be hinted at in this final bit of animation.

a winged angel—This "angel" appears to be a recolored version of the John the Baptist figure from Van Eyck's *Ghent Altarpiece*. The wings are *not* part of the original altarpiece figure, and move smoothly enough to have been rotoscoped, not simply drawn by hand. The fact that the winged character can rise and rise, only to be scorched by the sun, Icarus-like, and fall to earth again, sets the tone for the rest of the film.

Notes

1. Found in the Dover edition of *The Doré Illustrations for Dante's Divine Comedy*, page 90. Gilliam had used Dover editions on *Holy Grail*.

2. See the entries for these sections in Larsen, *BAFHG* for a closer look at all these composite settings; pages 265–69, 322–26, and 424–34.

3. *DDC*, 90.

4. In a promotional film the Pythons made for the Birdseye company in 1971, Gilliam also created similar block letters for the title sequence: *The Great Birdseye Peas Relaunch 1971*.

5. Larsen, *MPFC: UC*, 1.5, 42, 235, and 245.

6. This credit sequence is discussed in the "*bizarre things happen*" entry in *MPFC: UC*, 1.5.

7. Avery enjoyed context-smashing in his cartoon work, always ready to draw attention to the medium's formal elements; his cartoony worlds greatly influenced the Goons and the Pythons.

8. *MPFC: UC*, 2.39.

9. Plate 143, page 123 in Scott's *Piranesi* (1975). In that same book, plates 151, 162, 164, 206, 212, 217, and 316 display this same subtle conceit.

10. Another Doré print—"The Massacre of the Innocents"—features two babies in this precise pose, both being skewered by Herod's soldiers. These are much darker images (thicker etching lines); Gilliam chose the lighter version for the "Deluge" print. See *DBI*, 165.

11. See Palin's *Diaries 1969–1979* for mentions of these scenes and writing teams.

12. Perhaps since the veil moment does not appear in any significant way in any of the major filmic influences, and the temple itself is missing entirely from *Life of Brian*, the Pythons stayed away from such events in their version. Also, adding the earthquake to Brian's crucifixion might have upset the film's critics even further.

13. Recent geologic research has pinpointed Friday, 3 April 33 as a likely date for that earthquake and, therefore, as the day of Christ's death. See the *International Geology Review* (May 2012). For a contemporary influence, the July 1976 Tangshan, China, earthquake had killed at least 250,000; the disaster remained in headlines for months.

14. In *King of Kings* it's also darkness and wind/thunder. These were all films that the Pythons screened, in part, as they prepared for the writing process (Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 352).

15. Josephus, *AJ*, 15.11.3 (Whiston, 334); also Smallwood, *JURR*, 283. Josephus notes that these foundations were planned for repair "in the days of Nero," but circumstances intervened. Citations from the works of Josephus will be taken from the 1960 Kregel edition of *The Complete Works of Flavius Josephus*, the William Whiston translation. The page number *and* chapter/paragraph numbers will be provided.

16. For more on this fascinating figure riding the crest of a historical wave, see the foreword to Whiston's *Josephus*, Williamson's edition, and the entry for Josephus in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*. Since Josephus is one of the very few period sources writing about first-century Judea, his work has been cited for centuries.

17. *AJ*, 15.11.3 (Whiston 334).

18. See Scott's *Piranesi*, pages 62–63, plates 72–74; pages 71–73, plates 85–87; and page 129, plate 150, respectively.

19. Page 31 in the 1976 Dover edition.

20. *BAFHG*, 266–67.

21. *MPFC: UC*, 2.3.

22. During the run of *Flying Circus*, the Pythons misspelled quite a few title cards and captions (*MPFC: UC*, 1.159). Elsewhere in the series, they complain about the cost of captioning, so reshooting for a misspelling just wasn't in the budget. It's a little more surprising in a feature film, and with an actor they'd worked with before. (Bayler's name is spelled properly in the *Time Bandits* and *Brazil* credits, for instance.)

23. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 424.

24. Oxford historian and TV presenter Taylor is mentioned in *Flying Circus*, as well (*BAFHG*, 5); also the index under "Taylor, A. J. P." in *MPFC: UC*.

25. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 423–24.

26. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 472 and 475. In two July 1977 issues of *Private Eye* there coincidentally appear a stroppy Roman-era feminist in the "Hom. Sap." cartoons. In both cartoons a man is facing this fierce-looking feminist. In the first she brandishes a Roman standard topped by a Romanized version of the "female" symbol, and below a small banner reading "S. P. Q. R.—Rome Women's Movement" (8 July 1977: 8). In the 22 July issue, the very same setup instead ends with the woman telling the man what "S. P. Q. R." stands for: "Sexist Pigs Quit Rome!" (8).

27. *DBI*, 103.

28. In *MPFC: UC*, see the entries beginning with "Episode. . ." in every chapter for the listing of all extras and walk-ons scheduled for that episode; also the index under "*MPFC* extras and walk-ons (as scheduled)."

29. In the pages of *Private Eye* the Shah of Iran was known as the "Shit of Persia."

30. Caryl, *Strange Rebels*, 49.

31. Caryl, *Strange Rebels*, 49–50.

32. There existed Roman apartment buildings in the time the film is set, some reaching even six and seven stories, legally, and it's certainly possible that laundry could have been strung on lines between buildings (over narrow alleyways). Occupants would have been upper-middle class and below, meaning they might not have qualified as slums, except over time.

33. Quoted in Judith Flanders's article "Slums" at the British Library site.

34. The Pythons have already tackled the tower block and its checkered place in British life (*MPFC: UC*, 1.264–77). The clotheslined Victorian alleyway will also later appear in the *Oliver!*-inspired song and dance number "Every Sperm is Sacred" in *Meaning of Life*.

35. Similar images—dark, narrow, looming alleyways bedraped with clotheslines and drying laundry—can be found in Plates 2–3, 5–13, 15, 27, 30–33, 44, and 48 in Annan's *The Photographs of Old Closes and Streets of Glasgow 1876/77*.

36. See *Gilliam on Gilliam*, 38–40; also, index entries in *MPFC: UC* under "dismember (and re-membering)."

37. *MPFC: UC*, 1.240.

38. *BAFHG*, 89–90.

39. *BAFHG*, 184n59.

40. *MPFC: UC*, 1.305–6.

41. See *DBI*, pages 119, 124, and 131, for example.

42. This image is on the cover and page 58 of *DDC*.

43. Ficacci's *Piranesi: The Complete Etchings* (2000), 712; Scott, *Piranesi*, plate 316, page 262. This is one of the drawings that featured jutting masonry at the bottom edge.

44. *BAFHG*, 16; also dozens of additional references to Doyle in the *BAFHG* index.

45. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 514–15.

46. *DDC*, 31.

47. Ficacci, *Piranesi*, 748.

48. In *BAFHG*, see pages 265–69 and 322–26, as well as all of appendix A (495–529).

49. Page 259, at the far right of the photo.

50. See *MPFC: UC*, 2.84.

51. Hansen and Jensen, *The Little Red Schoolbook*; "Court Rejects Appeal on 'Red Schoolbook,'" *Times*, 8 December 1976: 5.

52. Many of these credits are culled from IMDb and the BFI databases.

53. "The Naked and the Dead," *Times*, 18 September 1970: 6.

54. *DBI*, 149.

55. Scott's *Piranesi*, page 132, plate 157.

56. See plates 213, 214, and 217. In 213 the man is nailing with a hammer, for example.

57. In the days of classical Hollywood, the studios sent “blocks” of film product to cinemas. The blocks could contain at least one feature film, a newsreel, and a cartoon.

58. *MPFC: UC*, 1.20. See also the many entries in *MPFC: UC* discussing the influence of animation on both the Goons and then the Pythons.

59. *DBI*, 214.

60. Ficacci, *Piranesi*, 128–53.

61. *BAFHG*, 13–14.

62. It reads: *L FABRICIVS C F CVR VIAR FACIVNDVM COERAVIT EIDEMQVE / PROBAVEIT*, or “Lucius Fabricius, son of Gaius, Superintendent of Streets, undertook to have this built / and himself approved it.” See Lansford’s *The Latin Inscriptions of* Rome, 454–55.

63. See the commemorative catalog *Pompeii AD79*, Bristol: Imperial Tobacco (November 1977): 34–35, 39, 41, and 65.

64. *BAFHG*, 307.

65. Richard, *WWAR*, 80.

66. Gilliam chose the arch because it was iconically Roman, though the Arch of Titus—with images of the parade through Rome following the fall of Jerusalem, the victors carrying spoils of the temple—would have been more historically pertinent. See *JURR*, 324.

67. Ficacci, *Piranesi*, 492–93.

68. This portion looks like that found near Segovia, Spain.

69. *DDC*, 99; this cloud is in the background and quite dark, though well outlined against the sky, in the original print.

70. *DBI*, 1974.

71. *ATW*, 2.31.106. Just a few years later, an occasional letter writer to *Private Eye* would sign himself “BAGOT.”

72. *MPFC: UC*, 2.70, 73.

73. *MPFC: UC*, 1.47.

74. *DBI*, 136.

75. *MPFC: UC*, 1.129. See entries in the *MPFC: UC* index for “Barker, Ronnie.”

76. Ficacci, *Piranesi*, 715.

77. The inscription on the statue pedestal is dedicated to Antinous; Piranesi also executed a drawing of the complete Antinous statue, posed much like the large Pilate statue seen later.

78. Found on the *Matching Tie and Handkerchief* album (1973), and performed at live shows.

79. This plate, titled “Geri Del Bello,” can be found on page 59 of *DDC*.

80. See Wilmut’s *From Fringe to Flying Circus* and Hewison’s *Monty Python: The Case Against* for more on the film’s production and release history.

81. *DDC*, 37.

82. Excepting *And Now for Something Completely Different*, which was produced by Patricia Casey, Victor Lownes (of *Playboy* fame), and David Gil.

SCENE THREE

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT **EXT. MOUNT—DAY—**THIS SERMON IS ONLY FOUND IN THE BOOK OF MATTHEW, WHILE A “SERMON ON THE PLAIN” IN LUKE INCLUDES FOUR OF THE BEATITUDES.

These kinds of often large gatherings did happen outside the city. In about the year 36, a Samaritan religious leader called for all faithful Samaritans to come out from the city to Mt. Gerizim, where he would “lead them to the summit and display to them the sacred vessels from the Tabernacle that were believed to have been buried there by Moses when the Israelites first settled in Canaan.”[1] Pontius Pilate, fearing an insurrection (especially after the fairly recent crucifixion of Jesus), sent troops out to prevent the ascent, which led to bloodshed, including the execution, by order of Pilate, of the sect’s leaders. With the exception of the fatal violence, the Pythons have set up a similar gathering in this opening scene. The Samaritans would officially complain to the Legate of Syria, and Pilate was recalled to Rome to answer before Tiberius.[2]

BIG CLOSE-UP OF JESUS—This is a shot composed with a telephoto lens, zoomed in to “crush” the perspective. The actor is Kenneth Colley, who would ironically appear as an Imperial commander in *The Empire Strikes Back* the following year.

pulling back and back (this is a helicopter shot)—No, this is not a helicopter shot; helicopters are expensive, and would likely have been a challenge to arrange in Tunisia. This is instead structured like the opening shot(s) of *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973), where a telephoto lens is also used. The shots of people heading for the sermon are modeled on a similar scene in *Ben-Hur*, where townspeople gather around Jesus. Most of the “Jesus” films screened as the troupe prepared for *Brian* feature a version of this scene.

. . . the CAMERA has revealed the full extent of the crowd—The Mount scene is staged very much like Doré's "The Sermon on the Mount" illustration from his Bible collection, images from which Gilliam used throughout the animated title sequence.[3]

CAPTION: JUDEA A.D. 33—This is Judea under Roman occupation. The Roman version of this date would have been A.U.C. 786, meaning 786 years after the founding ("*ab urbe condita*") of the city of Rome. The Pythons had started their previous film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, with another date, AD 932, though that date had been less fixed.[4]

This is also one of the challenging and argued about "facts" related to Jesus—when he was born, how long his ministry was, and when he was crucified. There are many scholars who opt for around 30, meaning Jesus would have been born a few years earlier than generally accepted.[5] Again, the Pythons are employing a more popular conception of events, so 33 works without argument.

CAPTION: SATURDAY AFTERNOON—There is no indication as to why the Pythons chose to set this scene on Saturday, the Jews' Sabbath day. The chances of observant Jews making the long trek outside the city walls, often with pack animals and servants, seem slight: the Sabbath wouldn't have ended until the evening. Various rabbinical traditions also forbid any traveling, and virtually any activity (including the "work" of animals) that might detract from the remembrance of God. Some with camels even look as if they are carrying their wares to be sold. Observant Jews could assemble at synagogues on the Sabbath, of course, for scheduled instruction, but traveling to a mount outside the city is well beyond this allowance.[6] It's possible, though, that this upstart man preaching on the Sabbath is an early indication of his dangerous nature. Jesus will heal on the Sabbath, much to the consternation of the Pharisees, who went away to counsel "how they might destroy him."[7] For the Pythons, this pleasant Sabbath day excursion descends into a scrum, which shouldn't be a surprise.

CAPTION: ABOUT TEA-TIME—This caption didn't appear in the "original" script as read through in 1977. Captions and titles and even animated bits would have only been firmly decided well after principal photography was complete. In the postproduction phase of *Holy Grail*, Palin juxtaposed the sober opening credit sequence with silly, faux-Swedish subtitles as a last-minute and very cheap way to finish the film.[8]

JESUS (Ken Colley): "How blest are the sorrowful, for they shall find consolation"—Firstly, these versions are more like those found in Matthew than in Luke (second person as opposed to third person). Second, the text seems to be

remotely drawn from at least two versions of the extant Bible, the New English Translation Bible (1971), and the New Life Version (1969). The latter is one of the very few versions that use the term “sorrowful” instead of “mourn,” but the phrase “How blest” is used in *none* of the myriad English translations across the years, and “blest” appears in just one instance in The Living Bible (1971). The King James Version is more recognizable: “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.”[9]

Perhaps not accidentally, Margaret Thatcher’s reign as the Queen’s First Minister, which began on 4 May 1979, started in a similar fashion as this introduction of Jesus by the Pythons. Standing on the steps of No. 10 for the first time as prime minister, she gave her own sermon: I’ll strive unceasingly to try to fulfil the trust and confidence that the British people have placed in me and the things in which I believe. And I would just like to remember some words of St. Francis of Assisi which I think are really just particularly apt at the moment. “Where there is discord, may we bring harmony. Where there is error, may we bring truth. Where there is doubt, may we bring faith. And where there is despair, may we bring hope.”[10]

JESUS: “How blest are those of gentle spirit; they shall have the earth as their possession . . .”—This is a version of Matthew 5:5, which most often reads “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.” “Gentle spirit” is a translation that also appears in very few instances in most translations, and none in relation to the Beatitudes. This is in fact what the people at the back mishear —hearing “Greek” for “meek”—even though the beatitude as uttered is clearly “gentle spirit.” This is some kind of disconnect between what Colley the actor utters (and the soundtrack provides) and what those at the far back actually hear and respond to. It’s as if Colley is using one translation and the Pythons another —and there’s no hint of any discord between the two. Jesus is saying one thing and his people, at least toward the back, are hearing something else. Just a few scenes later it will be the Centurion who mishears Pilate, responding with answers that don’t fit the questions or statements as we’ve heard them.

JESUS: “How blest are those who hunger and thirst to see right prevail. They shall be satisfied . . .”—The New English Translation comes closest here: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.” Other English translations use “justice” for “righteousness,” and “filled” for “satisfied.”

. . . revealing the enormous size of the crowd . . .—In terms of a film shoot this is a large crowd, and there are relatively few of these shots. According to

Palin these extras were making about three dinars per day, plus meals.[11] Most other depictions of the Sermon on the Mount—in films like *The Greatest Story Ever Told* and *King of Kings*—either zoom in as opposed to zooming out, focusing on Jesus, or use static, discrete shots. In *Ben-Hur*, the camera is behind Jesus, the crowd at his feet, and Ben-Hur himself is alone in the distance, slowly moving closer. *King of Kings* employs a low angle close-up of Jesus, over-the-shoulder shots, and very little lens movement. *Jesus Christ Superstar* employs the "moving" lens more than any other; it also offers modern dress, obvious sets and props, and language of the everyday to ground the telling in the 1970s. The most recent version, however, Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth*, employs nearly the same zoom-out that the Pythons use, revealing the "size of the crowd" as Jesus speaks. The zoom lens had found new life in more "artistic" films of the 1970s, when the crushed perspective of the zoomed-in shot and the artificial movement created by the lens (used to great effect in films like *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *THX-1138*, and *Jaws*, for example) helped define the cinematic period.

JESUS: *(very faintly)* "How blest are those whose hearts are pure. They shall see God"—This last is very hard to actually hear on the soundtrack, and even as those at the back start to mutter and scuffle, Jesus continues speaking (he can just be heard, off-camera). In Matthew 5:8 this is recorded as "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

large contingent of Roman Soldiers on extra weekend duty—(PSC) There are actually only seven or eight Roman soldier types visible in the forepart of the scene, and another three or four at the back, where all the action happens. In the finished film, the Roman soldiers often watch ambivalently as their charges argue and fight among themselves, including later at the stoning, where the wrong man is stoned. In the later printed version of the script, the description reads: "*Standing nearby, isolated but alert, is a large contingent of Roman soldiers drawn up in serried ranks, armed, impassive, foreign soldiers on extra-weekend duty. . . .*"[12] The "serried ranks" language appears in the final battle descriptions for *Holy Grail*, as well.[13]

In 1947, ironically, it was British troops acting this part in Haifa as unapproved ships crammed with Jewish refugees attempted landings in the Holy Land. Foreign Secretary Bevin's ill-advised attempt to "teach the Jews a lesson" led to three former death camp survivors being killed. Union Jacks painted over with swastikas greeted newsreel cameras in this propaganda disaster.[14]

These images of bolstered police and military presences at mass events would have been common by the late 1970s, in postcolonial hotspots and in London. There had been dozens of police officers assigned to the long-running Grunwick strike[15]—holding back picketers from assaulting busloads of "scabs," keeping the entrance to the factory clear, and protecting the many female Asian strikers in the otherwise burly, male crowd. As Mark Garnett mentions in *From Anger to Apathy*, all sorts of public gatherings, permitted and wildcat, drew a police presence in the mid-to-late-1970s as the Wilson and Callaghan administrations attempted to keep anti-government (or even just anti-malaise) sentiment from exploding into street violence.[16]

. . . the large and potentially anti-Roman crowd . . .—(PSC) There is nothing "potentially anti-Roman" about this crowd as presented. Like most filmic versions of the Sermon on the Mount, crowds of people gather quietly on a low hillside (though in Stevens's *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, Christ stands, arms perpetually raised, atop monolithic sandstones of the Canyonlands in southern Utah—quite striking). In George Stevens's version Herod Antipas (José Ferrer) sends Roman soldiers to arrest Jesus, and the beginnings of the Sermon are heard over the image of soldiers leaving Herod's fortress; this may account for the Pythons' inclusion of vigilant soldiers. There are no visible Romans in this scene, though the camera is pulled back to such a respectful distance—likely to capture the majesty of the setting, too—it's difficult to be certain. In the Sermon scene in *Ben-Hur*, there are no soldiers visible, and the crowd is quiet, and seated; in *King of Kings*, no soldiers, but a more restive crowd (they ask for signs); and in *Jesus of Nazareth*, a very respectful crowd (many crowd shots of intent faces), and no visible Romans. In the unusual (and low-budget) *The Passover Plot*, the Beatitudes are delivered in a jumbled rush to a gathering in town.

In the end, only the non-Romans cause trouble with other non-Romans (Jews grappling with Jews), and Reg and the PFJ wander away complaining that it's Jesus who doesn't understand contemporary politics.

. . . MANDY, older now by thirty-three years, but still a ratbag—(PSC) Mandy doesn't seem to have changed much at all, excepting the color of her costume.

MANDY: "Speak up!"—In the final Python film *Meaning of Life*, as the Catholic father tells his enormous family of their destitution, and the fact that he has to sell them all for scientific experimentation, one child in the back yells

“Speak up!” Father (Palin) helpfully repeats: “I can’t keep you all here any longer!”

MANDY: “Well I can’t hear a thing. Let’s go to the stoning”—In a printed draft of the script, it’s Brian who wants to go to the stoning, and Judith who wants to stay and listen; in that earlier version Brian’s mother Mandy isn’t in this scene, appearing just after, as part of the stoning crowd.

MRS. BIG NOSE (Gwen Taylor): “Don’t pick your nose”—In the printed script, this character is known both as “Wife” and “Mrs. Big Nose.” Taylor was in the running for the Judith role, which eventually went to Sue Jones-Davies.

Flying Circus was stocked with hectoring wives and angry husband types. In Ep. 5, Mr. A (Palin) tries to explain the family cat’s problem to a visiting vet (Chapman) only to have his wife, Mrs. B (Jones), “shush” him at every turn; in Ep. 9, though, Mrs. Equator (Jones) is both rude and incontinent, while her husband (Cleese) is abusive and groping; in Ep. 13, the husband (Cleese) is constantly apologizing for (and thereby insulting) his dim, rambling wife (Idle). Prior to his Monty Python experience, Cleese was part of a similar husband and wife sketch act, in *I’m Sorry I’ll Read That Again*, with Jo Kendall.[17]

There had also been a very visible couple the Pythons could draw from, who had been front-page news for years in the *Times*, on the cover of *Private Eye*, and in the gossip-page quagmire of the *Express* and *Mail*: Marcia Williams and Harold Wilson.[18] These two weren’t married, but their relationship read (in *Private Eye* and in various biographies and autobiographies from those around No. 10) as corrosive, painful, and retributive as any convenient but doomed marriage. Wilson’s senior policy adviser, Bernard Donoughue (disliked by the *Private Eye* staff and hated by Williams), writes of Wilson’s and Williams’s relationship as he saw it, later, from 1974, at the threshold of Wilson’s last premiership. It’s clear that even as late as 2005, when now-Lord Donoughue’s diaries were being edited for publication, he felt the need to tread lightly when referring to the writ-happy[19] Lady Falkender, but the lingering enmity seeps through: [Wilson] listened to and accepted her views more readily than those from any other source. He often indulged her wildest whims almost like a daughter (for example treating honours like chocolates given to her to keep her quiet and happy) and equally feared her like a fierce mother (as when he is seen hiding from her menacing phone calls). She, as I observed in the diary early in 1974, had the magical power both to switch on and switch off his lights. She was also very adept at mobilising his demons, stimulating his nightmares and evoking his alleged enemies. Theirs was a relationship of great intensity and

complexity which no one coming late to the scene as I did could presume to fully analyse and understand. But its existence mattered greatly to everyone who worked in Number Ten[20] trying to serve Harold Wilson as Prime Minister.[21] Williams knew Wilson's habits—she would have known if he was picking his nose—and wasn't afraid to use the threat of revealing whatever secrets she thought she had in managing her boss. Wilson's press secretary Joe Haines announced in his *The Politics of Power* that Wilson and his administration could not be fully understood without understanding his relationship with and dependence upon Marcia Williams—their stories were and would ever be interwoven. In the Sermon scene in *Brian*, it's Mrs. Big Nose's reaction to a "do you mind" that forces her husband to get involved, leading to a wild punch and then a dusty scrum. In the end, neither Mr. nor Mrs. Big Nose is being dragged from the scuffle; others around them have been drawn in, instead.

MR. CHEEKY (Idle)—(PSC) This is a character never named in the film, only in the printed script. "Cheeky" means fresh or even rude, and Mr. Cheeky's willingness to say what's on his mind fits those descriptors.

BIG NOSE: "Don't you swear at my wife"—"Bloody," as defined in the *OED*, "constituted the strongest expletive available. This is reflected in the regularity with which dashes, asterisks, etc., were formerly used to represent the word in print, and in the large number of euphemistic forms to which it has given rise [bee, bleeding, blerry, plurry, etc.]." The term is only used once in *Holy Grail*, when Arthur, clearly frustrated past the breaking point by the obstreperous Dennis, calls him a "Bloody peasant."[22] There it's also an anachronism, since the word as an intensifier doesn't appear until the sixteenth century. Here, it's out of place simply because it's an English invective heard in first-century Jerusalem. Controversial *Till Death Us Do Part* character Alf Garnett (Warren Mitchell) would use the term often as he decries, for example, the "bloody coons" ruining his beloved Britain.[23] Mary Whitehouse particularly disliked the show due to its use of the words "Jesus" and "bloody."[24]

In 1970, critic Maurice Wiggin wrote an article decrying television's language, "Poverty by the Mouthful."[25] Wiggin admits that he dislikes Mary Whitehouse and her attempts at censorship and that he himself can swear up a storm when it's called for, but "not in front of the children," he chides, "there's a time and place." Film and TV language and depictions of things sacred or private were decried often in the newspapers, and Wiggin is essentially echoing Mr. Big Nose in a not-in-front-of-my-wife way: "Everyone's free to speak as he pleases, in his privacy or in congenial company. And of course colourful obscenity can be

amusing, for a short time. But we simply must preserve an area of public communication wherein we all speak the same language—preferably at its best."[26] Part of the reason the Pythons included coarse language and nudity in *Life of Brian* was clearly to tweak those who would let themselves be tweaked.

MR. CHEEKY: "Well he has got a big nose"—Clearly, this "isn't meant to be taken literally," at least as these characters appear here—both Idle and Chapman have more prominent noses than Palin. This is likely an easy, obvious moment of racial identification, with Mr. Big Nose, as a (Samaritan) Jew, described by a stereotypically larger nose (even though the actor, Palin, has no such nose, and is not fitted with a prosthesis for the scene). Such depictions would have been recognizable to English viewers, at least, given the broadside caricatures and jargon of infamous London-born Jewish fence Ikey Solomon, and the recent performances of the character Fagin in *Oliver Twist* adaptations.[27]

. . . another rather well-heeled Jew in a Toga turns around—This is New Zealand-born actor Terence Bayler. According to Palin, Bayler was one of the company that the Pythons quickly and universally agreed upon.[28] In the film as shot, he and his wife (Cleveland) are standing between Mr. Big Nose and Mr. Cheeky.

The class struggles as criticized by Dennis in *Holy Grail* are all but invisible in *Life of Brian.* The historical social division among Jews isn't a leg in this stool (the rich and the poor, the priestly class and the commoners, etc.); instead, the Romans occupy the evil, oppressive role for the film, with Jewish internecine problems only hinted at. Gregory may be "well-heeled," but he and his wife are never treated as posh types, though they act the part. Later, Gregory will attempt to have Brian heal his wife of a headache, and he is concerned that he be crucified in "a purely Jewish section" of Calvary.[29] They act like upper crust, but they aren't judged as such—no narrative retribution that's any more venal than anyone else, since myriad non-Roman types are hanging on crosses as the film ends. The more Marx-lite sentiments are reserved for Reg and the PFJ as they lay out their case for revolution, but the arguments describe the Romans as invaders and occupiers, not powerful *haute bourgeoisie*.

A similar argument was made by some Marxist scholars, interestingly, about Jesus. Not a Christian himself, Karl Kautsky tried to situate Jesus within the history of Jewish anti-Roman activities—akin to the role and work of the Zealots (who will be discussed later)—representing "Jesus as a rebel engaged in a first-century Marxian class-struggle."[30] He saw Jesus as a man with a socialist mission, and not the Son about his "Father's business."[31] In the 1960s–1970s

some offered Jesus as "a kind of nationalist freedom-fighter," the Christ-like Korda image of Che Guevara, for example, drawing the two revolutionaries together, or even the opposite, positing "Judas [as] the man who wanted a liberation-struggle, and he betrayed Jesus because Jesus wouldn't join him."[32] The zeitgeist of the liberating, revolutionary 1960s clearly influenced many in their views of Jesus, moving him from lamb to lion; it's evident the Pythons are also affected by the world around them as they approach their first-century Jerusalem story and characters. Given this, the idea of a militant group determined to shrug off the shackles of the colonizer isn't narratively radical at all—it was happening in first-century Jerusalem, in the remnants of the twentieth-century British Empire, and across the Third World.

(draft) He constantly has trouble with his toga and has to keep pushing it back in place—Not part of the finished film, this is a sight gag borrowed from *Holy Grail*, though it even had life before that. In *Holy Grail*, Sir Bedevere (Jones) expends a great deal of energy holding open his faulty visor. This is in turn a mannerism borrowed from the Pellinore character found in T. H. White's *Once and Future King* (1958).[33] The irritations of everyday life, distractions, digressions, and something as simple as a bit of misbehaving clothing is comedic grist for the Pythons' mill. The tantalizing repetition of the sagging taffy or the squeaky door hinge in Jacques Tati's *M. Hulot's Holiday* (1953) can also be mentioned. But Gregory's specific tic—the slouching toga—is reminiscent of Mickey's too-long sleeve in *Mickey's Band Concert* (1935), as well as dozens of similar tiny gags from the likes of Chaplin, Keaton, the Marx Brothers, and Tati. The Pythons' (and The Goons') collective debt to physical comedy, cartoons, and the "cartoony" is explored elsewhere.[34] Palin writes about the *Three Wise Men* scene potentiality, in his *Diaries*, describing why something like a slipping sleeve could be funny: "In the classic Python mould of the humour of frustration; irritation at constantly being diverted by trivia."[35] Other diversions: Pilate's guards allow Brian to escape thanks to their narrative sidetracking, Harry the Haggler's gourd deal with Brian falls apart for lack of focus, and the wrong man gets stoned to death thanks to the word "Jehovah."

His voice is very cultured—Gregory speaks with a posh English accent, of course, not a posh Jewish or Greek or even Samaritan accent. G. B. Shaw's quip about one Englishman despising another Englishman the moment he opens his mouth is a bit far, but throughout *Flying Circus* and *Holy Grail* the Pythons have used language and especially accent to identify class and social position. In Ep. 16, one character points out the "poshness" of another character, via

pronunciation of a single word: Mr. Chigger (Jones): Look, I came here to learn to fly an aeroplane.

> Mr. Anemone (Chapman): A what?
>
> Mr. Chigger: I came here to learn to fly an aeroplane.
>
> Mr. Anemone: (*sarcastically; affected*) Oh, "an aer-o-plane." Oh, I say, we are grand, aren't we? (*imitating a posh accent*) "Oh, oh, no more buttered scones for me, mater. I'm off to play the grand piano." "Pardon me while I fly my aer-o-plane." Now get on the table![36]

Mr. Anemone says "grahnd" and "piahno," and then slips back out of the accent so that the "a" in "table" sounds more like the "i" in "Bible," decidedly less posh. By the end of *Brian*, when Mrs. Gregory is on the cross, her posh accent turns "rather" into the very affected "raw-thur," and we understand why the Gregorys don't want to be crucified among the great unwashed.

A small boy holds a large parasol . . .—The boy is clearly meant to represent an African slave, perhaps of Nubian descent. Jeremias notes that the presence of both Jewish and Gentile slaves in Jerusalem was a given for centuries, and he spends a good deal of time describing the types of and laws regarding slavery among the children of Israel.[37] As it turns out, both types of slaves were defined and even protected by law.

If there is anything here worth noting beyond the presence of the slave owned by a wealthy Jew, it is the fact that there is *only* one.[38] A medieval king like Arthur would have been followed by an impressive retinue, and not just Patsy.[39] Koloski-Ostrow writes that the wealthy in the empire defined and displayed that wealth often by sheer numbers: "We do have a passage by Ammianus Marcellinus . . . in which he describes retinues of up to fifty servants accompanying imperial aristocrats to the baths at Rome."[40] The patrician Jew Gregory is being quite conservative, then, as he leans on just one slave to listen to the sermon. The budget for the film would have precluded such displays of (even cinematic) wealth, with the masses being used only occasionally as background extras. This boy will also be at Calvary, shading the crucified Gregory.

MAN FURTHER FORWARD (Charles McKeown): "I think it was 'Blessed are the Cheesemakers'"—Another misunderstanding, a miscommunication, the kind that can send narratives sideways in the Python world. In the post-Python film *Brazil*, written by Gilliam and Tom Stoppard, a single typo—"Buttle" for "Tuttle"—dooms an innocent man to torture and death, and propels Sam (Jonathan Pryce) on a mission to save the woman of his dreams. In Ep. 29 of *Flying Circus*, a Victorian explorer mentions that it's been

“a great expedition,” prompting an immediate cut to jaunty music and “*an engraving of Crystal Palace*,” where the 1851 Great *Exhibition* took place. The explorer has to say “Great expedition” again, more precisely, to refocus the story.[41]

This rehearsal is a slight rewording, as well, as this Christ figure here would have said “*How blest* are the peacemakers . . . ,” and not “Blessed are the peacemakers,” to be bibliographically precise.

WIFE OF GREGORY: “What’s so special about the cheesemakers?”—Nothing, probably. This is only the Wife of Gregory’s ill-stated *Sitz im Leben*—she’s wondering how this blessing came to be attached to cheesemakers, or what it’s “setting in life” can mean.[42] Jeremias describes the food trades active in first-century Jerusalem, and the making of cheese, by inference, can be assumed, if not in the city then nearby. In a paragraph describing the production of oil, bread, and processed meats in Jerusalem, he mentions that “an Athenian is said to have had cheese and eggs bought from a Jerusalem market,” meaning cheese was at least available for purchase.[43] In *Life in Biblical Israel*, King and Stager identify milk products (primarily from goats) as part of the Israelites’ staple diet, including milk, curdled milk, yoghurt, curds, and cheese.[44] And though there were dozens of occupations described as impure or unholy in Jewish everyday life, cheesemaking wasn’t one of those professions.[45] Josephus mentions the Tyropoeon Valley, also known as Valley of the Cheesemongers (or Cheesemakers), which was likely named for the tradesmen who occupied it at some point. This valley had actually been an unofficial dump and landfill site for the city for decades.

The Pythons exhibited a fun fixation on cheese in *Flying Circus* Ep. 33, “The Cheese Shop” sketch, where Mr. Mousebender (Cleese) asked Mr. Wensleydale (Palin), the proprietor, about the availability of forty-three types of “cheesy comestibles,” none of which were actually available for sale.[46]

GREGORY (Terence Bayler): “It’s not meant to be taken literally. Obviously it refers to any manufacturers of dairy products”—In the July 1977 issue of *Private Eye*, in the article “Jesus Was ‘Ordinary Bloke,’” the reverends Stupitt and Flannel[47] sound very much like Gregory: “In a new book entitled *A God for the Seventies*, a group of radical theologians . . . have put forward what they call ‘a radical re-orientation of the Christ-myth to provide an ongoing belief-structure for Christians and non-Christians alike.’” Then the nail is driven: “The Rev. Stupitt and his colleagues argue that Christ, despite his claims to be God, did not mean to be taken literally.”[48] Christ did teach in

parables, often, where deeper meanings could be hidden from or lost on scribes and Pharisees, or those who had hardened hearts and didn't have "ears to hear."[49] In *Jesus of Nazareth*, when Jesus is dragged before Caiaphas, one of the men admits this pointedly: "Rabbi, we fail to understand the meanings of many of your sayings." Mrs. Gregory is also missing the point. The Beatitudes are sectional, a condition followed by a result. Mrs. Gregory is just remembering the condition, or at least a version of the condition, and one that skews the condition-result relationship badly. Blessing one group of tradesmen seems unfair, of course, since not everyone could or should aspire to cheesemaking; blessing a peacemaker likely makes the world a better place, and assures membership in God's household. In a moment, the blessed will be a single man (or even woman) of Greek extraction, at least as heard.

The satire in the *Private Eye* article seems to be pointed at recent fashionable writings from men like Bishop John Robinson in *Honest to God* (1963), who posited no God "up there," no mythological or supernatural being, since man has "come of age" and merits a different, less preternatural reality. Many would respond in print over the following years, and the arguments about God or no God would carry on through the bleak 1970s. Brian will later tell his "followers" that they don't need an organized belief system, that they don't need to follow anyone but themselves. The followers and Judith will intensely agree with him, and then promptly try and follow him.[50]

Later in the life of the Roman Empire the increasing employment of "replacement theology" and the use of allegory to interpret scripture became commonplace, according to Richard, as the Christian church became more Romanized: Though the replacement theology of the late empire was largely the product of a new anti-Semitism that accompanied the increasing Romanization of a once Judaic religion, it was also partly the result of the destruction of the nation of Israel and the dispersion of the Jews by Vespasian and Hadrian. Fourth-and fifth-century Christians could not imagine that Israel would ever be restored as a nation; therefore, they naturally inclined to the view that the Bible's end-time prophecies must refer to "spiritual Israel," the Christian Church, God's new (and exclusive) chosen people. Since such an interpretation of Scripture was extraordinarily non-literal, it also serves as an illustration of another development of the late empire—the increasing tendency to interpret Scripture allegorically. In the hands of theologians like Augustine, the Millennium of Christ's rule became a figurative reference to the Church Age, another

interpretation that involved an extraordinary departure from the literal biblical text.[51]

Once again, Gregory's reminder to not take (the misheard versions of) Christ's parables too "literally," thus a "cheesemaker" can and should be a producer of any dairy product. Interestingly though, when it's heard that a "Greek" is set to inherit the earth, Gregory becomes much more literal, wanting to know the lucky man's name, likely to secure an introduction.

MR. CHEEKY—(PSC) Many of these names aren't spoken during the film, so names like "Mandy," "Mr. Cheeky," and "Gregory" have been missed by viewers for years. Idle plays this type of fresh character often. In *Flying Circus* he is the quintessential cheeky character in the form of Norman in the "Wink, wink, nudge, nudge" sketch from Ep. 3, as well as the irritating interloper Arthur Name in Ep. 9.[52] In Ep. 35 he appears as Mr. Badger, a Scottish hijacker who will tell the flight crew where he hid a bomb for, first, a thousand pounds, then just a pound, and finally *offering* the crew a pound to retrieve it. He will also later promise to not interrupt sketches for a pound.[53]

MR. BIG NOSE: ". . . I'll take you to the fucking cleaners"—This is the kind of language removed from *Holy Grail* so that an AA rating could be achieved. As an intensifier, the word has only been part of the English lexicon since the later nineteenth century.[54] Earlier drafts and readings of the film featured many more uses and variations of the term. Also, the phrase "take you to the cleaners" is much younger than ancient Judea, and, as an American colloquialism, generally means to separate someone from his money, to fleece him, not assault him physically.[55]

MR. CHEEKY: ". . . not so bad yourself, Conkface . . ."—Kind of a double meaning here, since "conk" can mean the nose, but also "nosey," which fits the situation quite well. This may also be a racial joke, relying on the age-old stereotype of a Jew having a large nose. The Goons had poked fun at mate Max Geldray's larger (yes, Jewish) nose across the seasons of *The Goon Show*, sometimes even hinting at the *double entendre* of a large nose and a large male member, as Mandy will reference later, talking to Brian about sex. It's worth pointing out the perhaps obvious—Idle's nose isn't appreciably smaller than either Chapman or Palin's. In Palin's estimation, part of the reason Chapman was cast as Brian was that he was "Roman-looking, which helps," meaning he possessed an aquiline profile.[56]

ANOTHER PERSON FURTHER FORWARD (Gilliam): "I think it was 'Blessed are the Greek'"—Miscommunication here again, and this time taking

a blessing meant for all mankind (who humble themselves) and reserving it instead for a Greek man whose name isn't known. Again, the condition has been misheard, and it's as if there is no result even considered. Gregory will want to know the man's name, but he's not asking why the Greek is fit to be "blest" in the first place. He's jumping from the condition, over the result, and to what likely he hopes could be a profitable introduction to this blessed man. Famous Greeks in the news in the 1970s included Stavros Niarchos, Archbishop Makarios, and Aristotle Onassis and family. Magnate Onassis is referenced in *Flying Circus* and many times in the pages of *Private Eye* (there as O'Nassis), known for his mega-yacht, his buying of islands, and for marrying Jackie Kennedy in 1968. Niarchos was an oft-married and often-in-the-news shipping multibillionaire.[57] The Church of Cyprus archbishop (and President of the Republic of Cyprus) Makarios is mentioned in *Private Eye*, and even in the Python sketch "String," found on *The Contractual Obligation Album*.[58] The Greek with the highest visibility in Britain's tabloids during this period, however, would have Gregory asking about "her name." Arianna Stassinopoulus is now Arianna Huffington of liberal *Huffington Post* fame, but in the 1970s she was everywhere: on the radio, on television, in the opinion columns of the *Times*, addressing right-wing think tanks, literary lunches and Conservative Women's conferences. The name, the hair, the voice, the strident opinions—everything was instantly recognisable. . . . For a dozen heady years [c. 1966–1978], everything she wished for was in Britain. She had fame; she was controversial; she was admired by distinguished old men and escorted by ambitious young ones. There were books, lectures and after-dinner speeches; there were appearances on *Any Questions* and *Face the Music*. There was a [successful] libel action against *Private Eye*. There was even her own chat show.[59]

Of the three, a man like the wealthy Gregory would have identified with the (then) right-leaning Stassinopoulus and the multi-millionaires Onassis and Niarchos; less so the churchman Makarios who had been deposed by junta in 1974. All four of these Greeks could be regularly found in the news of the day in Britain.

MRS. BIG NOSE: "Oh it's the Meek . . . Blessed are the meek!"—Actually, unless this Christ is offering several versions of his own Beatitudes, or repeating himself, he's already well past "Blessed are the meek." Moments earlier, as the camera zooms out from the close-up, he said, "How blest are those of gentle spirit. They shall have the earth as their possession," a version chosen

for a reason, according to Palin. The verbiage Ken Colley employs is "a modern translation of the Beatitudes . . . in preference to the St James version," Palin writes in his *Diaries*, "because it felt less like a set up for a joke, and more of an attempt to portray Jesus as honestly as possible."[60] This fidelity was seen earlier, in the (actual) manger scene, as well.

MR. CHEEKY: "Who hit yours then? Goliath's big brother?"—Some rabbinical literature does posit Goliath as a sibling, one of four sons to Orpah, the sister of Ruth. Additional giants are also mentioned in Samuel 21. Mr. Cheeky is mentioning Goliath's *big* brother purposely, likely meaning Mr. Big Nose's nose is so big it has to have been smashed by a giant among giants. In the end, this simply sounds like a schoolyard insult, like "Big Nose" and "Conkface," the kind of talk heard on playgrounds across the years.

WIFE OF GREGORY (Carol Cleveland): "Oh do pipe down . . ."—Another more recent term, this one from the nineteenth century. Novelist Evelyn Waugh would use the phrase as an indicator of the speaker's class. In *Brideshead Revisited*, for example, prisoners—"various tramps and pickpockets"—employed the shouted phrase to help them get some kip.[61] Perhaps this is a sort of "Move yer bloomin' arse" moment, where Mrs. Gregory reveals a more ill-refined upbringing? She does manage to say this coarser phrase in a posh accent, though.

. . . a group of three intense young men whose dress sets them apart from the rest—In the finished film Judith is a part of this group (she was standing with Brian in earlier versions.) This little cabal does seem to be intense, and their dress, though perhaps darker in color, seems quite similar to the others, excepting Brian. Brian's tunic is a bit more threadbare, looser, and woven more coarsely than the robes of the PFJ. These *jeunesse dorée* sport tightly woven and fashionably black robes, and they are clean-shaven, something that really sets them apart from the adult males around them.

These better-dressed individuals seem to be the disaffected, upper-middle-class youth who will talk about fighting the imperialists, the capitalists, the "system." None of them seem to be employed, nor are they at school, serving in religious capacities, *etc.* It may be that these young men are simply more Hellenized than others in their city. But these are also characters seen on the streets of larger British cities at the time when the film was being written. In the transition in Britain from glam rock to punk rock in the mid-1970s, it was often the "look" that youngsters embraced first as they tried to be different. One man who adopted the new fashions looked back in an interview for *Eyewitness 1970–*

1979, fully appreciating the irony of his bold antiestablishment choices: "Oh, yeah, I mean we were individuals because we were wearing a uniform, no doubt about that, we really were. How seriously you were into punk rock was measured by how completely and strictly you adhered to wearing this uniform. And that's when I got my Mohican haircut."[62] We meet this black-clad[63] and fashionable confederacy as they attend Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, where it's clear they have ideological misgivings about Jesus and the Beatitudes; we'll see them again as they attend the gladiator fights in the amphitheater, where they don't want, initially, the "imperialist" food of the oppressors; and then again as they've gathered to discuss their assault on Pilate's palace, where we see their reasonably argued and nearly unanimous commitment to violence against the state.

Voice of the New Left Herbert Marcuse had talked about "outsiders" emerging in the 1960s and 1970s to reinvigorate socialist revolutions, according to Dobson and Payne: [Marcuse's] examination of the new industrial societies had led him to the belief that scientific and technological revolution had changed the structure of the working class and thereby altered a number of Marxist assumptions. In the new technologically-based society of the West a labour aristocracy had developed, and a new alliance had grown up between big business and the working class which was no longer revolutionary or intent on overthrowing the established order.

> This development created a situation in which only what he called the "outsiders" were now the true revolutionaries. *The outsiders were those forced from the system because they were unemployable by it; those persecuted for their colour; the exploited masses of the Third World, and the students and intellectuals disgusted by comfortable consumerism in the West.*[64]

The PFJ won't seem part of any system, they don't seem to be employed, they are persecuted because they are not Roman, and they are ironically comfortable thanks to what the Romans have done for them, but still petulant in that comfort.

And here is how they see themselves, these high-minded revolutionaries, in Bakunin and Nechaev's *Revolutionary Catechism*[65] terms, according to Demaris: The revolutionary is a dedicated man. . . . Everything in his life is subordinated towards a single exclusive attachment, a single thought, and a single passion—the revolution. . . . He has torn himself away from the bonds which tie him to the social order and to the cultivated world, with all its laws, moralities, and customs. . . . Night and day he must have but one thought, one aim—merciless destruction. . . . He must be ready to destroy himself and destroy with his own hands everyone who stands in his way.[66]

It will become evident that this is how Reg and the PFJ see themselves, but their commitment to paying the ultimate price will waver in the face of both Roman retribution and the comfortable, infrastructural benefits of the Roman occupation.

(draft) BIG NOSE lets fly an almighty punch and hits GREGORY in the face —In the earlier drafts it is Gregory who asks Mr. Big Nose to "pipe down," and Gregory who takes the punch to the face. A fight still breaks out at the back of the group, near Brian and Mandy, and Roman soldiers move in to break it up.

This punch is also one of those moments where, during the editing process, a handful of frames were removed to make the motion seem faster than the actual movement. This is a cartoony process used often by the Pythons—and in slapstick comedy films in general. For example, when Robin Hood's men are distributing treasure to "the poor" in Gilliam's *Time Bandits*, each recipient is also gifted with a vicious, sped-up sucker punch. Robin (Cleese) asks if the punches are "absolutely necessary," and the Merry Man replies that he's "afraid it is."

(draft) **JUDITH: "Roman bastards!!**[67] **We don't want you here!"**—In these earlier drafts Judith is much more fired with revolutionary zeal than in the final version, with Brian trying to explain away the presence and influence of the Romans. At this stage of the screenplay process it is Brian who is keen to go to the stoning, not his mother, and Brian and Judith are already acquainted.

(draft) **JUDITH: "Imperialist pigs!" . . . "They're an army of <u>occupation</u>"**—In the earlier drafts of the script the Roman guards were more menacing and inflammatory, with Judith responding here to catcalls. These barbs have disappeared by the finished film, replaced by the Jews fighting each other, and the Romans intervening only to unpack the scrum.

"Imperialist pig" and "army of occupation" is the language of the leftish, postcolonial world, heard in relation to British troops in Northern Ireland; American forces in Japan, Germany, and especially Vietnam; Israeli interests in contested Palestine and Jerusalem; and even earlier in regard to the French in North Africa and the British in Levant. The British had employed self-styled British Armies of Occupation in parts of defeated Germany after both world wars, when the term was likely more reassuring to natives afraid of postwar reprisals from the nearby Soviet forces. By the period of postcolonialism, however, the phrase had been co-opted by student movements, rebel groups, and Communist governments like Mao's PRC.[68] Judith is using the phrase here as an epithet, an invective meant to urge others to action. (She is mostly ignored, and

shushed by Brian, who in this draft doesn't want trouble.) The use of this modern phraseology makes it clear that in addition to a first-century Judea setting and focus, the Pythons are addressing the contemporary world of colonial oppression, postcolonial power vacuums, and the budding terrorism brought on by Western hegemony across the Third World. The frictions between these foci actually push the film forward, past the potential shuntpoints of cul-de-sac arguments ("What have the Romans ever done for us?") and alien space rides, and toward a final song-and-dance number on the crosses.

This "pig" reference also might have been a particularly insulting insult, given the orthodox Jews' views on pig flesh. Why pigs? Various traditions identify pigs as defiled because they have "fully split hooves," they are filthy and disease-carrying, and, simply, forbidden by God's commandment. One ancient text even helpfully equates pigs and the hated Romans: "*It is a symbol of hypocrisy*: It pretends to be a kosher animal. The Midrash draws a comparison between the Roman empire and the pig. . . . Just as the pig sticks out its hooves when it is resting, as if to say 'I am kosher,' so did the Romans put on a show of justice to mask their avarice and corruption."[69] "Imperialist pig" is a more modern framing, but the insult works across time and cultures.

FRANCIS (Palin): "Well, Blessed is just about everyone with a vested interest in the status quo . . ."—Again, the hearers of the Word are hearing "Blessed"—and even saying "blessed" when they speak it—when Jesus has clearly been saying "blest," an odd disconnect between parts within a single scene, separated by some space but not time. This may be due to the fact that the actual portion of this scene where Jesus is talking was filmed well apart from the furor toward the back, according to Kim Johnson.[70] The "blessed" mentions would have been shot and recorded first, and then days later the "blest" sayings from Colley as Jesus.

This "status quo" charge was one of the main complaints against PM Wilson. Emerging as a leftish member of the Labour Party after the war, Wilson followed Aneurin Bevan but was never considered Left enough by those on the Left. It seems that early on Wilson realized how pragmatic the center space could be, understanding that "extreme" prime ministers were few, far between, and short-lived, and that holding the party together (Reg-like?) trumped all else. Once he became PM, Wilson tried to balance the fringes of the Party, but thanks to an up and down economy, a struggling pound, and stroppy unions, the great plans for change often failed to materialize, and discord was inevitable: The old Tory style of government by clique and clubmen gave way to government by

faction and feud, a weakness in Labour politics throughout the party's history. Wilson had emerged by hopping from group to group, with no settled philosophical view or strong body of personal support in the party. Instead of a "Wilson party," represented in the Commons and country, he relied on a small gang of personal supporters—Marcia Williams most famously, but also the Number Ten insiders Peter Shore, Gerald Kaufman, George Wigg and, for a while in these early years, Tony Benn too. . . . Suspicious of the Whitehall establishment, with some justification, and cut off from both the right-wing group of former Gaitskellites, and the old Bevanites, Wilson felt forced to create his own gang . . . [turning] to an eclectic group on one-offs and oddballs, producing a peculiarly neurotic little court, riven by jealousy and misunderstanding.[71]

Some of these names will be mentioned again as we go, along, with others not named, including Bernard Donoughue[72] and Joe Haines. The PFJ are caught between the Jews and the Romans, and tinctured by both the first and the twentieth centuries; Wilson's "one-offs and oddballs" managed to run the country from the isolated center from 1964 to 1970, and then again for a last dash from 1974 through Wilson's sudden retirement in 1976.[73] As the film comes to an end, Francis could have complained that Reg's version of the PFJ was as guilty as any—the status quo had been maintained by purposeful inaction, the essential core of the PFJ were still in place, the Romans were still in place, and only the agitator Brian was set to suffer as a result of the momentary disequilibrium.

Francis's complaint is fundamentally accurate, though, in relation to what Jesus is suggesting. If Jesus is promising in the Beatitudes that those who are oppressed and downtrodden will eventually inherit riches and kingdoms, then keeping the Romans in power and the Jews in bondage does satisfy the status quo, keeping things the way they are and have been. "Real change" revolutionaries would have gone away from the Sermon a bit deflated, having hopes that this whispered-about messiah might have been the one to lead a military uprising against the Romans. Turning the other cheek meant more oppression, more subjugation, with rewards promised but delayed.

These beardless thinkers are clearly part of the New Left, an early version of PM Wilson's "tightly knit group of politically motivated men" who had never had the luxury of failing at the ballot box.[74] This minority of voices at the left of the Labour Party, in Wilson's view, combined their Marxist sentiments with political intrigue, meddling in the unions to agitate for dock and transportation

strikes, hoping to benefit from every downturn of the pound and rise in prices. Wilson saw them lurking everywhere. The PFJ aren't so devious, of course, hewing closer to what groups like Britain's own Angry Brigade got up to, which wasn't all that much: Though in many ways the Angry Brigade were a non-event they represent the only direct confrontation between revolutionary protest, supposed to be one of the key ingredients of the sixties, and the evolving economy of pleasure which was the sixties' real story. Other left-wing groups, mainly Trotskyists would argue with each other and march, protest and publish about employment and foreign affairs.[75]

For the PFJ, "revolutionary protest" is mollified by the admitted "pleasure" of subjugation by the Roman Empire. The long list of reasons to not hate the Romans will be enumerated later. "The English revolution," Marr would write of the Angry Brigade's failures, "was again postponed for lack of interest."[76] One journalist would neuter them completely, calling them "a quaint Pythonesque version of their more murderous continental counterparts."[77] Reg, Francis, and Stan aren't the Jews inspired by revolutionaries and teachers including "Judas, Zadok, and other Pharisees" of the first century; they're not demanding an end to Roman rule because it is an offense to God, rather, an offense to the individual liberty of the twentieth-century, postcolonial Man.[78]

In the space between the camera and the PFJ is the result of the disagreement. Gregory, his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Big Nose, and two of the others gathered (Gilliam and McKeown) are rolling around in the dirt, while Mr. Cheeky—who really started it all—is helpfully pointing into the melee so the Centurions can make proper arrests. This is also a kind of status quo, when the Jews fight among themselves and seem to forget their Roman oppressors. Historically it was often the more violent gladiatorial games that brought *crowd* members into confrontation, not quiet sermons outside the city walls. Nero had to cancel games for a decade when Pompeii fans couldn't keep from fighting with rival fans.[79] More recently, even after myriad concessions offered to both sides in the decades-long struggle in Northern Ireland, including the short-lived "power-sharing executive" in the form of the Sunningdale Agreement in 1973–1974, nothing seemed to alter the status quo—killings and reprisals went on.[80] Lecturer Vernon Bogdanor notes sardonically that almost twenty-five years (and many deaths) later the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 essentially aped Sunningdale, which Irish politician Seamus Mallon ruefully called "Sunningdale for slow learners."[81]

REG (Cleese): "Yeah, well what Jesus blatantly fails to appreciate . . ."—The pre-revolutionary nihilism amongst the intelligentsia in Russia exhibited itself in similarly contrarian ways. The PFJ dress and groom themselves differently, and denounce Jesus's radicalism as just the "status quo." In nineteenth-century Russia, "nihilism meant an inordinate credulity towards any numbers of 'isms'. . . [including] terrorism," with the young radical adopting "a contrived boorishness" and "conforming nonconformity"—the very picture of the PFJ.[82] The revolutionary verbiage is nearly identical to that heard in the more sober *Jesus of Nazareth*. After Jesus has been performing healing miracles his disciples are worried about appearances: Disciple 1: He doesn't seem to realize the scandal it would cause. Peter, you tell him!

Peter: I've told him.

Disciple 2: Well tell him again. The whole place is talking about it!

Disciple 3: Meaning some Pharisees I suppose . . .

Disciple 2: Well they know the law!

Like the PFJ in *Brian*, these four are apart from their "leader" when they discuss him.

Reg and the PFJ clearly didn't see the messiah they wanted, one who was going to "appreciate" their situation and overthrow the Romans, freeing all Israel. There were likely quite a few Jews who listened at the Sermon on the Mount for a sign that this man was their avenging, sword-wielding shepherd, and who went away disappointed. In 1969 the PLO-supporting Al Fatah[83] posed similar questions about Jesus and his image to the modern world, asking Christians, essentially, what they really believed: "In an anonymous letter addressed to both Catholic and Protestant Churches in West Berlin at Christmas 1969,[84] the supporters of the Palestine Liberation Front, Al Fatah, challenged the pastors of these churches to speak out openly in favour of this Front, presenting Christ as an example 'who fought against the Roman occupation power.'"[85] As mentioned earlier, a number of scholars in the 1960s were rereading Jesus's life and finding revolutionary planks, supports that could justify twentieth-century antiestablishment thought and action. The PLO and Al Fatah will be discussed in more detail later, in the PFJ scenes.

REG: ". . . it is the Meek who are the problem"—Reg is speaking for many followers of Jesus who didn't want the Romans "blessed," but sent packing: "Many of Jesus's followers found it difficult to accept his message," Kotker writes. "What they wanted most was a political Messiah, a divinely sent king who would drive the Romans out of the country. The crowds who came to hear

him, and even the Disciples who followed him closely, pleaded for a sign from Jesus indicating that he was sent by God to end Roman power and usher in the rule of God.[86] Many were tired of the "go along/get along" attitudes that leaders in the Jewish communities of Judea had adopted: as long as the Romans left the Jews' religious lives alone, some taxes, tributes, and occupation were tolerable. But the PFJ is different from other Zealot-type terrorists of the first-century. If they are Jews, then something is missing. Brandon describes the overall breakdown of the relationship between Jews and their masters, the Romans, and that a Jew didn't have to be a member of a terror group to feel "the natural resentment of any subject people towards the unjust government of their foreign masters." He went on, noting, for us, what is missing from the PFJ: "there must be added the profound devotion of the Jews to their peculiar religion which logically envisaged Israel as a theocracy."[87] The PFJ show no Jewishness, to be fair, nor are they Samaritans or Idumaeans. (Their "leaders" are all clean-shaven, if that's a noteworthy commonality.) Even if they are Jews, they don't seem to be waiting for a Messiah to free them; they're not arguing for a theocratic government; they don't participate in the temple cultus; and they don't mingle with other Jews or priests or almost anyone outside their clique.

This is part of the script more closely connected first to postwar Britain, and thence the world of 1970s political and terror movements, and further away from first-century Jerusalem. The wretched "meek" beatified by Christ but mistrusted by Reg could be found in the immediate postwar period, when millions of war refugees descended on Western and Central Europe, and then Britain. Former POW camps in England changed roles but not populations as prisoners became refugees. Though happy and privileged in Stinchcombe, novelist Evelyn Waugh[88] worried about the postwar changes, fearing he could smell "the reek of the Displaced Persons Camp," and, ultimately, that Britain had changed forever.[89] This same rabble will be waiting for Brian in his living room later—lepers, those possessed with devils, adulteresses, wailing babies, *bourgeoisie* with headaches, foreign promoters like Mr. Papadopoulos—all wanting his attention, most wanting to touch him or be touched by him.

That being said, Reg and the PFJ also don't seem to be following the *modus operandi* of emerging 1960s and 1970s radical groups like those in the Shah's Iran, for instance. There, the all-powerful Shah had "closed off every possible avenue for political expression," according to Caryl, pushing many radicals—of the intelligentsia and working class—right into the arms of a radicalizing Islam.[90] The PFJ aren't turning to their inchoate Jewishness or even to the new

and radical tenets of Christianity—they seem to think that direct revolutionary action (at least as discussed) is the only way to achieve the "world supremacy" they're seeking.

In a 1978 interview with the New Left thinker Herbert Marcuse, interviewer Bryan Magee's last question seems to well describe the PFJ as presented in *Brian*. Magee is asking about the admitted failings of the New Left: For example, it's commonly said of the New Left movement that has developed to such a large degree out of your work that it is elitist, that you have these little groups of, for the most part, middle-class—some would say self-admiring—intellectuals divorced from the working class as you have yourself acknowledged earlier, regarding themselves as the instruments of revolution . . . and that the whole thing has become trendy and has become fashionable, and above all has become dissociated with the real working class that it was all supposed to originally be about.[91]

There is no indication that Reg and the PFJ have any real connection to the working class of Jerusalem—we never see them at jobs, in queues, at worship, and almost never mingling with the unwashed general public. Their cleanliness, smart dress, and well-fed appearance means they are actually middle-class, and can be "tarred with the epithet" of "dissolute middle-class revolutionaries"—the same attached to Britain's own Angry Brigade.[92] When they do find themselves surrounded by the rabble—in Brian's living room—they are curt and dismissive toward lepers and children, the sick and possessed. They are clearly intellectuals and have had some schooling; they have a command of revolutionary jargon and parliamentary procedure. Italian New Wave director Pier Pasolini would likely have called them "anthropologically middle-class," meaning they are incapable of bringing about real change because they are too interested in the things of the world.[93] They are in the end fashionable—when push comes to shove and they have an opportunity to act in a revolutionary way (by saving Brian from the cross), they demur, saving themselves and the movement. This New Left, *attentisme*-like, will wait for the day that oppression overthrows itself, perhaps.

JUDITH *(the girl BRIAN has been admiring)*: "Yes . . . yes . . . I see . . ."—In the film as shot, Judith is styled as an acolyte, a kind of outsider (perhaps not unlike Brian, in a following scene). She is clearly looking up to Reg here, and not just because of his height (a joke that would be different if they'd cast Jones or Palin in the role; see the "short one's" entry below). Perhaps Judith is the first and only female sibling in the movement, hence her sycophancy, but it also could be just standard acolytic behavior in small groups. Judith sees positives in

Reg—he doesn't seem afraid or constrained and is (almost) endlessly self-confident—and she won't be proven wrong until later, when Reg stays behind from the raid, hides from the Romans, and finally he and the rest of the PFJ leave Brian on the cross to suffer for all of them.[94] But Judith, too, will ultimately understand the "wonderful" side of Brian's sacrifice as explained to her by her leader, Reg, and abandon Brian to his fate.

These kinds of sycophantic, worshipful relationships existed in the terror organizations of the day. Even in prison, Andreas Baader led via cult of personality in the Red Army Faction, "[infatuating] all those who ventured close to him with a Promethean mission of fire and immolation."[95] His lawyers regularly delivered mission instructions to his followers, and to a degree the revolutionary work of the RAF carried on even as its leaders languished in maximum security cells.[96] Charles Manson and Carlos the Jackal[97] held sway over followers and the public differently, but to similarly manipulative ends. The ultimate example might be the case of heiress Patty Hearst, who was abducted by the Symbionese Liberation Army and eventually came to ally herself with the group, and willingly participate in their criminal activities.[98]

(draft) **JUDITH: "The short one's Reg"**—Remembering that Cleese stood about six-foot-five, this might have been a joke, a purposeful mistake, a reference to someone else scheduled to play Reg or, most likely, that this Reg was at least originally based on the "pint-sized" trade union firebrand Reg Birch.[99] A lifelong and ardent Communist (or better, Maoist), Birch had been expelled from the Communist Party in 1966 for being too radical, and had formed the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) in February 1968.[100] Like Reg, Birch would talk loudly and determinedly about holding to principles. In an April 1968 strike action, the "right-wing moderates" of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering and Foundry Workers had overridden the more militant left-wing and settled for "a token strike." Coverage of the negotiations saw the split in the AUEW: Mr. Reg Birch, a left-wing member of the executive council said: "Now we are either to be in unity or at the parting of the ways." Not to give the mandate to the executive to take action would make nonsense of any decision to call a one-day token stoppage. "Either you say we are in a battle or you use, as an excuse, this hypocritical display of militancy of a one-day stoppage because you do not know how to retreat", he said.[101]

Birch was often front-page news until his retirement in 1979, just as *Life of Brian* was being completed. He was particularly on point during the ongoing Ford strikes in the late 1960s and into the early 1970s, his name and union being

mentioned in article after article, his thoughtful, carefully crafted declarations making good copy.

(draft) **JUDITH: "He may not be personally attractive, but he's the sort of man we need if we are to liberate ourselves"**—On the way to the stoning in an earlier draft, Judith is talking to Brian about the "short one," Reg, and perhaps even figures like Carlos (Ilich Ramirez Sanchez), who was chubby and "normal" in appearance; and Charles Manson, who was just over five feet and wiry. They are perhaps even referring to Jesus, whose physical appearance in recent biblical epics had been generally Waspish—tall and fair and beautiful, and likely inaccurate.[102] A number of contemporary reviewers took Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* to task for its worshipful dullness, and for its love affair with star Robert Powell's face. Critic and playwright Dennis Potter wrote: "Indeed, a score of minor miracles may yet follow the screenings, though none, I fear, will be quite so astounding as the grace which apparently enabled Jean Rook of the *Daily Express* to hold her breath for three hours last Sunday and yet still survive to rhapsodise in her bilious tabloid about Powell's still, lake-blue, green eyes.'"[103] Potter posits what a "real" Jesus might have looked like, and how even eager youngsters (like Potter once was) learning songs about Jesus might receive him: We may have had scrubbed faces, polished shoes, and clean hankies, but most of us warbling that childhood hymn would have been only too prepared to hurl a stone or a jibe at the strange young Jew barely recognisable as the "real" Jesus. Of all the many faces of Christ, indeed, the one we would surely never acknowledge is that one, the wandering rabbi down from the sour hills with the Torah in his head and wild figs in his stomach.[104]

The BBC documentary *Who Was Jesus?* made its debut in April 1977 on BBC 2, less than two weeks after Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* appeared for the first time on BBC 1. In the documentary and accompanying book,[105] authors Cupitt and Armstrong lay out the "facts" of Jesus as known or accepted in 1977. In the section on archaeology, they include a note in regard to Jesus's physical appearance, pointing out "early traditions" that posited a glorious and beautiful Jesus "in his risen or transfigured state," as well as "a frail and ugly" Jesus in his "human appearance."[106] Christian art took up the glorious version, but the "older writers" remembered "the frailty of Jesus' human appearance": Clement of Alexandria . . . says his face was ugly. The pagan writer Celsus . . . asked "How can the Son of God have been such an ugly little man?"; and the Christian writer Origen . . . usually so quick to rebut slanders, on this occasion accepts the description and quotes Isaiah 52ff.[107] The great Latin Father, Tertullian . . .

opposing heretics who regarded Jesus as some kind of angelic visitant, repeatedly emphasized Jesus' frail human form. He was like a "puerulus," a wretched little boy.

> Where did the idea come from? The most ingenious answer was given by Robert Eisler,[108] who put together a description of Jesus from Byzantine citations of a now-lost version of Josephus. It is a string of adjectives: three cubits tall, crooked or stooping, long-faced, long-nosed, with connate or continuous eyebrows, with scanty hair, looking older than his years, dark-skinned.[109] Eisler argued that this is the language of a police description, that an official record of the trial of Jesus must have existed and that Josephus (and perhaps Tacitus too) would had access to it. . . . As Tertullian remarked, Jesus' physical appearance may have partly prompted the barrage of mockery and insults which the Gospels so surprisingly preserve.[110]

Cupitt wonders about the historical accuracy of these descriptions, but sees the descriptions as "the most religiously beautiful ever produced." The above quote is lengthy but important, given that within a span of a fortnight two separate BBC shows offer such remarkably different depictions of Jesus, and just when the Pythons are creating their own version. The Pythons' initial thoughts of casting of a "short" or unattractive actor for Reg (or Brian, even) might well have been a forward-thrusting move past most biblical epic depictions of Jesus. As it played out, Cleese took the role of Reg and anything beyond humor evaporated.

(draft) **BRIAN: "I wish you'd liberate yourself"**—Brian is talking about sex—and with Judith, clearly—and not about the nascent women's liberation movement that had been gaining momentum in many countries, including Britain. Women's Liberation Conferences convened starting in 1970, and the feminist magazine *Spare Rib* premiered in 1972.[111] Germaine Greer's 1970 book *The Female Eunuch* would have disappointed Brian—her version of liberation is more than sexual: "Now as before, women must refuse to be meek and guileful, for truth cannot be served by dissimulation," she writes. "Women who fancy that they manipulate the world by pussy power and gentle cajolery are fools. It is slavery to have to adopt such tactics."[112] Brian will have to impress if Judith is to "liberate" herself in the way he means; her goals seem well beyond a physical relationship. Greer just might be the "stroppy feminist" the Pythons were thinking of when they created Judith's role. Judith may see a relationship at this point in her political life as another form of enslavement, no different from the hated Roman occupancy, but one that offers (as we'll see) a modicum of security, as well: "Abandonment of slavery is also the banishment of the chimera of security. The world will not change overnight, and liberation will not happen unless individual women agree to be outcasts, eccentrics, perverts, and whatever

the powers-that-be choose to call them."[113] Judith will be a bit of an outcast from the men of the PFJ; she will agree to a relationship with Brian, but she will ultimately abandon the relationship for, ironically, the security of PFJ membership *and* the continuing Roman occupation.

In 1978 Herbert Marcuse would say that "far more attention needs to be paid to the women's liberation movement," and that he saw in that contemporary "movement . . . a very strong, radical potential."[114] Here Judith wants to change society; Brian is amenable to that, but post-coitally, if he has his druthers. Brian's forwardness (especially about sex) will disappear from the final drafts of the script, as will most of Judith's protestations about the "bloody Romans."

***(draft)* JUDITH: "It's positively Chaldean"**—Meant to indicate ancient, backwards, or even "stone age," but perhaps also violent and repressive, the Chaldean empire was active six and more centuries earlier than the time of Christ. The Old Testament prophet Habakkuk, whose name will be mentioned later in relation to the failed raid on Pilate's palace, perhaps set the example for Judith in the prophet's description of these marauders. Habakkuk cries to the Lord about the "terrible and dreadful" Chaldeans; he knows they are coming, and he knows that his people haven't behaved in such a way as to merit God's protection. *Spectator* religion writer Martin Sullivan discusses Habakkuk's "dilemma" in a 1974 Easter article: "He admits that the social evils of Judah deserve Divine chastisement. What is God up to, using as His instrument a nation which by its rapacity and its arrogant impiety was an infinitely worse offender? How could these Chaldeans, conquerors of Babylon, marching over the face of the earth with an unbridled savagery, be agents of God's purposes?"[115] What's also interesting here is that the early version of Judith was one who wanted to participate in men's activities even if those activities were painful and punitive. She's arguing for the right to stone someone to death, the stone-thrower's gender notwithstanding.

As the film concludes it seems as if the PFJ have also come to acknowledge the Roman's significant part in bringing God's (political) will to fruition. They will allow Rome to crucify Brian, perhaps seeing the act as a necessary step toward their eventual freedom.

Notes

1. Smallwood, *JURR*, 170. The discussion of prophets in and around Jerusalem will be broached again in the "Street Preachers and Haggling" scene.
2. *JURR*, 170. Tiberius would die just before Pilate reached Rome, but Pilate's governorship of Judea was finished. He was replaced by a temporary governor in 37.
3. See page 175 of *DBI*.
4. The Pythons had discussed and even tried other time settings, including 787, 1167, and 1282 for the events of *Holy Grail*. See Larsen, *BAFHG*, 28–32.
5. See, for example, *JURR*, 167–68, and especially note 82 on page 168; also, see the most contemporary summary of popular Jesus scholarship in Cupitt and Armstrong's *Who Was Jesus?* published in 1977.
6. *JURR*, 133. Also see the index entries in *JURR* for descriptions of Sabbath in first-century Judea.
7. Mark 3:1–6.
8. *BAFHG*, 14.
9. Matthew 5:4.
10. Margaret Thatcher Foundation, http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104078. It has been pointed out that the words are only *attributed* to St. Francis, and are actually of the Victorian era—this may fit Thatcher even better (Marr, *HMB*, 385).
11. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 492–93.
12. From *Monty Python's The Life of Brian (of Nazareth)*, 8.
13. *BAFHG*, 485.
14. Burleigh, *BRT*, 106.
15. The loud and long strike at Grunwick will be discussed in more detail later, in relation to women at the stoning and the missing "Popular Front."
16. Garnett, *From Anger to Apathy*, 78–83; also Sandbrook's *Seasons in the Sun*, 599–618.
17. Larsen, *MPFC: UC*, 1.205.
18. Wilson was prime minister 1964–1970, and 1974–1976, and leader of the Opposition in between; Williams (later Lady Falkender) was part of Wilson's "kitchen cabinet" as his private and then political secretary. Williams had been with Wilson since 1956. For his part, Donoughue referred to the *Private Eye* reporters as "lice" (*DSD*, 1.512).
19. As recently as 2007 Lady Falkender was awarded £75,000 in damages from the BBC for libelous depictions in the 2006 drama *The Lavender List*. As part of the settlement the BBC agreed to never air the show again.
20. The first (and much feared, in No. 10) version of this relationship and these events at the top of Britain's government emerged in 1977, when Wilson's former press secretary, Joe Haines, published *The Politics of Power*. Haines dedicated thirty pages to the relationship between Wilson and Williams, and to the temblors that their collusions and collisions propagated.
21. Donoughue, *DSD*, 1.14.
22. *BAFHG*, 149–51.
23. *BAFHG*, 279–80. *Till Death Us Do Part* aired 1965–1975 on the BBC.
24. "'Need for Good Sense on TV,'" *Times*, 23 June 1965: 8. By 1970, Mrs. Whitehouse had achieved almost mythic status, according to David Wade: "Certain public figures acquire reputations so powerful that it becomes almost impossible to hear what they actually say. One [is] Mary Whitehouse, heard last week in *What Happened to Authority?* (4). We all know Mrs. Whitehouse, scourge of the B.B.C., defender of the national morality, the St. Joan of clean living and thinking: Angel or demon according to your point of view" (*Times*, 19 September 1970: 18).
25. Wiggin has been mentioned in *Flying Circus* Ep. 38 as being a "looney." *Private Eye* also lampooned him more than once. See *MPFC: UC*, 2.144–45.
26. *Sunday Times*, 29 March 1970: 53.

27. Solomon was a popular rogue, escaping from or accidentally being released from prison more than once, and giving the authorities a run during his long criminal career; for Fagin see David Lean's 1948 film, and the West End musical (1960) and film *Oliver!* (1968).

28. Along with Neil Innes, Roger McGough, and Ken Colley (Palin, *Diaries: 1969–1979*, 423–24).

29. He's protesting the presence of a Samaritan, who is also Jewish, ironically.

30. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 23n1.

31. Luke 2:49.

32. Cupitt and Armstrong, *Who Was Jesus?* 9. See Pathrapankl's "Jesus: Freedom-Fighter or Prince of Peace?," as well as the 21 June 1971 *Time* magazine, including "The New Rebel Cry: Jesus Is Coming!" There was also an entire series of articles on Jesus appearing in *Der Spiegel* in 1966. In the (1965 book and) 1976 film *The Passover Plot*, Jesus allied himself with active Zealots to ensure his martyr status. Alberto Korda's famous picture of Che, taken in 1960, adorned the flats of students from Berlin to Tokyo (*BRT*, 223–24).

33. White, *The Once and Future King*, 16, quoted in *BAFHG*, 192–93.

34. From *BAFHG*: "The surrealistic and context-smashing world of these cartoons was clearly influential for both the Goons and the Pythons. See *MPFC: UC*, 1.19–20, as well as the index in those volumes under 'cartoony' for more" (321n29)." Oversized props, exaggerated sounds, and unreal violence can be found throughout *Flying Circus* and *Holy Grail*.

35. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 348.

36. *ATW*, 1.16.206–8.

37. Jeremias, *JTJ*, 312–51, passim.

38. The "weedy Samaritan" seen later in the colosseum might be a slave, but he also might be a captured combatant whose only role is to die in the arena. (A Samaritan so captured might have been shipped off to Rome for more elaborate games demonstrating the strength and scope of the Empire.) The use of Christians as games fodder is a later development.

39. *BAFHG*, 32–33. The film's meager budget played a large part in this economy, as well.

40. Koloski-Ostrow, *The Archaeology of Sanitation in Roman Italy*, 31.

41. *ATW*, 2.29.84; *MPFC: UC*, 2.42.

42. Guelich, "The Matthean Beatitudes," 418.

43. *JTJ*, 8.

44. King and Stager, *LBI*, 102–3.

45. The herdsman, though, *was* on the list of despised trades, as he was considered to be "dishonest and thieving" (*JTJ*, 304). It's not clear how cheesemakers could get their hands on milk to make cheese, except that law and practice often diverged. Shepherds were also on these lists, proving that such trades could be prone to prejudice in one place or time, and celebrated in another (305–7).

46. *ATW*, 2.33.142–45; *MPFC: UC*, 2.91–100.

47. Generally meaning soft-headed or nonsensical. "Stupitt and Flannel" is a play on the contemporary Jesus scholars Cupitt and Armstrong mentioned earlier.

48. 8 July 1977: 14.

49. Mark 4:9.

50. This moment is an echo of the two guards in Swamp Castle in *Holy Grail*. They listen carefully to orders from their king: (1) guard the prince, and (2) keep the prince from leaving the tower. They agree, and when the king turns to leave, they immediately follow him. This movement to a more approachable God is discussed in *MPFC: UC*, 1.28, 33.

51. Richard, *WWAR*, 273.

52. *ATW*, 1.3.40–41 and 1.9.118–19, respectively.

53. *ATW*, 2.35.165–79.

54. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) is consulted for definitions and etymologies.

55. See *MPFC: UC*, 1.33, 48, 74, 99, 103, and 106; 2.44 and 46. These terms crept into British and English culture thanks to the flood of Hollywood films and television, as well as the presence of American

troops and personnel on English soil during and since World War II. Fittingly but unevenly, the BBC tried to suppress these linguistic infiltrations into domestic programming as early as 1948 (1.50, 59, 89, and 276).

56. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 395–96.

57. Lifelong competitors in the oil tanker business (and sharing at least one wife), Onassis and Niarchos were often mentioned in the same newspaper columns and profiles. See "The Two Millionaires Relish Their Rivalry and Enjoy Their Fortunes," *Times*, 3 June 1972: II.

58. In the 1970s, *Private Eye*'s offices were located on Greek Street, as well.

59. Brian Cathcart, "Rear Window," *Independent*, 15 October 1994.

60. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 505.

61. See the *OED* entries under, first, "pipe," then "to pipe down" beneath.

62. "The Emergence of Punk 1," in *Eyewitness 1970–1979: A History of the Twentieth Century in Sound* (London: BBC, 2005), CD, a.t.

63. They appear to be wearing linen robes, likely meaning they are more expensive as the weaving is finer.

64. Dobson and Payne, *The Carlos Complex*, 222; italics added.

65. Available at the marxists.org website. Mikhail Bakunin was a Russian revolutionary and anarchist; Sergei Nechaev is also credited with working on this tract. See *BRT*, 37–38.

66. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 382; see also *BRT*, chapter 2.

67. "Bastards" will be discussed later in relation to Brian's status as one of uncertain parentage.

68. *MPFC: UC*, 2.23.

69. See Mendy Kaminker, "Pigs and Judaism," at http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2376474/jewish/Pigs-Judaism.htm.

70. Johnson, *Monty Python's Tunisian Holiday*, 20–21.

71. Marr, *HMB*, 307–8.

72. Donoughue was Callaghan's adviser and head of the government's Policy Unit, and had worked previously at No. 10 under Wilson.

73. These events and figures are covered extensively in myriad books, including those from Donoughue, Marr, and Sandbrook, and in the pages of daily newspapers and *Private Eye*.

74. *HMB*, 297.

75. *HMB*, 333–34.

76. *HMB*, 333. The Angry Brigade will be discussed in more detail later, in the "PFJ Plan their Raid" scene.

77. See Martin Bright, "Look Back in Anger," *Observer* 2 February 2002.

78. Horsley, "The Sicarii," 443.

79. *WWAR*, 69; also Grant, *Gladiators*, 79.

80. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 298.

81. "Collapse of the Postwar Settlement, 1964–1979," a.t.

82. *BRT*, 33.

83. Also "al-Fatah," "Al-Fatah," and later just Fatah, depending on which newspaper or communique is mentioning the group.

84. For timeline perspective, the Pythons had just broadcast Ep. 10 of *Flying Circus* on 21 December, and recorded Ep. 12 on that same day.

85. Pathrapankal, "Jesus: Freedom-Fighter or Prince of Peace?," 79.

86. Kotker, *HLTJ*, 62.

87. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 107.

88. Waugh and his writings on Englishness are discussed in *MPFC: UC*, in notes to Eps. 2, 10, and 31. His oldest son, Auberon, wrote for *Private Eye* and *Spectator* for many years.

89. *HMB*, 47. The nearest large camps were more than fifty miles away from Waugh's village, so he was speaking more poetically. Homeless British families began squatting on deserted military bases and in empty government buildings across the country as early as summer 1946, changing ancient regional

populations overnight (*HMB*, 71). By fall, it was estimated that there were more than forty-five thousand of these "meek" squatting on government land, and many more followed, even into Kensington, through the winter (72–73).

90. Caryl, *Strange Rebels*, 46.

91. Marcuse, "Interview with Herbert Marcuse," a.t.

92. Cleese's Mr. Praline character utters the first phrase in *Flying Circus* Ep. 23 (*MPFC: UC* 1.349–59); the second is from Martin Bright's article on the Angry Brigade (*Observer* on 2 February 2002). Members of the Angry Brigade had, for the most part, come from middle-class homes and were at one time enrolled in university programs.

93. Discussed in Ricciardi's *After La Dolce Vita*, 55–56. For Pasolini, "consumerist 'ideologies' and modernist 'tolerance'" have replaced revolutionary fervor (55). The truth of this becomes evident at the end of the film; the PFJ want to stay alive and keep fighting the fashionable fight.

94. Not unlike the Irish situation, when, in 1919, Republicans in vain sought American influence from President Woodrow Wilson, "patron of the rights of small nations": "He refused, as a Chicago priest said, 'to take poor Ireland down from the Cross on which she has been hanging for seven long centuries'" (Brendon, *DFBE*, 312).

95. Lasky, "Ulrike Meinhof and the Baader-Meinhof Gang," 10.

96. Lasky, "Ulrike Meinhof and the Baader-Meinhof Gang," 10–11.

97. Carlos was nicknamed "The Jackal" by a journalist *after* the release of both the novel and film *The Day of the Jackal*. The 1971 novel was written by Frederick Forsyth—mentioned later in relation to its influence on coup actions. Manson had been incarcerated since late 1969.

98. Carlos, Hearst, and Baader will be discussed in much more detail later.

99. "Pint-sized" comes from Terry Pattinson's obituary (*Independent*, 16 June 1994).

100. Birch's version of Communism favored more rigorous Chinese and Albanian practices. See "Maoist Party Is Planned," *Times*, 3 February 1968: 2. A series of interesting articles looking at the various arms of the New Left—including Birch's Maoism—began appearing in the *Times* in 1971 ("The Revolutionaries," *Times*, 15 February 1971: 12). Birch would lead a small delegation to Communist China in January 1971 ("The Times Diary," *Times*, 14 January 1971: 14).

101. "Moderates Win as Engineers Settle for Token Strike," *Times*, 30 April 1968: 1.

102. The 1964 Pasolini film, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, offered a darker, swarthy Jesus (played by a Spanish-Italian student). Pasolini was well-known for casting non-professionals who could bring an honesty to the role.

103. Dennis Potter, "The Celluloid Messiahs," *Sunday Times*, 10 April 1977: 33.

104. Potter, "Celluloid Messiahs," 33.

105. The BBC often produced books to accompany special productions (*MPFC: UC*, 1.361; 2.22).

106. Cupitt and Armstrong, *Who Was Jesus?* 27.

107. Isaiah 52:14: "As many were astonied at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men."

108. Robert Eisler was an Austrian historian (who was also Jewish). His controversial rereading of Josephus, *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist* was published in English in 1931. Chapter 15 discusses Eisler's reading of Josephus's remarks on the physical appearance of Jesus.

109. This is much like Pasolini's choice for his Jesus, including the unibrow.

110. Cupitt and Armstrong, *Who Was Jesus?* 27–28.

111. Cleese had appeared on the cover of *Spare Rib* on 6 December 1972.

112. Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, 328.

113. Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, 328.

114. Marcuse, "Interview with Herbert Marcuse."

115. "One Who Embraces," *Spectator*, 6 April 1974: 10. The Pythons have mentioned the Chaldeans, in Ep. 43, in relation to authentic "police" helmets or headwear (*MPFC: UC* 2.188).

SCENE FOUR
THE STONING

Cut to MANDY and BRIAN walking along towards the city . . .—Ahead of Mandy can be seen the city of Jerusalem set on a faraway hill. This is a forced perspective technique as old as film itself and where, if this were *Holy Grail*, Patsy would have chirped: "It's only a model."[1] The Pythons are obviously not as interested in drawing attention to this film's artifice as in their previous film. Since there are no full-size trees or other buildings to give an actual perspective to this hill shot, building a scale model and shooting it from a low angle would have been rather simple. Tiny trees were added nearby to complete the illusion of a larger city set on a hill further away than it appears. A matte shot *could* have been employed, as will be seen at the beginning of the Colosseum scene and after Brian's graffiti endeavor, and had been used to create an entire castle where ruins stood in Polanski's *Macbeth*.[2] Cost-wise, it may have been cheaper to build the model on location than create a matte painting during the postproduction process.

MANDY is fiddling away putting on a very obvious false beard—(PSC) Later we'll see that there is a designated hook in their home where she can hang her beard as she comes in, indicating, in the world of the film, that beards for Jewish women were an everyday item. In Ep. 43 of *Flying Circus*, there is a special hanging place on a bedroom wall for a rather nasty-looking, gold-plated knobkerrie, used to bang on the wall to silence the neighbors.[3]

The wife of the pharaoh Thutmose II, Hatshepsut, may have donned a beard after the death of her husband, and ruled Egypt as co-regent, king, and then pharaoh for a total of more than twenty years (according to Josephus). The sculptured images of Hatshepsut depict her as wearing a beard, as pharaohs did for ceremonial occasions, even when she is attired in identifiably female clothing. (She may have shaved her head, as well, which was also the custom of the elite.) It's also clear Hatshepsut was *not* trying to hide behind the beard; it may just have been that false facial hair was an important part of the ruler's expected attire of state.

MANDY: "Oh, I hate wearing these beards"—Mandy is wearing the beard so she can participate in a ritual set apart for men only—like priestly activities, and some access to the temple (often forbidden due to a woman's ritual uncleanliness or impurity). This separation of sexes wasn't confined to first-century Jerusalem, though. Public discussion of equality for women in the mid-to-late-1970s became even more heated after the passage of the Sex Discrimination Act in November 1975. *Times* Columnist Bernard Levin wrote a blistering article directed at those "sniggering" at the prospect of more women in shipyards and foundries, comparing the sniggerers to those who laughed at NHS recipients in the late 1940s wearing their state-provided "false teeth and spectacles": "Today, the similar reaction to the new law is based on what might be called attitudes of sexual class; a particular kind of man thinks that women have no business being equal, and similarly ought to bear their lesser status without complaint."[4] Levin goes on to point a finger at women who refused to support the recent election of Margaret Thatcher to the Tory leadership, calling it "an enormous achievement" that brought only "sneers" from the "sisterhood." Bad form, that, and a missed opportunity:

> But if [women] do succeed in using the Act to press on towards genuine equality of opportunity they will indeed pose a threat to the male domination of our society, and in particular to the way in which that domination has enabled men to retain a wildly disproportionate share both of power and of the loot that goes with it. . . . [The Act] *can* have explosive effects; but only if women, and their allies among men, can use it creatively and usefully.[5]

The bearded women in the scene have used their ally among the men, the beard salesman, to secure participation in a man's event, the effects being at least concussive, if not explosive. Levin's call for civility prompted some sniggering from Auberon Waugh just nine days later:

> I fear I'm beginning to lose my admiration for the Thoughts of Bernard Levin. . . . Why has he joined the chorus of randy London bachelors saying we must not snigger at sexual equality? . . . Perhaps you have to be a married man living in the country to understand the cruel and unnatural thing which is being done to our women. But the Labour government's action in 1948 was not nearly as cruel as *these new proposals to equip our women with free beards and moustaches, make them work as navvies*[6] *and beat them from a tender age*.[7]

Only women will be casting stones, we'll see in a moment, all because they've taken advantage of the tacitly approved offer of beards—a kind of odd equality—allowing them to participate in what had been a man's world.

In relation to the temple, women were expected to pray at the northern gate, and men nearer the temple, in the inner court.[8] Ackerman points out that even

though the bulk of written work pertaining to ancient Israel and the Hebrew Bible was recorded by, for, and about (often elite) men's lives, female duties and roles can be "painstakingly teased out."[9] Not surprisingly, the female's area of influence tended to be in the household, and with(in) the family.[10] In an earlier draft of the script, Judith is at Brian's home, inviting Brian to dinner with her parents. In the finished film, Judith has no domestic responsibilities or role, excepting as a bedmate for Brian. Even that chore ends with her defending Brian as a "great leader," and not a great lover or provider or even boyfriend. Mandy's domestic presence is limited, as well; she tells Brian to clean his room, and provides sexual favors to Roman soldiers for an income.

The beard as forming a disguise, however, also has precedent in this period, and for men, specifically. During his tumultuous reign in Judea, Herod would sometimes don a disguise and go out into Jerusalem (where he lived most of the year) to converse with and listen to his people, gauging their mood and opinions of him.[11] Later, at the time of the unrest following the opening of Pilate's aqueduct (built at the temple treasury's expense), Pilate sent out dozens of his men, armed and disguised, to infiltrate the gathered mob and deal with the most vocal of the rabble.[12]

Lastly, the Goons had mentioned beards as part of a disguise in the "I Was Monty's Treble" episode. There, a song is determined to be fake because it's wearing a beard, and clean-shaven beneath.[13]

BRIAN: "Why aren't women allowed to go to stonings, Mum?"—A version of this exchange can be found in the earlier drafts, but there it's Judith and Brian discussing the laws, with Judith decrying the backwardness.

The oral traditions gathered into the third-century Mishnah do allow for stoning, after a proper trial and conviction. The book also explains how the stoning should be carried out, with instructions varying slightly for a male as opposed to a female stonee (generally, how they are to be dressed and situated). There does not seem to be a *specific* mention in the Mishnah that women are forbidden from participating in the stoning.[14] Leviticus 24:14 actually mentions that "all the congregation" is to participate in the stoning of the blasphemer, though there has been much disagreement as to how to decipher "all." (All men? All men, women, and children? All adults?) The sentencing would have come from men of the Sanhedrin, the witnesses would likely have been male, and at this time the Roman authorities would have had to approve the execution—again, all men. The fact that this was a religious proceeding in a patriarchal society—and the woman's place tended to be in the home—indicates little

chance of women being invited or allowed to participate in such a potentially unsettling event. Those things being said, it makes perfect sense for women in the Python world to cross-dress (put on beards) so they can participate in the man's world.

(draft) JUDITH is wearing a beard—Judith isn't in this scene in the finished film. In earlier drafts, she may be a revolutionary, but she's clearly still participating in the repressive activities of this world, though the stonings would have been part of the Sanhedrin's punishments, therefore Jewish and religious, not Roman and secular. The Sanhedrin did have the power to punish capital crimes, as well, to "conduct trials and execute sentences for capital crimes perpetrated by Jews in Judea,"[15] but, as Smallwood points out in *Jews Under Roman Rule*, "the question of the composition, powers and presidency of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem [during Hyrcanus's time] is intensely complicated."[16] That power was eventually taken from the Sanhedrin by Pilate (perhaps even before) to become part of the *jus gladii*, or "law of the sword" held by Roman prefects in Judea. The challenging factors include the nature of Brian's crime, as well as his race: Is he a Jew or Roman? Or neither?

MANDY: "It's written, that's why"—It is Josephus who offers this Sadducean,[17] letter-of-the-law conceit, essentially, in *Antiquities of the Jews*, telling us who *cannot* stand as an official witness in ancient Israel: "But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex."[18] Deuteronomy 21:21 affirms that "all the *men* of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die," and verse twenty-two says essentially the same. This would seem to preclude women from participating in these stonings as stone-throwers, too. (Women are fair game to be stoned, incidentally.) Translator Whiston can't account for this proscription: "The Pentateuch says not a word about the exclusion of women as witnesses in courts of justice," Whiston admits, before dropping the other shoe: "It is very probable, however, that this was the practice of Jews in the days of Josephus."[19] So Whiston himself is saying he doesn't know, "It's written, that's why."[20]

It would often have been wise to at least know *what* was written during this period, even if one didn't know *why* it had been written. Josephus mentions an inscription in the temple in Jerusalem, likely carved in Greek and Latin so foreigners could read it, a warning to trespassers.[21] A large engraved tablet from the temple itself was discovered in 1871, and was translated: "*No stranger is to enter within the balustrade round the temple and enclosure. Whoever is caught will be responsible to himself for his death, which will ensue*."[22] This is a sort of

“All hope abandon, ye who enter here” mentioned earlier in the opening titles discussion.[23] No one other than the Jews and, perhaps, even then only the highest-ranking priests would *really* know why the temple was such a forbidden place—for all else, it’s off-limits simply because “it’s written, that’s why.” Those that did manage to make it into the Holy of Holies, including invaders Pompey and later Titus, were quite surprised to find an austere, barren room.[24] It’s clear many polytheists didn’t believe the Jews meant it when they said no likeness of Yahweh could be managed, so none should be made.

There were plenty of “it’s written” texts (and oral litanies) that laid out rules for behavior and belief for the Jews. The ascetic Qumran Essenes had their Manual of Discipline, there were Pharisee rules and Sadducee rules (many of which conflicted), and dozens of books of scripture and apocrypha. There were laws regarding what to eat and what not to eat, what to do in the temple, with what (and by whom), there were “laws of property and laws that dealt with criminals . . . [and] laws of conduct,” including the Ten Commandments.[25] Mandy and Brian would most likely have only heard these texts as read aloud by Pharisees and scribes.[26] There were also varying degrees of ritual adherence in first century Jerusalem, ranging from spirit of the law to an almost fanatical letter of the law precision,[27] and this just among the Jews. Add in the Roman laws and the presence of many foreigners and their religions in the city, and the comprehension of all things “written” becomes virtually impossible.

Another version of “because it’s written” during this period comes from an unusual source: a novel. Frederick Forsyth’s *Dogs of War* was published in 1974, and, like Marighella’s *Minimanual*, became required reading for would-be revolutionaries. The book is essentially the recipe for a successful coup, Wheen notes. The first maxim posits that “a mere handful of mercenaries can overthrow a regime.”[28] This is just the heady stuff that the PFJ (and the RAF and JRA, etc.) wanted to hear, and where some likely stopped reading before embarking on their piratical adventures. The rest of the recipe is crucial, though. A “mere handful” like the PFJ can suffice *if*, the formula continues, “the republic is weak enough and power concentrated in the hands of a tyrant.” The PFJ would have done well to think on the last two requirements.[29] Demaris underscores this point effectively: “Terrorism has failed as a tactic because it is ineffective against a ruthless tyranny or strong democracy. Unlike organized revolution, it has never overthrown or even seriously threatened a totalitarian state.”[30]

Pilate may have been tyrannical, but he did have to answer to the Syrian Legate and then Rome, the latter being as powerful an empire as could have been

imagined. These are the reasons that coups seldom succeed in democratic or even benignly fascistic countries—the symbols of power aren't just symbols, they represent actual weapons, active militaries, and acceptable levels of economic and social stability. The banana republic is a different story, and one that Forsyth was telling. Forsyth's methods were tried and tested in the field, when mercenaries were planning an Equatorial Guinea coup d'état in 1973, but were arrested before the plot could unfold, or others successfully overthrew the Comoros, on several occasions.[31] Forsyth's plot and methods were uncannily similar to the planning and execution of a number of such attempts across Africa, the Seychelles, and on. Soldier of fortune Robert Denard led four coups against the Comoros, and Mike Hoare led one in the Seychelles, sorties that Forsyth commented on later: "It was remarkable. In Denard's attack, I learned, every mercenary had a copy of *Les Chiens de Guerre* stuck in his back pocket and in Hoare's attack they all had a copy of the English version."[32]

Lastly, the facts of life in Britain, economically speaking, would remain set in stone as long as the popular "postwar consensus" remained in effect. The wide-ranging social programs, the safety nets of social security and single-payer health, the nationalized (subsidized) industries, and the promises of full employment kept the free market wolves away from the door from 1945 through most of the 1970s. The changing global economy (thanks in part to Middle East oil), Britain's moribund manufacturing (thanks to entrenched trade unions and practices), and Britain's waning influence beyond her borders reduced the size and vitality of the domestic economy to a point where there weren't enough taxes to subsidize blossoming public responsibilities. A sort of "because it's written" mentality persisted as long as the pound was strong enough and jobs were available for all who wanted to work. This postwar consensus—that the welfare state was a comfortable and dependable fact of life—had been "the bedrock of British politics," according to Caryl, but would have to change utterly from 1979, under Thatcherism.[33]

Packets of gravel are piled in cone twists—These look like traditional chip servers (as in fish and chips), and they'll be seen again when Brian is selling otters' noses at the Colosseum.

***(draft)* BRIAN: "No. Not in the beard"**—In a draft version of the script, Judith is walking with Brian to the stoning, she's already donned her beard, and she's just snapped at him, comparing him unfavorably to Reg:

BRIAN is hurt. Pause. JUDITH looks at him. Takes his hand.

Judith: Sorry.

Brian: Don't.

Judith: Come on.

Brian: No . . . not in the beard.

Here she's wanting Brian to cuddle with her in front of Harry and the woman carrying the donkey, but Brian is clearly uncomfortable with the potentially homoerotic image this would convey. The OT mentions "sodomites" practicing their "abominations" in 1 Kings 14:24, while the Torah calls the act abhorrent; the Lord's displeasure with that act would certainly keep public displays of homosocial affection to a minimum. Leviticus 20:13 even calls for a death sentence for both participants in a homosexual union. Ancient Roman and Greek views of same-sex relationships would have been much more relaxed, as discussed by Jason von Ehrenkrook in "Effeminacy in the Shadow of Empire":

> "Normal'' sexual behavior for a *vir* [a fully masculine male] encompassed three orifices: the *vir* who penetrates the vagina (*fututor*), the *vir* who penetrates the mouth (*irrumator*), and the *vir* who penetrates the anus (*pedicator/pedico*). That a *pedicator* might penetrate a male anus, or an *irrumator* a male mouth, was of no consequence to the penetrator's status as a *vir*. Conversely, the corresponding receptive behavior that did in fact compromise one's status as a *vir*, placing him into the category of gender deviant, included performing oral sex on a female (*cunnilinctor*) or male (*fellator*) and receiving anal intercourse (*pathicus* or *cinaedus*).[34]

Jewish religious authorities of Jerusalem would have been much less receptive to these more permissive categories; if Brian is going to be public about his affections, then it will be with the unbearded Judith. It's during this very period in Britain that the great struggle between religious fundamentalists and the more permissive society was being waged, featuring campaigners like Mary Whitehouse and Malcolm Muggeridge on one side, and Germaine Greer and Roy Jenkins on the other.

Beyond the local employment of beards to mask female faces at religious events open only to men, the image of the "bearded revolutionary"—facial hair somehow signifying the anti-authoritarian credentials of the wearer (Lenin and Trotsky, Guevara and Castro, for example)—comes forward through the 1920s and into the 1970s. In a 1966 story covering the south Wales elections, the winning Liberal candidate is described, probably tongue-in-cheek, as wearing colors that are "dangerously revolutionary," and "his beard adds to the impression."[35] In this same election cycle, the headline "All Beards are Suspect to Labour" graced a *Telegraph* column in January 1966; the story beneath reads as silly as the leader, and comes from Hull:

> Growing a beard is a time-honoured form of disguise, but Mr. Gott, the Radical Alliance[36] candidate, who has a luxuriant nut-brown one, will have to reverse the process if he wants to gatecrash another Labour meeting here. Stewards at the two Labour meetings last night were told to watch for anybody with a beard seeking admission. Mr. John Gittings, Mr. Gott's agent, who is also bearded, was asked if he was Mr. Gott. Mr. Peter Jackson, Labour's prospective candidate for High Peak, Derbyshire, was also challenged. Mr. Gott, who was escorted from a Labour meeting on Sunday, told me he is now thinking of sending a few "doubles" to attend meetings.[37]

Mr. Gott was able to claim 253 votes in this by-election, but the seat remained safely Labour.

In 1970s Britain, the image of the bearded person had taken on very definite political connotations, and as early as 1971 the suggested image must have been rather widely accepted, too. In an article about the contentious Industrial Relations Bill,[38] the influence on/from the Left by the Communist Party was presented as a given: "It is not a revolutionary party in the bearded, grenade-draped sense of the word but a formidable political organization with a single-minded devotion."[39] Moderates and those on the right of the Conservative and even Labour (and Liberal) parties and their sympathetic newspapers now identified the dangerous Far Left by appearance, including the "progressive" and bearded teachers discussed later.[40] Bernard Donoughue met with a reporter friend, Brian MacArthur, of the *Evening Standard*, who passed on that "working on the *Standard* is now terrible. They are instructed to get pictures of pickets with beards, but that is all. No analysis."[41] Donoughue also notes that when he was first part of the 1974 Wilson administration he and his staff were vetted for security purposes, one older official asking "about one of my staff. 'Is he vulnerable to subversion? He has a beard.'"[42] Two years later times hadn't changed, as Donoughue noted the "positive vetting" of a newer member of his staff by British intelligence even though the intelligence man has "worried that [his] housing man had a beard."[43] By the mid-1970s in Britain beards were still considered by many to be something to hide behind. But bearded women? On a later trip to Ruskin College, Oxford in October 1976, Donoughue records that at the tea after Callaghan's education speech,[44] "the PM went to discuss the [education] issues with some student representatives, all—including the girls, I'm sure—with beards."[45]

And even though it's considered fairly certain that Israelite males during Jesus's time all wore beards[46]—including Jesus, his disciples, and his detractors—the nuclei of the PFJ do not. The social stigma attached to beardlessness in the later Talmudic period seems to argue against being clean shaven—a beard was "the adornment of a man's face," and in the Talmud "a man without a beard was

compared to a eunuch."[47] The PFJ's clean-shaven appearance sets them apart from most everyone else at the Sermon—these beardless rebels—and will be discussed later as they plan their raid on Pilate's palace. It's not likely that the Pythons de-bearded the PFJ for any other reason beyond presenting them as very young and rebellious, but it also did give the troupe a break from hair and makeup sessions as the shoot wore on.

HARRY, the stone salesman—This quick moment is unusual and worth mentioning. The rock and gravel sale is a commercial transaction[48] that actually goes to plan—a rarity in the Python world. In *Flying Circus*, there are a handful of such transactions, including a City Gent buying a copy of the *Times* before embarking on the famous "Silly Walk" sketch (Ep. 14), a native guide leads intrepid explorers right to a "smashing little restaurant" and is paid for his efforts, and a man buys and then receives an argument (both in Ep. 29). Most transactions, whether financial or informational, go awry in *Flying Circus* and *Holy Grail*—for example, Arthur's attempts to gather adherents or even guidance ("What knight lives in that castle?") on his quest prove incredibly frustrating. In *Flying Circus* we are presented with the Pythons' version of Britain as the "nation of shopkeepers" mentioned earlier by Spike Milligan (and earlier still by Napoleon and Adam Smith, et al.).[49] These vendors sell encyclopedias (Ep. 5), pet parrots (Ep. 8), lingerie (Ep. 10), albatross (Ep. 13), jokes and novelties (Ep. 15), fishy aftershave (Ep. 17), meat and insults (Ep. 18), tobacco and newspapers (Eps. 6 and 25), arguments, abuse, and "being hit on the head lessons" (Ep. 29), cheese (Ep. 33), pornography (Ep. 36), and Icelandic honey (Ep. 45). Most of the transactions in these establishments come to naught, while the customer is often frustrated as the narrative is hijacked in some other direction. The British and Roman empires had been sustained and expanded thanks to goods and human trade—"trade and empire went hand in hand"[50]—creating more nations of shopkeepers in far-flung provinces: "The spearhead, one could say, of Roman expansion . . . was as much economically based as it was militarily based," Hendrix points out. "We have a lot of evidence that tells us about Roman venture capitalists out there on the fringes of Roman economic spheres, beginning to build their small economic empires, and in some cases rather larger economic empires, that brought with [them] Roman rule."[51] The "venture capitalists" in *Life of Brian* don't seem to be molested by the Romans, carrying on their trade ("How much for the gourd?") around the city walls and as a backdrop to the actions of Brian, the PFJ, and the Roman soldiers. The more contemporary British Commonwealth also relied on favored exchange between

member states, agreements that had been (and continue to be) one of the main points of contention in the EEC.

MERCHANT (Idle): "Stone, madam?"—This woman is wearing no beard, so she's clearly a woman; it's then interesting that Harry is offering to sell her stones, since "it's written" that she, being a woman, cannot actually attend stonings, and he would know that. He's not flouting a Roman, civil law, but a religious one important to the Jews of Judea, meaning, if he's an observant Jew, he would have to answer to religious authorities, the same men who would have condemned Matthias to death for blasphemy.

Selling stones for a stoning is just the Pythonesque version of the active commercial life Jerusalem enjoyed, especially around Passover, one of the three pilgrimage festivals that gathered thousands into the city.[52] Sellers of animals (doves, goats, sheep, cattle) for temple sacrifices were needed, as were moneychangers to convert foreign money into that which was acceptable for the required half-shekel temple tribute, as well as the sellers of pilgrimage souvenirs and trinkets. The pilgrim coming to the temple for Passover would need a sacrificial animal, and could buy one in the streets outside the temple; the Pythons' pilgrims coming to the stoning will need a stone to participate fully in this other "religious" activity, and can buy one from Harry on his (or her) way.

This also likely tells us that this works along the lines of the black market during World War II—illegal but always a wink and a deal made if there's money available. The Pythons grew up in wartime and postwar England, where black market goods were on offer if you knew who to ask, an underground economy cautioned against in newspapers and government radio broadcasts of the period.[53] During and after the war, when rationing was in effect, sought-after items ranged from any meat not from a horse to budgie seed to affordable liquor (even legitimate pubs were having to depend on black market vendors).[54] Alcohol and cigarettes weren't rationed, but thanks to the German naval activity around the United Kingdom, both became harder and harder to find as the war dragged on. In Dunstable, A. W. Morgan remembers that a kind of charcoal-gray black market developed as rationing bit harder: "Our neighbour managed to get meat from a butcher in exchange for surplus eggs and my mother exchanged some of my 'sweet' coupons for 'sugar' coupons from another neighbour and thereby was able to build up a stock for jam making when fruit was plentiful."[55] So, not stolen goods flogged from the back of a lorry or out of a trench coat, but daily necessities acquired through clever bargaining and trades of rationed items—this is the England the Pythons knew as youngsters.

An elderly woman, almost bent double by the weight of a huge donkey on her shoulders, staggers past—See the "donkey rides" sight gags from *Flying Circus*, Eps. 3 and 35.[56] Also, this "elderly woman" isn't so elderly, and is played by the same woman who played the wife to Mr. Big Nose in the previous scene, Gwen Taylor.

The stone salesman whips open his coat, revealing rows of artificial beards . . .—This is the sure sign of the street peddler, and more than likely one who is selling black market goods. The legal products, rocks and gravel, are on display, while the illegal goods, the beards, are hidden in the coat. This "open-coat" trope has been seen in cartoons, on television, and in films for many years. Idle often played this type of fast-talking "spiv" character in *Flying Circus*, as a burglar selling encyclopedias, a door-to-door jokes and novelties salesman, and as a vicar hawking water heaters, Cup Final tickets, biros, the lot.[57] In the popular *Dad's Army* (1968–1977), Private Walker (James Beck) played this role, always ready for a quick sale of whisky, cricket balls, or King George VI "coronation beer mugs."

WOMAN: "I haven't got time to go to no stonings. 'E's not well again"—Ailing animal aside for a moment, in *Holy Grail* it was Dennis and his mother who were too busy gathering "lovely filth" to be bothered by their king's (re)quest. These are early medieval characters whose feet are planted firmly in their lives and work, and whose connections and allegiances to any representation of the state is ephemeral at best.[58] The clannish nature of a Jewish existence likely prevented this kind of dislocation, since even the Diaspora gathered together wherever they found themselves in the postexilic period. In Jerusalem of the first century, Jews would have been necessarily attached to the religious activities and expectations of the temple cult and festivals; the quotidian nature of sacerdotal life likely kept *most* from wasting much time at stonings or sermons or meeting with terrorist cells.[59] Bogdanor notes that in Britain such individual-State interactions are a recent development, and that up until about the end of the nineteenth century, the "role of the State" was a limited one:

> If you look at 1900, the average British person, provided he or she kept out of the hands of the police and did not commit a crime, would have nothing whatever to do with the State—the State would not impinge: there was no health insurance, no unemployment insurance, nothing to connect you with the public authorities. But, gradually, all that changed: from the First World War, the Liberal reforms and so on.[60]

This change has much to do with the increase in the British people's "confidence in the State," something the PFJ and Brian don't seem to share. Auberon Waugh described this type of person who would avoid a stoning—or perhaps the modern equivalent in Britain, the picket line's attack on scabs—as someone whose everyday life mattered more:

> On such days as this one realises that England still survives. Beneath the notice of television or colour supplements there exists a whole world of quiet, intelligent people going about their daily lives pretty well as they have always done, untroubled by trade unionists or transistor radios or comprehensive schools. The secret is to take no interest in what people say is happening, and disbelieve everything you read in the newspapers.[61]

The health of the family's donkey might have meant the difference between life and death, between sustenance and starvation, or even between being lower-middle class and poor. In this the Elderly Lady perhaps represents what later came to be called the "Essex Woman" (and "Essex Man"), the quasi-real C2[62] working-class voters who elected Margaret Thatcher in 1979. This is a rare figure in the Python oeuvre, the seemingly normal person who, even when given the opportunity, refuses to become or remain a part of the narrative folderol. Dennis's mother in *Holy Grail* is another such character.

The donkey is also an indication that the woman isn't a slave, and that she owns at least one animal, setting her above the beggars seen later, and perhaps even above Brian and his mother. As a method of transportation, the ass was oft-used in first-century Jerusalem, according to Jeremias, and an important beast of burden for tradesmen.[63] The class arguments that were heard in *Holy Grail* are not really part of this world, though class and privilege meant a great deal in ancient Judea.[64] Magness writes: "Social categories among Jews were religiously based (for example, priest versus Israelites or being a member of a sect or movement), not economically defined."[65] (Example: The "wealthy Jew" Gregory and his wife end up on crosses just behind Brian, underscoring this classlessness.) There's also no indication as to how the woman actually uses the ass, whether for milk or for personal transportation or hauling, or, worse, whether she is somehow associated with one of the so-called "despised" trades, an ass-driver. Despised trades included most anyone who drove animals or transported goods, the lot being seen as conniving and dishonest.[66] Incidentally, the peddler selling the stones is also considered a despised trade participant, as would anyone selling "rich Imperialist titbits," or haggling for beards or gourds. Jeremias notes that "there can be few reputable trades left," so most of what we see in the streets of *Life of Brian*'s Jerusalem is ritually impure.[67]

Finally, carrying a sick donkey isn't an odd act, considering the way animals might be treated in the ancient world. It didn't pay to be a sacrifice-worthy animal, of course, since most of the major religions, pagan and otherwise, spilled blood as part of elaborate, crucial rituals to please various gods. The temple in Jerusalem was said to "resemble a busy slaughterhouse" at times.[68] A number of the film versions of the nativity featured shepherds carrying a lamb, and there are scores of devotional paintings, old and new, depicting Christ carrying a lamb. Roman beliefs put animals in odd situations, too. Inside the Senate chamber, and next to the altar to Apollo, a "coop of sacred chickens" served as auguries when important decisions were considered. The chickens were fed "hallowed grain" and then watched closely for their signal of the omens, good or ill.[69]

HARRY *(to Mandy)*: "Stone, sir?"—The salesman has switched adroitly from addressing the donkey-bearing woman as "madam" to calling Mandy "sir," likely since she's sporting the called-for beard. It's not clear whether he knows he's addressing a woman dressed like a man, there's no wink-wink moment between them. In fact, he deals with Mandy as a straight-ahead customer, pointing out the craftsmanship of the stones he sells.

In *Flying Circus*, the cross-dressed man isn't often identified, at least textually. In Ep. 9 the lumberjack (Palin) admits to dressing like a woman, and in Ep. 14 two characters admit to cross-dressing. One, played by Chapman, is an MP appearing on a news show to discuss housing (and dressed completely as a woman), and the other, played by Cleese, admits to being a female impersonator who has dated Dinsdale Piranha.[70] Other than that, the characters dressed as female are treated as female, and sometimes rat-bag females, but as women, even if there is a sexual setting, as in Ep. 17, when a Poet Inspector (Palin) is being cooed over by a lusty, lonely housewife (Jones).

Lastly, American novelist Herman Melville visited Jerusalem in 1857, and was greatly disappointed at the gray, barren tattiness of the entire region. In *Clarel*, he soliloquized on the wretched stones he found at every turn:

> Stones of Judea. We read a good deal about stones in Scriptures. Monuments & stumps of the memorials are set up of stones; men are stoned to death; the figurative seed falls in stony places; and no wonder that stones should so largely figure in the Bible. Judea is one accumulation of stones—stony mountains & stony plains; stony torrents & stony roads; stony walls & stony fields, stony houses & stony tombs; stony eyes & stony hearts. Before you and behind you are stones. Stones to the right & stones to the left.[71]

Melville—whose Jerusalem was a Pythonesque "half melancholy, half farcical"—is clearly not appreciating the stones as either Harry or Mandy will, and leaves the Holy Land uninspired.[72]

MANDY: "Nah, they've got them up there lying around on the ground"—In Zeffirelli's version, there *are* stones just "lying around" ready to be used for a stoning. The *Brian* script does call it "The Stoning Place," after all, but it's not quite the same as described in the Mishnah. In the Zeffirelli version, which the Pythons clearly emulate, Christ refuses to convict the woman, and after asking those who are without sin to cast their stones first, the crowd (of men) drop their stones, rather cinematically, and wander off. The woman is then forgiven. The final shot of the scene depicts Christ standing where the woman had cowered, discarded stones scattered around his feet.

HARRY: ". . . feel the quality of this—that's craftsmanship"—Craftsmanship seems to have been very important in Jerusalem during this period, perhaps thanks to the well-known work on Herod's palace: "Both in exterior decoration and interior appointment, in the selection of materials as in their treatment, in wealth of variety as in costly detail, the various crafts competed: the sculptor, the tapestry maker, the planner of fountains and ornamental gardens, the goldsmith and the silversmith, were all engaged in the work."[73] This is the palace that Pilate would have likely been occupying, and which we will see later in a state of remodeling. There, we will also see an example of an elaborate mosaic in tile on the palace floor, representing another of the surviving hints of Jerusalem's place in architectural history. Harry is probably thinking of himself as a stonemason, a rather high-ranking position among Jerusalem's craftsmen, according to Jeremias.[74] His off-the-books job is more in the gray market area of beard manufacture and selling.

Gilliam and his crew actually handcrafted the stones for this and the following stoning scene, according to Palin.[75]

MANDY stops and appraises the stone. Weighs one up professionally—She's obviously done this before, and knows the kind of stone she likes for such forbidden events. In the Zeffirelli version, there are women glimpsed in the shots, but they are at the back, watching—none are clasping stones.

BRIAN: "Can I have a flat one, Mum?"—Brian makes the mistake of betraying Mandy's gender, but a simple "shush" is enough to keep the illusion in place, at least for Harry, who wants to make a sale. In *Holy Grail*, Patsy's "reveal"—a remark that "It's only a model"—is also shushed, and the diegetic fiction is maintained.

MANDY (adopts a lower register)—(PSC) In Ep. 10 of *Flying Circus*, the police are only able to communicate with one another (and the general public) once they've learned each other's speaking idiosyncrasies, including higher and lower registers, loudness, *etc.*[76] In the film as shot Mandy does *not* attempt to change her voice, and the rock salesman doesn't seem to notice (or just doesn't care, given he's making a sale) that she might be a woman.

HARRY: "Should be a good one this afternoon . . . local boy"—Given that this is a religious punishment, it's likely that most of the condemned would be "local." The local versus foreign argument might be more applicable to those figures appearing in the games, especially the gladiatorial combats. The Emperor Commodus, born near Rome, fought in hundreds of gladiatorial combats, and appears to have been a popular "local boy" to the bloodthirsty masses, though not necessarily to the military or city fathers.[77] He would eventually be assassinated. In contemporary terms, "local" boys like boxer Alan Tottoh of Manchester were touted this way, drawing larger home crowds than visiting stars on the fight circuit, even though they may have been no more accomplished.[78] The term appears in relation almost exclusively to boxing and politics across the years.[79]

The STONING PLACE—(PSC) This is set up almost precisely as the scene from *Jesus of Nazareth* where the "woman taken in sin"[80] was set to be stoned—featuring ancient stone walls[81] and a crowd of assembled priests and stone-clutching Jews. The Pythons had worried prior to shooting that using some of the same sets and backdrops might be too familiar to viewers, since *Jesus of Nazareth* had broadcast to enormous viewership in April 1977, but they chose this setting anyway.

By the way, even though Brian and Mandy are pictured hustling toward the stoning so as to not miss it, once the scene begins they aren't pictured at all. They aren't part of the crowd of "men" ready to throw stones, nor do we see either of them throw a stone or even watch as others throw. There are surviving frame captures[82] that show both of them at the back of the crowd, but the Pythons obviously decided to cut them out of the finished film.

An OFFICIAL stands here, with some helpers—This official must represent the high priests of the city, members of the Sanhedrin, of which there may have been two separate bodies, according to Zeitlin,[83] the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, and others:

> For neither Josephus nor the Gospels in speaking of the Sanhedrin report any of its decisions or discussions referring to the priests or to the Temple service, or touching in any way upon the religious

> law, but they refer to the Sanhedrin exclusively in matters connected with legal procedure, verdicts, and decrees of a political nature; whereas the Sanhedrin in the hall of hewn stone dealt, according to the Talmudic sources, with questions relating to the Temple, the priesthood, the sacrifices, and matters of a kindred nature. Adolf Büchler assumes indeed that there were in Jerusalem two magistracies which were entirely different in character and functions and which officiated side by side at the same time. That to which the Gospels and Josephus refer was the highest political authority, and at the same time the supreme court; this alone was empowered to deal with criminal cases and to impose the sentence of capital punishment. The other, sitting in the hall of hewn stone, was the highest court dealing with the religious law, being in charge also of the religious instruction of the people (Sanh. xi. 2–4).[84]

As described above, it's still not clear which body would have dealt with a Jew who blasphemed and deserved capital punishment, especially at a time when such punishments may have been enforceable only with Roman permission.

The Official's costuming, and especially his headdress, is actually less like those seen in *King of Kings* or *Jesus of Nazareth*, and more like the exaggerated hats created for the priests to wear in *Jesus Christ Superstar*. The costume designers have done their homework here, though. The Official's tunic is not held together with buttons, which wouldn't be used in this way until about the thirteenth century, but brooch-like ornamentation at the chest and a thong that runs up the side of the body and inside of the arms. These can be untied and loosened to put on or remove the tight-fitting garment. He appears to wear the ritual fringes required of all observant adult males (Deut. 22:12), though it's not clear whether he's wearing only woolen clothing, another requirement, and not a mix of linen and woolen clothing (Deut. 22:11). His clothing is also white—more expensive, harder to make (bleaching is required), and harder to keep clean.

The timeline here isn't completely clear, but it should be pointed out that if this is the Passover eve—and the presence of Biggus Dickus might support that—then the Sanhedrin seems to be running afoul of its own laws. The Mishnah was very clear in these matters, Rosenblatt reminds us:

> One of the characteristics of the Pharisees that made them particularly objectionable in the eyes of the authors of the [NT] was that they were sticklers for the letter of the law. If this characterization is correct, then they could never have had anything to do with either the trial of Jesus or his death by crucifixion. Under the rules of Pharisaic law as summarized in the tractate of Sanhedrin of the Mishna no hearings in a case involving capital punishment could be initiated on the eve of a major holiday like Passover. No conviction was permitted to be brought in at night. No sentence might be executed on the day of a festival.[85]

So Matthias could not have been tried and convicted if the Passover were the following day, nor could he be executed, if the letters of laws were followed. Rosenblatt notes that since even note taking was forbidden on this day, as well,

no court proceeding could have been accomplished.[86] The Roman prefect would have to have given his permission, as well, meaning an earlier meeting with Pilate (which could have happened, offscreen). All these are letter of the law rules, certainly, which the Pythons have never slavishly followed in their citing of history and historical characters.

Ultimately, in the stoning scene from *Jesus of Nazareth*, the visual influence for this scene in *Brian*, all of these same juridical considerations are also ignored or, less likely, perhaps accomplished offscreen. The woman taken in adultery is simply dragged into the scene/shot, like Matthias, she is accused by her captors, and the priests(?) tell them to take her to Jesus for his condemnation.

. . . the potential stonee, MATTHIAS—Matthias is wearing a simple loincloth, a clear indication of his role as a convicted man ready for punishment. He is essentially "naked" wearing only this undergarment. The "weedy Samaritan" will be dressed similarly when he's pushed onto the Colosseum sand, and Brian will be stripped to a loincloth as he's affixed to the cross.

OFFICIAL (Cleese): "Matthias son of Deuteronomy of Gath"—There are at least two "Matthias" possibilities to note here. The first is a Matthias who, like our Matthias, got himself into trouble with Jerusalem's leadership. This Matthias was the High Priest Matthias who, in about 5 BC, was sacked by Herod for "allowing" several overzealous rabbis and their pupils to tear down an eagle Herod had installed on a wall of the temple.[87] Another Matthias only appears in the New Testament, and is known for being the disciple who replaced Judas. Matthias was later (perhaps) martyred in Ethiopia. Our Matthias is in trouble here with the religious authorities and threatened with stoning; later he is in dutch with the Roman authorities and threatened with crucifixion. He seems to be what Pilate might have termed a "notowious cwiminal," even more so than the later mentioned "wapist," "wobber," and "pickpocket"—and yet Matthias escapes unharmed, as far as we can tell.

Deuteronomy is the fifth book of the Hebrew Bible, and rarely used as a name. It is, however, one of the OT books cited often in regard to Mishnah laws, and, along with Leviticus, would have been the books the Pythons scanned as they prepared for the film, as well as the Synoptic Gospels and John. Gath is one of the Philistine cities mentioned in the OT, and a place name found throughout the OT. The name "Gath" appeared in British newspapers often, in relation to many new Israeli settlements being created as thousands of Jews returned to their homeland. "Gath" also appeared as a clue for a number of crossword puzzles appearing in the *Times* after 1963.

OFFICIAL: “. . . found guilty by the elders of the town of uttering the name of our Lord . . .”—Richard describes this phenomenon in the first century: “By contrast [to the polytheistic Roman religion], the Hebrew religion involved the worship of Yahweh, an omniscient, omnipotent, and inscrutable but loving and creative God who appeared in various forms (e.g., as a burning bush) and whose name could not be uttered.”[88] It’s not clear where “could not be uttered” comes from, except as an accretion over time, or as the influence of one rabbinical school over another. There don’t seem to be such prohibitions in either the Torah or the Mishnah, according to the very popular *Judaism 101*[89]:

> Nothing in the Torah prohibits a person from pronouncing the Name of God. Indeed, it is evident from scripture that God’s Name was pronounced routinely. Many common Hebrew names contain “Yah” or “Yahu.” Part of God’s four-letter Name [YHVH]. The Name was pronounced as a part of daily services in the Temple. The Mishnah confirms that there was no prohibition against pronouncing The Name in ancient times. In fact, the Mishnah recommends using God’s Name as a routine greeting to a fellow Jew.[90]

The site goes on the mention that later, “some rabbis” began to treat the utterance of God’s name more proscriptively, condemning to death or damnation (in principle, not practice) those who pronounce the four-letter name rather than using a substitute.

This is one of the very few Jewish religious references in the film, which is fascinating given the setting, first-century Jerusalem, and the subject matter, the crucifixion of a misunderstood messianic figure. The “elders” would have been high priests who were members of the Sanhedrin bodies, those authorized to hear complaints, conduct trials, and pass sentences of corporal and capital punishment. Most of the biblical movies the Pythons screened as they prepared for *Brian* feature at least one scene—often the trial of Jesus—where these bearded and somber men are gathered. With the exception of one of their officials seen here (who may be a lower level priest), there are no obvious priests or high priests depicted in the film, and no religious gathering. Brian will be condemned by Romans and Roman law, for an attempt on the life or safety of the prefect’s wife; he will face no religious charges or authorities. No such scenes seem to have been part of any draft of the script.

This sentence is the result of an actual trial, it seems (he reads from an official transcript or recommendation from that trial), which was one of the avenues through which such executions were made possible. In those cases, the accused would have been brought before the priests to answer to charges brought by witnesses. Spontaneous stonings could also be found, though those throwing the

stones would likely have to have personally witnessed the crime. “Stoning to death could occur as the spontaneous action of a mob enraged against an individual . . . since it was a form of killing for which weapons could usually be found immediately at hand,” Bauckham writes. “Formal trial is evidently not required, since those who undertake to stone [Jesus for the crime of blasphemy] have themselves witnessed the crime.”[91]

In *Jesus of Nazareth*, the stoning of the sinful woman seems to be fairly spontaneous, though the scriptures say that it was the “scribes and Pharisees” who brought her before Jesus, meaning she could have been at a trial already (John 8:3). The Johannine account makes it clear that Jesus is being tested by those who would trick him into a blasphemous trap, and the scene as depicted in *Jesus of Nazareth* may be just as spontaneous as it appears. As played out, the scene in *Brian* very much resembles the “She’s a Witch” scene in *Holy Grail*, discussed below.

OFFICIAL: “. . . as a blasphemer . . .”—There is an interesting angle from which this scene and the eventual conviction of Brian by Pilate can be examined. Death by stoning (or burning or hanging, etc.) *did* happen in first-century Jerusalem, and the Romans *did* crucify thousands as they built and then protected the empire. These scenes of sanctioned violence may be included for reasons similar to those for a plague cart heaped with bodies or a witch brought for burning in *Holy Grail*—both of which can be historically verified and have come to define an image of the Middle Ages for modern viewers. The specter of violence is also always at the Python feast, a nod to hyper-violent postwar cartoons, New Wave films, and the more “grown-up” postwar generations of film viewers. It seems clear that the Pythons weren’t out to damage the name and legacy of Jesus, to hold him up to ridicule, or cast him into a narrative that degraded, sexualized, or even “normalized” him, as other recent depictions had been accused of or attempted.[92] Those sensational books, poems, plays, and films will be discussed as we move forward.[93] The mobs who follow the messiah du jour in *Brian* and who are willing to physically put down any opposing voice are the obvious targets, though belief and believers also take body blows as the Pythons promote a more laissez faire version of the spiritual man.[94] The Pythons have gone out of their way to depict Jesus in what can only be called conservative, traditional settings, and to handle those settings and Jesus himself with kid gloves. The silliness and undercutting goes on in a manger well away from the baby Jesus, and it’s only at the back of the Sermon on the Mount that mishearings become fighting words. It could be argued that the conviction of

Jesus by the Sanhedrin, for blasphemy, and thence by the Romans, for sedition, are offered by proxy in *Life of Brian* by Matthias and later Brian himself.[95] The film parses the trials and convictions Jesus faced onto two characters, one of whom, Matthias, even manages to escape his execution when the stoning descends into a melee.[96] Brian does not escape, except by the diegetic "out" of the film ending before he dies, and when we last see him, he looks as happy on the cross as we've seen him in the film.

One of the reasons Mary Whitehouse and a handful of British faith-based organizations were so ready to pounce on even the whiff of a film like *Life of Brian* was the announced Danish film *The Sex Life of Jesus Christ*. In May 1975 the Danish government admitted that it had granted artist Jens Jørgen Thorsen funding to produce the incendiary film.[97] Thorsen then stoked the flames in preproduction interviews by promising depictions of Christ participating in both heterosexual and homosexual acts, and even orgiastic set-pieces.[98] The controversy saw members of the Danish Film Institute resign, the Vatican speak out against the project, the Queen call the idea "obnoxious," and France withdraw permissions for location filming. Mrs. Whitehouse went to the trouble of having the script translated from Danish into English so that vicars, MPs, Home Secretary Merlyn Rees, and anyone interested could read it.[99] By September 1976 hundreds of letters had been sent and received, from parishioners to prelates, and from prelates to politicians, asking that the Danish filmmaker be banned from Britain, and—if made—the film banned, as well.[100] Britain's home secretary eventually denied the filmmakers entry into the UK in February 1977.[101] No other accessible locations were granted before the film's funding guarantee expired (Denmark, Sweden, France, West Germany, Britain, and Israel all said no), and the project was dead.[102]

Closer to home, editors of the underground magazine *OZ* had been put on trial in 1971 for obscenity (for an issue put together by and directed at teens), and were eventually given prison sentences.[103] In 1977 the *Gay News* and publisher Denis Lemon had been found guilty of blasphemy at the Old Bailey in July, thanks to Mrs. Whitehouse's private prosecution charges against a poem the magazine was to publish. The poem—*The Love That Dares to Speak Its Name*, by James Kirkup—depicted a centurion's physical love for and to the crucified Christ. Prosecutor J. J. Smith was interviewed by the *Times*' Stewart Tendler:

> He said that the Crown had to prove two ingredients of the offence. One was an attack on Christianity that undermined the doctrines of Christianity or the Bible. The other was an attack made in such a manner as to pass the limits of decent controversy or discussion and outrage the feelings of any

> sympathizer of Christianity. "The nub lies in the second ingredient, the tone of this publication, the language used, such as to outrage a sympathizer," he said.[104]

Here is where the Pythons likely situated themselves, to be safe from similar attentions:

> [Smith] asked the jury to note that "we have freedom of speech, which means that you can say anything about religion . . . within limits of decent controversy. You can say Christ was a fraud or a deceiver or Christ may have been a homosexual, provided you say it in a reasonable, measured, reflective, decent way."[105]

And since Lemon was eventually only fined and given a suspended sentence, this may have given the Pythons all the impetus needed to push forward with their story that did not feature Christ himself in any controversial way.[106]

By April 1979, however, as *Life of Brian* was being prepped for distribution, nervousness still wracked the film's backers and the BBFC, who would have to give the film a rating. Palin writes on 12 April:

> [Producer] John Goldstone says the censor has been along to see *Brian* and reckons it would be an AA,[107] and he liked it, but he is concerned about licensing a movie against which there could be legal proceedings. He is sure that the Festival of Light will try and use the blasphemy law (upheld in the *Gay News* case) to try and stop the film. Lord Justice Scarman's judgement in the *Gay News* case gives them a ridiculously wide area to play with. JG wants to be sure of the church's attitude and so does the censor.[108]

EMI did flee, leaving a scramble for backing met by George Harrison's HandMade Films, and the film was completed. Ultimately Matthias is condemned for something that happened offscreen and for which there seem to be no witnesses present (these witnesses could/should cast the first stones). Matthias manages to escape this religious punishment, and he also evades punishment by the Romans. Brian is never condemned by the Jews, interestingly—separating him further from Jesus—just the Romans, which turns out to be condemnation enough.

OFFICIAL: ". . . you are to be stoned to death"—The actual practice of stoning, as carried out when the Sanhedrin enacted a death penalty, may have been quite different than the one depicted by the Pythons:

> At the place of stoning, his clothes would have been stripped off. Then one of the Sanhedrists, as witness to his "blasphemy," would have shoved him off a precipice onto the rocks below. If he were still alive, a second member of the Sanhedrin would have dropped a boulder onto his heart. If he still survived, the entire Sanhedrin and any others present would have been obliged to hurl stones down on him until he died.[109]

Not long after the crucifixion of Christ, a fellow Nazarene, Stephen, whose Christ-centered preachings and acts angered many Jews, was stoned to death for blasphemy.[110] Rather than being turned in by his wife or neighbor, like Matthias, or trapped by false charges, as Jesus was, Stephen blasted the Sanhedrin for their evils—essentially asking for a public execution.

Punishment for sins against God was very real for Jews, but could also be applied to Romans, as it turned out, especially when political expediency was involved. During the procuratorship of Cumanus (AD 48–52), an imperial slave was robbed somewhere between Jerusalem and Joppa; Roman reprisals included raids on nearby villages ostensibly looking for terrorists, but more to set a reminder of imperial power. One Roman soldier went the extra mile and destroyed, in front of horrified villagers, a "Laws of Moses" scroll, tearing it, burning it, and using "reproachful language" as he did so.[111] This "act of unspeakable desecration" led to a mob march on Caesarea, where Cumanus lived, who acted quickly in the name of peace: "Cumanus had the soldier, who was probably guilty of military insubordination as well as of a breach of the Roman law declaring the sacred rolls in the synagogue sacrosanct, beheaded in front of his accusers, a firm and uncompromising action that restored calm by satisfying Jewish indignation."[112] The Roman soldier's actions weren't blasphemous, to put a fine point on it,[113] but certainly sacrilegious and ill-advised, given the volatile political situation of Judea. The Pythons' stoning is also clearly a use of punishment as a means of maintaining public order, not by or thanks to the Roman occupiers, but by the Jews themselves,[114] perhaps understandably so:

> Because blasphemy is an intolerable profanation of the sacred, it affronts the priestly class, the deep-seated beliefs of worshippers, and the basic values that a community shares. Punishing the blasphemer may serve any one of several social purposes in addition to setting an example to warn others. Punishment propitiates the offended deities by avenging their honor, thereby averting divine wrath: earthquakes, infertility, lost battles, floods, plagues, or crop failures. Public retribution for blasphemy also vindicates the witness of the believers and especially of the priests; it reaffirms communal norms; and it avoids the snares of toleration.[115]

Zeitlin reads Jewish history similarly, and sees the Sadducees as the likely force be behind a stoning such as this one. Holding to the *written* laws and nothing else, the Sadducees

> maintained that a man should be rewarded for his good deeds in this world, and held that a person who transgressed a precept of the Bible involving a death penalty should be punished accordingly. They were of the opinion that the [Jewish] State was the foundation of the existence of the Jewish people.

> Therefore, they held that the State was responsible[116] for the deeds or acts of the individual and that the court should punish those who transgressed the laws of the Pentateuch.[117]

According to the Sanhedrin Tractate (43a) in the Babylonian Talmud, a herald announced that Jesus himself was slated for stoning after news of the miracle of Lazarus circulated, standing accused of sorcery. Forty days later, he was crucified.

And the Roman non-interference in this religious event was typical, not odd or absurd. Rome had been dealing with the dispersed Jews since at least the second century BC, and since the year 6 with Jews in Judea and their Holy City, Jerusalem. E. Mary Smallwood describes Rome's treatment of these "peculiar people":

> Two alternatives faced Rome in dealing with a religion of this sort—suppression, or toleration and protection. Rome chose toleration and protection. There is nothing surprising in this. It was in line with her general policy towards provincial cults. Unless they were politically dangerous or morally objectionable—and Judaism was not suspected of being either—no attempt was made to suppress them. . . . It was therefore only natural that the Jews should be allowed to go on worshipping their own God. . . . But Rome went further than mere toleration, and safeguarded Jewish religious liberty.[118]

Smallwood is seconding Zeitlin, who writes twenty-five years earlier:

> It seems to me that there is no doubt that the Jews had full religious freedom under the Romans. The Romans never interfered in their internal affairs. As Josephus records, Fadus and Tiberius Alexander abstained from all interference with the customs of the country and kept the nation at peace, since it was not the policy of the Romans to intervene in the religious and cultural life of the peoples whom they conquered.[119]

So the Pythons are right here: Roman soldiers are going to shake their heads at the silly religious claptrap about "blasphemy," but they won't step in and stop a religious exercise, even if it's a capital punishment. If the punishment had been for a crime against the Romans, then the Jews would have had no authority to carry it out, and Rome's interference would have been expected.[120]

MATTHIAS: ". . . all I said to my wife was 'That piece of halibut was good enough for Jehovah'"—These are all English versions of first-century languages spoken in Jerusalem, but "Jehovah" itself is a much later term. In Tyndale's Bible of the earlier sixteenth century, it's printed "Iehouah," while in the earlier Wycliffe Bible it's "Adonay," one of the replacement versions of God's name.[121] The version as uttered by Matthias, "Jehovah," can't be found in popular print until Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667).

According to longstanding tradition, more than one witness is required to confirm the offense before an execution can be carried out: "At the mouth of two

witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; *but* at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death."[122] It's not clear in the scene (from the charge read out by the official) whether the wife is a witness, beyond hearing the utterance in the first place, and if Matthias were turned in by his wife. Deuteronomy 17:7 also demands that the witnesses be the first to cast stones, meaning some of the gathered should be witness to the crime. This latter isn't likely, though, since the stoners are all bearded women, and Josephus tells us that women and slaves are disqualified.[123]

It's also not likely that Matthias would have been able to get his hands on halibut, since these are deep-water fish found in the northern Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Trade across the vast Roman Empire might have brought the fish all the way to Jerusalem, but almost certainly not to Matthias's plate. The halibut gets top billing here likely for reasons closer to home. In Ep. 23 of *Flying Circus*, for instance, Mr. Praline mentions that his pet fish, Eric, "is an halibut."[124] Earlier, in Ep. 17, one of the sought-after "fishy" requisites (aftershaves) was something "a little bit more halibutish."[125] The reference even goes back to the Goons, where "Halibut" is a silly name for a wealthy family.[126] Fish from the nearby Red Sea included St. Peter's fish, carp, and catfish.

This is a slightly different version than the more elaborate "outing" in the original version of the script. In this earlier version Matthias finishes his explanation by saying "and she turned me in," meaning his wife had turned him over to the religious authorities for blasphemy.[127] These few additional words are themselves leftovers from an entire scene that appeared in an earlier draft of *Brian*. There, a wife (dragging two children) works very hard to convince the centurions that her husband is the Brian they are looking for. It's not clear why she wants to turn him in, except that he's described in the script as "*wretched*," but she is quite persistent that he's Brian, not "Errol," as he's claiming. Other scenes mentioned and now missing include an early shepherd scene (which Palin was rehearsing on set[128]), the fight with Pilate's enormous wife, the Pythons' version of the Last Supper featuring Brian and two "easy" disciples, and additional Otto and Sermon on the Mount–type scenes. These either disappeared before being filmed—like the "King Brian the Wild" scene for *Holy Grail*—or were filmed and later edited out.[129]

OFFICIAL: "Blasphemy! He's said it again"—Saying it more than once makes it worse? Perhaps, if there were a warning from the elders about some violation of religious law, and then the violation was repeated. If one sign of devotion to the Lord were good, then many or repeated indications should be

much better, some thought: “It was said that Moses had received the law of their observance from God on Mount Sinai; that the ‘tephillin’ were more sacred than the golden plate on the forehead of the high-priest, since its inscription embodied only once the sacred name of Jehovah, while the writing inside the ‘tephillin’ contained it not less than twenty-three times.”[130] So at least in one rabbinical tradition, repetition did matter, but in this case making someone more holy, as opposed to more condemned.

This may be a reference to Peter’s infamous denial, which appears in all four of the Gospels.[131] Jesus has told Peter that before the morning the follower would deny or disown his Lord three separate times; Peter was certain he would rather die. Sure enough, Peter was given three chances to admit that he knew and followed Jesus, and three separate times he denied such. In this case one would not have been enough, the second and third utterances did in fact make “it worse”—the repetition was necessary to fulfill Jesus’s prophecy. Incidentally, the (Sanhedrin) Official does not tear his mantle here after hearing this repeated blasphemy, an act we’ve seen in various iterations of Jesus’s trial in recent popular film, where Caiaphas is depicted.[132]

OFFICIAL: “Are there any women here today?”—The cross-dressing gets confusing here, as the Pythons are men dressed as women who are then pretending to be men. On the Elizabethan stage this kind of confusion was quite normal: a young male actor always played the younger female roles, and sometimes those roles required the female character to pretend to be male. Boys pretending to be girls pretending to be men upset many anti-theatricalists in Elizabethan and Stuart times, where both “aesthetic and erotic pleasure” was feared and realized.[133] That’s not the case here, nor with most Python cross-dressings. In the stoning scene the women are dressing as men to participate in the man’s religious world, a world off-limits to them because of their gender. They are trying to deceive the Official, otherwise they couldn’t participate, meaning a sin is being committed here, too. There are no uneasy sexual moments in this scene, though; that will happen in the following scene, when Mandy seems ready to offer a sexual favor to a Roman soldier. That specter was also raised moments earlier, in the draft version, when Brian resists Judith’s amorous advances because she’s wearing a beard.

But it wasn’t just the strict Sadducees or Pharisees who kept women at bay. The Pythons had been taking the female roles since before they were Pythons. The revues at Cambridge and Oxford were, if not forbidden to women, certainly not welcoming. The Pythons had written and performed all their own work, only

giving away the female roles that called for actual femininity or, more honestly, actual breasts. The troupe ran a fairly closed shop.

In the world outside the film and the Pythons, other areas historically seen as a bastion of men began to change during the 1970s: the unions and the picket line. The workers at Grunwick who initially went on strike in 1976 were primarily Asian females, and were soon joined by sister members of the Communist Party Women's Group, assorted "stroppy feminists," and even Labour minister Shirley Williams showed up to have her picture taken with the strikers.[134] Pictures of the strike featured more female faces than previous strike actions—not women as spouses but women as workers—and especially women of color. One of those interviewed during the strike had this to say: "If you look 'round at this strike or if, you know, as the build-up to this big mass—mass day of support, I think you'd find that the number of women who have participated in it have been fantastically high."[135] The singing of songs of solidarity had been a mainstay of strikes for many years in Britain, and the Grunwick strike was no different, except that here female voices rang through.[136] One of the songs pointed up the female presence:

> Hey Susie are you comin'? / With us in the van?
> Bring the kids 'round our place, / They'll stay with my old man.
> We're going to join our sisters / On the march to victory,
> With union might and women's rights / In solidarity.[137]

The role husbands played might have been exaggerated, yes, but the Grunwick action will be discussed in more detail later.

MATTHIAS: "Ow. Lay off . . ."—A twentieth-century term, and leaning more American than British, according to the *OED*. The Official won't cancel the stoning because of one stoner who false starts, but, as in middle school, the troublemaker gets sent to the back.

During this they keep their voices as low as they can, in pitch but not in volume—These ladies are trying to keep from betraying their femaleness, though the chance that one will be outed seems unlikely. In the wider shots there are *only* females wearing beards in the stoning, no men (men will be seen in the close-ups). The child behind the Official might be male, but it's not certain. Brian is not part of the crowd, either.

OFFICIAL: "Who threw that stone? Come on!"—This is suddenly a school classroom setting, one that appears often in *Flying Circus*. In the very first episode an Italian class is being taught to Italian speakers, in Ep. 2 a Cambridge Don is beaten up, a handful of students put on a bad version of *Seven Brides for*

Seven Brothers (Ep. 18), and the newer "plate-glass" universities (East Anglia, e.g.) are home to idiots and idioting degrees (Ep. 19). Here Cleese is the headmaster, as will be seen in full flower later in *Meaning of Life*.

Sensation!!!!! The WOMEN gasp—(PSC) At the mention of the name "Jehovah" again, the assembled crowd gasps as one. The printed script reflects this outrage by resorting to comic book expressions, multiple exclamation points, and a music hall (or even silent film) kind of printed verbiage. In the 1963 film *Tom Jones*, the opening sequence is structured like a silent film, complete with title cards. When the foundling is discovered in the Squire's bed, a card reads: "*Abandoned!!!*"[138] This is also one of those moments in a Python script written for the reader, and for the other Pythons. This has been a staple since *Flying Circus*, where the printed script spoke to other members of the troupe, as well as to the director and production designers at the BBC. In Ep. 12, a character bangs on his desk, then falls through a hole and into the earth. In the script as presented for production, it reads: "*He thumps on the desk and he falls through the floor. (Yes Mr Director you did read that right: he fell through the floor and added a fortune to the budget).*"[139] Here *Sensation!!!!!* is intended as a scene direction for a particular reaction, but one that might only be known to the other cast members, and only because they'd worked together and agreed on a language in their scripting. This is a tabloid headline; in fact the word "Sensation" followed by one or more exclamation points, has been used a number of times in the banner headline of the *Daily Mirror* over the years. The *Mirror* was competing with the *Sun* and *Daily Mail* for best-circulated tabloid in the later 1970s. Moments later, when Matthias begins dancing and singing "Jehovah, Jehovah" the script direction reads *Greater Sensation!!!!!*

OFFICIAL: "You're only making it worse for yourself"—Probably the only way an execution could be made worse is if it is designed to be prolonged. A stoning as laid out in the Jewish laws is quite specific, with steps that need to be followed to ensure a fairly swift death. As described above, the victim is pushed awkwardly from a fairly high and rocky point, landing on rocks; if still alive, a large rock is immediately used to finish the task. There are also OT versions where the entire populace pick up stones and conduct the execution for the good of the community, all under God's direction. As the Centurion will point out to Matthias later, crucifixion could take hours or longer, depending on the method of affixion.[140] Being burned alive sounds quite horrible, though it can't last terribly long, and wasn't attached to very many crimes, while strangulation and the sword were also possible.[141] If God is listening at this

religious event, then Matthias might also suffer from reoffending God with his repetition, according to the apocryphal *Wisdom of Solomon* 1:6: “For wisdom is a kindly spirit and will not free a blasphemer from the guilt of his words; because God is witness of his inmost feelings, and a true observer of his heart, and a hearer of his tongue.” He’s “making it worse” as he dances and sings “Jehovah,” then.

But the Official may also be referring to what the stonee can expect once he’s ushered from this world, though this would betray the Pythons’ Christian upbringing. “Jewish teachings on the subject of afterlife are sparse,” the *Encyclopedia Judaica* notes. “The Torah, the most important Jewish text, has no clear reference to afterlife at all.”[142] The noncanonical scriptures also offer hints along these lines, including the Wisdom of Solomon 3:9: “The godless will meet with the punishment their evil thoughts deserve, because they took no heed of justice and rebelled against the Lord.” Perhaps the Official is certain that Matthias is one of these “godless.” The rock ends up on the Official, anyway, postponing Matthias’s adventure into the afterlife.

MATTHIAS: “How could it get any worse?”—For international terrorists serving life sentences for their crimes, there weren’t many “get any worse” possibilities. In March 2017, however, the infamous Carlos—already serving two life sentences for bombings and kidnappings—was found guilty of murder and sentenced to yet another life sentence for his bombing of the Publicis pharmacy in Paris, September 1974.[143] Carlos was working on behalf of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) at the time.

OFFICIAL: “If you say ‘Jehovah’ one more time” ***(A stone hits him on the side of the head. He reacts.)***—This is a classic Python moment, where the tables are turned on the accuser or antagonist. In *Holy Grail*, it’s the Bridgekeeper being flustered on the Bridge of Death—uncertain whether his question to Arthur hinges on the swallow’s particular geographical heritage, “African or European”—and he is thrown in the chasm after the others.[144] Here the Official is also hoisted with his own petard, and the literality of the crowd, as he is stoned for the same utterance as Matthias.[145]

More up to date, on 23 June 1977 the aggressive strike action against Grunwick in Willesden was going well until someone in the crowd threw a bottle, hitting a policeman on the head. The stark, graphic image of PC Trevor Wilson lying in a pool of his own blood made the front page of newspapers across Britain; the image changed almost immediately the tenor of the strike, especially in the minds of the general public, who had either been sympathetic to the strikers, or

had been ignoring the fracas entirely.[146] In Brian's world, though, not even the Roman guards can muster any real feeling or effort as the religious Official is pelted, then squashed entirely. The Romans won't interfere if Jews kill Jews; and likely the effects of the bottle incident would have been quite different if it were simply one of the strikers who'd taken the hit.

Matthias also cackles noticeably as the first stone comes to a rest, happy that the Official is in for the same punishment.

Five WOMEN carry a huge rock, run up and drop it on the OFFICIAL— (PSC) This looks silly and cartoony, and was likely meant to be seen as such, but it's actually not far from the prescribed ritual as found in the Tractate Sanhedrin. According to the Mishnah, the condemned was to be pushed by his thighs from a low cliff so that he would land face first on rocks below, but not so high that his body becomes "mangled."[147] If he survived the fall, he would be turned over, and one of the witnesses was to drop or place a large rock on his chest. In some versions the stone had to be so large that it required a minimum of two men to carry it. The stoning as carried out in the film is likely a more modern, less ritualized, more spontaneous version—as seen, for example, in *Jesus of Nazareth*—but the coup de grace rock is spot-on.[148] That, or the Pythons are referring to the Lord's OT description of how a stoning should be administered when the Children of Israel were in the wilderness, and who should administer it. In Leviticus 24:10–16, the son of an Egyptian and an Israelite blasphemed during a scuffle, he was brought before Moses, and Moses prayed for guidance. Soon, his prayer was answered:

> 13 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
>
> 14 Bring forth him that hath cursed without the camp; and let all that heard *him* lay their hands upon his head, and let all the congregation stone him.
>
> 15 And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin.
>
> 16 And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, *and* all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name *of the LORD*, shall be put to death.

Moses continues his lecture, reciting the "breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth" dictum, and then: "And Moses spake to the children of Israel, that they should bring forth him that had cursed out of the camp, and stone him with stones. And the children of Israel did as the LORD commanded Moses."[149] It's not clear just how the Egyptian-Israelitish man used the Lord's name in a

blasphemous way, but it's also clear that it was more than just an utterance of the Lord's name—it was likely uttered as part of an oath or condemnation.

During the run of *Flying Circus*, these oversized, cartoony props appeared often. A sixteen-ton weight fell from nowhere to end a character and/or a scene, a helpfully labeled "anarchist's bomb" is handed to a character, a giant hand of God points out the guilty man who is then arrested[150]—visual absurdities that point up the cartooniness of the violence—as well as an oversized hammer that banged people on the head.[151] The rock brings this stoning scene to a close with another "thud," a scene that wouldn't have been nearly as funny if only smaller, more obviously realistic rocks had been used. In this age of acts of terror playing out on the nightly news, a comical hijacking can't end with dead hostages or a burning plane; it has to end with the hijackers absurdly commandeering a city bus to Cuba (*Flying Circus* Ep. 16), or a forgetful bomber asking for help in finding his bomb somewhere on the plane (Ep. 35), or a Chinese army trying to take over an English school prize-giving ceremony (Ep. 19). The ridiculousness takes the curse off the tender subject, much in the same way the Allies created derisive, ridiculing propaganda during the war, even as Hitler and the Nazis seemed poised to overrun most of Europe, and even Britain.[152]

This is also a classic "escalation" sketch structure, which the Pythons used often in *Flying Circus*. In this sketch type something starts small and then gets bigger, in this case rocks, from one rock hitting the intended target, to one hitting an unintended target, to many hitting another target, and then to the giant payoff rock squashing a man completely. The stoning begins properly, with Matthias being hit, then goes off the rails in quick order as the Official is stoned, then squashed. In the "Accidents Sketch" in Ep. 18 of *Flying Circus*, a man waiting to see someone starts a chain of accidents that get larger and larger, culminating in the house exploding into rubble.[153] The very serious and lethal act of stoning, which was still in practice when the film was being produced, is made less threatening by this ridiculous treatment, and the same approach will be used in treating both the Romans and Jews of this period.

Lastly—harking back to the discussion of empowered women thanks to the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act—the women here not only took advantage of a leveling element (the beards) to participate in what had been a males-only state-religious activity, they managed to save one of their fellow-sufferers, Matthias, and destroy the embodiment of their oppression, a Sanhedrin official. Two birds killed with that cartoony stone.

Everyone claps. The GUARDS sadly shake their heads—(PSC) Note that these guards—who don't seem sad but bored—don't attempt to intervene or break up the melee, as they eventually did earlier, at the Sermon dust-up. There are at least two reasons for this. First, as Elisabeth Vikman, quoting William V. Harris, points out, the Roman soldier had by this point become inured to violence, such that "Roman warfare was malignant":

> "Almost every year the legions went out and did massive violence to someone—and this regularity gives the phenomenon a pathological character. . . ." The otherwise abnormal behaviour adopted by soldiers surrounding battle must have been normalised, as war turns into everyday experience. Killed, violated and mutilated people must eventually become a regular feature for the soldiers. Harris claims that the Roman army had a particular taste for savage behaviour: "the regular harshness of Roman war-methods sprang from an unusually pronounced willingness to use violence against alien peoples." He believes Romans were worse in this respect than other, contemporary societies.[154]

Secondly, these Romans seem content to allow the Jews to kill each other, likely because this began as a sanctioned Sanhedrin execution. Roman soldiers as police forces had a fairly straightforward function, according to Aristides, writing of Flaccus's governorship in Alexandria, Egypt: "He instructed . . . the soldiers individually not to interfere in matters outside their military duties, but to remember that they had also been ordered to maintain the peace."[155] The large public gathering at the Sermon had the potential to devolve into a scrum—there were Jews and Samaritans in attendance—so the soldiers stepped in to separate combatants. They leave this Jewish-only religious melee alone completely. It might even be said that since a Jew was stoned to death, then this was a successful ritual, at least in the eyes of the Roman sentinels. George Bernard Shaw had voiced a similar conceit in regard to British military activity in Northern Ireland: "After all, what business is it of the British if we Irish want to slaughter each other?"[156] This would be revoiced many times and from both sides of the longstanding conflict in Northern Ireland in the 1960s and 1970s.

Josephus also relates an event toward the end of procurator Felix's rule in Jerusalem, where the high priests and the "principal men" of Jerusalem began some kind of disagreement. Gangs were formed on either side and the hurling of epithets and rocks followed. What surprised Josephus was the lack of institutional control displayed: "And there was nobody to reprove them; but these disorders were after a licentious manner in the city, as if it had no government over it."[157] Felix and his Roman garrison obviously did not step in and separate these rival factions,[158] allowing the high priests to cut off tithes and offerings from those lower priests who opposed them, leaving "the poorer sort of the priests" to die "for want."[159] Confident in their position and power, our

Roman guards watch as the potential stonee, Matthias, escapes his punishment, and the Sanhedrin Official takes on the chest a cartoony rock like the dozens that fell on Wile E. Coyote. These soldiers seem completely confident that they themselves are untouchable, that the Roman system is in full control, and that any intervention on their part is unnecessary. Emperors including and since Caesar Augustus had set the parameters in place for the tolerance of things particularly Jewish in Judea, and even in Rome itself and throughout the empire. These soldiers are like the sentries at the gates of Swamp Castle in *Holy Grail* (*sans* nosegay garlands) as they watch guests filter into the wedding, unchallenged. Here, though, there does not seem to be even the slightest concern that these Roman soldiers are in any danger from any kind of Launcelot figure—phlegmatic, they watch their charges killing each other in a sanctioned (by Rome and the Sanhedrin) religious activity.

In one of the earlier drafts Mandy thanks a remaining Official for a lovely stoning before moving off after Brian and the others. In the finished film, neither she nor Brian are seen in any of the shots.

Notes

1. Larsen, *BAFHG*, 238–39.
2. *BAFHG*, 239.
3. Larsen, *MPFC: UC*, 2.188.
4. “Sniggering Does Nothing for the Cause of Equality,” *Times*, 13 January 1976: 14.
5. “Sniggering,” *Times*, 13 January 1976: 14.
6. Slang for heavy construction worker.
7. Waugh, *FCY*, 22 January 1976; italics added.
8. Ezekiel 8:14, 16; see the entirety of Ackerman’s article, “Women in Ancient Israel and the Hebrew Bible,” in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*.
9. Ackerman, “Women in Ancient Israel.” Ackerman reminds us of a rather telling fact: “Indeed, over 90 percent of the 1400 or so individuals who are given names in the Hebrew Bible are men.” Given the actual ratio of named men to women in the scriptures, the Pythons can be credited with making more robust the female presence in their version of first-century Jerusalem.
10. Ackerman, “Women in Ancient Israel,” passim; also, King and Stager, *LBI*, 21–60.
11. Kotker, *HLTJ*, 40–41.
12. Discussed in more detail later, in “The PFJ Plan their Raid” scene.
13. 10 November 1958.
14. A searchable version of the Mishnah is available at the Jewish Virtual Library site, http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/tractate-sanhedrin.
15. Maier, *Pontius Pilate*, 129.
16. Smallwood, *JURR*, 32n36. Smallwood summarizes the complicated, contentious issue, concluding that there were essentially two Sanhedrins, one more political, one more religious. It’s no wonder the Pythons avoided the Sanhedrin entirely. See also *JURR*, 149–50.
17. See Zeitlin’s very helpful delineations of the major sects of this period, the Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes, in “The Crucifixion of Jesus Re-Examined,” 328–32. He characterizes the Pharisees as beholden to “the unwritten law,” to tradition.
18. Josephus, *AJ*, 4.8.15 (Whiston, 97). The twelfth-century rabbi Maimonides also disqualifies nine others, those who “are not competent to affirm or testify,” including “slaves, minors, lunatics, the deaf, the blind, the wicked, the contemptible, relatives, and the interested parties.” (“Witness,” *EJ*). Women cross-dressed as men might also make this list. See Zeitlin’s “The Crucifixion of Jesus Re-Examined” for more on these divisions.
19. *AJ*, 4.8.15n (Whiston, 97).
20. See also the lengthy, cross-referenced entry for “witness” in *EJ* found at www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org.
21. Josephus, *WJ*, 5.5.2 (Whiston, 554).
22. Only the Greek version was found. Smallwood discusses this warning in *JURR*, 92–94.
23. See the entry for “*cave ceiling rock*” in the notes on the opening titles.
24. Smallwood notes (following Josephus and Cicero) that Pompey did not loot the temple, which would have been replete with gold, expensive furniture, and tithes, and he allowed it to be re-sanctified the following day, so that regular Jewish rituals could continue (*JURR*, 23–27). Pompey understood that allowing the Jews their practices simply made his job easier. Later, Titus would allow his men to sack the temple and the city (*HLTJ*, 128–29).
25. *HLTJ*, 50.
26. See Kotker, *HLTJ*, chapters two and three.
27. This potential leeway may have been where some congregations or cities forbade female participation in events like stonings, and others might have tolerated their presence.
28. Wheen, *Strange Days*, 148.

29. The final requirement is one the PFJ don't mention at all: having a ready substitute leader for the overthrown country (Wheen, *Strange Days*, 145). Reg never promises any version of post-coup leadership.

30. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 383.

31. *SD*, 147–50. Donoughue mentions the reading/viewing of Forsyth's very influential *The Day of the Jackal* and *The Odessa File* in *DSD*. International terrorism and espionage were clearly both fascinating subjects and much in the public view in the 1970s.

32. *Strange Days*, 148.

33. Caryl, *Strange Rebels*, 5.

34. Quoted in *BAFHG*, 341.

35. "Strange Political Landscape," *Times*, 31 March 1966: 8.

36. The RA was a short-lived offshoot of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) movement, and the Independent Nuclear Disarmament Election Committee (INDEC). All these parties/movements/splinters were tagged with real and imagined Communist influences, diminishing their candidates' electability. Mr. Gott was just twenty-seven at this time, confirming his dangerous status. See "Added Hazard for Labour," *Telegraph*, 5 January 1966: 34.

37. 19 January 1966: 24.

38. Trade union reaction to the restrictive bill would eventually lead Heath to call an early election, a loss to Wilson and Labour in 1974.

39. "The Revolutionaries," *Times*, 16 February 1971: 12.

40. In *Holy Grail* Arthur "must be a king" because of his appearance, and the witch was certainly a witch because "she looks like one"; in the Python world, appearance matters.

41. *DSD*, 2.438.

42. *DSD*, 1.121.

43. *DSD*, 1.634.

44. This was the celebrated "back to basics" education speech intended by Callaghan to claw back control of the schools and curricula from "progressive," "trendy," Far Left elitists. See *DSD*, 2.82–84, and Sandbrook's *Seasons in the Sun*, 684–88.

45. *DSD*, 2.84. This may also be a sideways, sanctimonious slap at the students attending Ruskin, a school affiliated with Oxford but not actually part of it. Ruskin was set up to educate mature students who couldn't achieve the necessary qualifications for Oxford or Cambridge.

46. This facial hair admonition is traced to Leviticus 19:27 and 21:1–5.

47. "Beards and Shaving," *EJ*, 235.

48. Harry the "spiv" will be discussed again, when he haggles with Brian for a beard and a gourd.

49. Uttered by the wily Frenchman Moriarty (Milligan) in *Goon Show* episode "The Man Who Won the War" (18 September 1955).

50. Kenneth Morgan, "Symbiosis: Trade and the British Empire"; see also Brendon's *DFBE*, passim.

51. Holland L. Hendrix, from the *Frontline* PBS program *Jews and the Roman Empire* (1998), a.t.

52. One of Pilate's soldiers and Pilate himself will later mention Passover; no one else in the world of the film, even the observant Jews, mention it at all. This must have been a late addition, as well—none of the earlier drafts include references to the holiday.

53. Stiff fines and prison sentences were handed out to those who would buy truckloads of eggs directly from farmers for resale, or to families who received extra ration books by mistake and used them anyway, or kept using a ration book after the death of its owner, and on.

54. Garfield, *Private Battles*, 247, 333.

55. See *WW2 People's War*, "Dunstable Town Centre," a BBC website.

56. *MPFC: UC*, 1.52.

57. Found in Eps. 5, 14, and 28, respectively.

58. *BAFHG*, 94–160. Dennis's mother didn't even know they "had a king" (*BAFHG*, 116).

59. Also, for most Jews the Roman occupiers might have been more supernumerary, meaning their direct rulers were the priestly Jews (Sanhedrin).

60. “Character of the Postwar Period,” a.t.
61. *FCY*, 18 December 1976.
62. A demographic classification created by the National Readership Survey (NRS) identifying the “skilled working class” in Britain, the voters Thatcher identified as wanting to move into the middle class, and whom she said she represented. See Bogdanor, “Thatcherism,” a.t.
63. Jeremias, *JTJ*, 31, 59.
64. Aside from Gregory and his wife, and perhaps the religious officiator at the stoning, the Pythons don’t present us with characters who can be called members of the “priesthood and secular aristocracy,” those who would most benefit from “the taxes and tithes flowing into the expanding temple city of Jerusalem,” quoting Silberman and Meyers (“The Politics of First-Century Judea,” 39). For the most part, we keep on a level with the working classes. Privilege won’t keep Gregory and his wife from the cross, or the religious official from death by incidental stoning (this is a Python world, after all).
65. Magness, *Stone and Dung*, 11.
66. *JTJ*, 303–4.
67. *JTJ*, 303.
68. *HLTJ*, 31.
69. Maier, *Pontius Pilate*, 159. Livy mentions the sacred chickens, as well, used earlier in preparations for battles against the Samnites (Book X).
70. *MPFC: UC*, 1.151, 228.
71. Sugarman, “Melville in Jerusalem” (from *Clarel*, 1876).
72. Sugarman, “Melville in Jerusalem.”
73. *JTJ*, 15; also, from *WJ*, 5.4 (Whiston, 553–54).
74. *JTJ*, 15–16.
75. Gilliam was pushing for the stoning scene to be filmed on Saturday, 16 September, the first day of filming, knowing the stones would have to be prepared by Thursday at the latest. Cleese had been unwilling to shoot such an important scene on day one (*Diaries*, 486–88).
76. *MPFC: UC*, 1.191–92; *ATW*, 1.154–55.
77. He enjoyed games more than administration, his appearances at the combats cost the city a great deal of money, and his opponents were often said to be more weedy than the Samaritan we’ll see later. See chapter 2 in Toner’s *The Day Commodus Killed a Rhino* (2014).
78. “McAlinden Stopped by the Quiet American,” *Times*, 14 March 1972: 11.
79. The *Telegraph* ran a story in 1961 that pointed out how effectively the Liberal Party contested local council seats, winning a much higher percentage in relation to their national positions than larger parties. The story was headlined “Local Boy Makes Good” (7 January 1961: 6).
80. John 8:1–11.
81. Plus one constructed for the *Jesus of Nazareth* film, and then left in place.
82. *Monty Python’s Life of Brian (of Nazareth)*, 11.
83. “The Crucifixion of Jesus Re-Examined,” *JQR*, pages 327–69.
84. *JE*, “Sanhedrin.”
85. “Crucifixion of Jesus Re-Examined,” 317–18.
86. Rosenblatt, “The Crucifixion of Jesus from the Standpoint of Pharisaic Law,” 318.
87. *JURR*, 99.
88. Richard, *WWAR*, 252.
89. Found at http://www.jewfaq.org.
90. “Pronouncing the Name of God”; these are (translated) versions of “God be with you” and “God bless you” (jewfaq.org).
91. Bauckham, “For What Offence was James Put to Death?,” 219.
92. If they’d stayed with the original title and concept, *Jesus Christ: Lust for Glory*—a nod to the movie title *Patton: Lust for Glory*, the title of *Patton* (1970) when it was distributed in the UK (the film aired on ITV on 31 December 1976)—there might have been a different reception.

93. Including the novel *The Last Temptation of Christ*, the plays/films *Godspell* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*, the announced Danish film *The Sex Life of Jesus Christ*, and the poem *The Love That Dares to Speak Its Name*.

94. This will become even more pronounced in the later *Spamalot* musical, where the euphemism for such unquestioned freedoms is "Find Your Grail."

95. From Zeitlin (1941): "According to the Gospels, Jesus was arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin and the High Priest, charged with blasphemy, while the Sanhedrin, in presenting the case to Pilate, maintained that Jesus was a rebel against the State" ("Crucifixion of Jesus Re-Examined," 359).

96. Jesus was a target for stoning, as well, but he evaded angry mobs just weeks before his eventual arrest and crucifixion (John 8:56–59; 10:27–36).

97. "Danish Grant for Film on Christ," *Times*, 29 May 1975: 5. In January 1976 the Danish attorney general announced that he would not seek a blasphemy charge against Thorsen ("Script on Sex Life of Christ 'Not Blasphemy,'" *Times*, 3 January 1976: 3).

98. These wouldn't have been terribly unusual, given recent New Wave films from Ken Russell, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and Jean-Luc Godard, among others. The presence of Christ would have been the cruncher (see *BAFHG*, xi–xxx). Pasolini's final film, *Salo*, appeared in London in July 1977 and was confiscated by police at the Compton Cinema Club; obscenity charges brought against the private Soho club were later dropped.

99. "Mrs Whitehouse Delivers 'Obscene' Danish Script of Jesus Film to Mr Rees," *Times*, 5 October 1976: 1. Note that this was front-page news.

100. See "Proposed Film about the Sex Life of Jesus Christ," *Times*, 4 September 1976: 13. The Pythons seem to have, in creating *Brian*, responded to what contemporary critic (and no fan of Thorsen) Bernard Levin called the "thuggish intolerance of some of the Christians involved in the argument, together with the pre-judging element in their attitude" toward a film they'd not seen ("Fight the Good Fight by all Means," *Times*, 7 September 1976: 12).

101. See Nash's *Blasphemy in the Christian World*, 182. The Pythons were writing together in both December 1976 and March 1977 on *Brian* ideas. Palin doesn't mention the Thorsen film or accompanying controversy anywhere in his diaries.

102. Waugh wrote that he had been considering *The Sexual Life of Jesus Christ* [sic] in a planned series, but decided against it when he'd concluded "such a film would require a cast of only one and might get us into trouble with Equity." He continued: "Instead, we are working on the sexual lives of Karl Marx, Mahatma Gandhi, Queen Victoria, Sir Harold Wilson, Lord Goodman, Arianna Stassinopolous, and many hundreds of others" (*Private Eye*, 29 October 1976: 15). The film that never was truly had legs in the British media.

103. The sentences were eventually overturned, but not until those imprisoned had their hair cut and spent time in Her Majesty's prison system. See *MPFC: UC* 2.124–25, 126.

104. "Blasphemy Charge over Poem about Christ," 5 July 1977: 2.

105. "Blasphemy Charge," 2.

106. Palin reports that the Pythons donated £500 to *Gay News* in April 1976 to help fight the case (*Diaries 1969–1979*, 376n). For a contemporary account of Whitehouse and her movement in the wake of the *Gay News* ruling, see Caroline Moorehead's article "Mrs. Mary Whitehouse: A Certainty That Everything Is Either Black or White," *Times*, 31 October 1977: 8.

107. *Holy Grail* had gone out with an "A" rating, meaning all audiences five and older could attend; an "AA" stipulated that audiences had to be fourteen and older. Palin makes it clear that as they shot and edited *Brian* the Pythons agreed they shouldn't bend to censorial demands: "We discuss our attitude to censorship, on which there is total agreement within the group that we do not and will not change anything because we're told to, unless we happen to agree that it isn't funny anyway. We're all happy to go to court in defence of the movie" (Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 556).

108. Palin's note: "Scarman upheld the ruling under the Blasphemy Act of 1697 that the *Gay News* had offended by claiming that Christ was homosexual" (547). Justice King-Hamilton had made the initial ruling

against *Gay News* in 1977, discussed later in the "In Pilate's Jail" scene.

109. Maier, *Pontius Pilate*, 213; this is a work of historical fiction, though quite well-researched. It is useful here in that, like Mannix's gladiator fiction *Those about to Die*, it was a popular and oft-cited text focusing on portions and practices of the Roman Empire at the time the Pythons were creating their own work of "historical fiction," *Life of Brian*.

110. See Acts 7. The scriptures tell us that Saul (he would become Paul) was a willing witness to this stoning.

111. *AJ*, 20.5.4 (Whiston, 419). See also *Jesus and the Zealots* (106–7) for events tied to Cumanus's volatile procuratorship.

112. Smallwood, *JURR*, 265.

113. Many passionate voices responding to *Life of Brian* invoked the term, though it was also often pointed out that this was a religious charge, and not a crime punishable in civic courts. (See Hewison's *The Case Against*.) The Jews of first-century Judea weren't interested in the hair-splitting, and demanded the Roman soldier's life for his crimes.

114. The Roman authorities wouldn't have involved themselves unless someone had "blasphemed" the official cult, perhaps defacing Roman iconic badges or displays. These distinctions came into play when the Sanhedrin demanded Christ's death, and Roman authorities (Pilate and even Herod Antipas) argued against capital punishment—favoring corporal punishment—for a religious offense.

115. Levy, *Blasphemy*, 3.

116. Again, this would be separate and distinct from crimes against the Roman occupiers, which Brian will be charged with; Matthias is charged with crimes against God and the Jewish State.

117. "Crucifixion of Jesus Re-Examined," 330.

118. Smallwood, "Jews and Romans in the Early Empire," 233.

119. Zeitlin, "Crucifixion of Jesus Re-Examined," 344.

120. See Zeitlin, "Crucifixion of Jesus Re-Examined," 344–46 for more.

121. Mentioned in the "God's Name" section of *Judaism 101*, and there spelled "Adonai." See the *OED* entry under "Jehovah" for more.

122. Deuteronomy 17:6.

123. *AJ*, 4.8.15 (Whiston, 97).

124. *ATW*, 1.23.316.

125. *ATW*, 1.17.232.

126. *MPFC: UC*, 1.188; *The Goon Show*, "Silent Bugler," 23 February 1958.

127. See the printed/read aloud version of the original script available as a special feature on DVD and Blu-ray editions of the film.

128. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 488. By the point of a February 1979 screening of the film, the Shepherds scene and most of the raid on Pilate's palace had been removed, Palin mentions, and the film plays better for the absence (531).

129. See *BAFHG*, 421–23 and additional index entries under "King Brian the Wild."

130. Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, 222.

131. Matthew 26:33–35; Mark 14:29–31; Luke 22:33–34; and John 13:36–38.

132. Anthony Quinn performs the service in the recent *Jesus of Nazareth*.

133. Larsen, *MPSERD*, 180–81.

134. Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun*, 607–8; also Benn's *Conflicts of Interest*, 172–74. Palin's *Diaries* ignores the strike entirely, while Donoughue's *DSD* mentions it only in passing.

135. *Look Back at Grunwick* (1980), a.t.

136. This strike was also unusual in that it was covered so closely by news outlets. With hundreds of hours of footage shot and thousands of still images captured over many months, it is likely the most fully documented strike action in British labor history.

137. *Look Back at Grunwick*, a.t.

138. Directed by Tony Richardson and starring Albert Finney.

139. *MPFC: UC*, 1.186; *ATW*, 1.12.160.

140. Yeshua in *The Passover Plot* counted on this delay, planning for his rescue from the cross.

141. "Capital Punishment," in the *EJ* at the Jewish Virtual Library http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/capital-punishment In Roman prisons, strangulation tended to be the favored method.

142. See "Jewish Concepts: Afterlife," Jewish Virtual Library, http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/afterlife-in-judaism.

143. Indiscriminate bombings of public, "bourgeoisie" places was a hallmark of nineteenth-century anarchist movements across Europe (see Burleigh, *BRT*).

144. See *BAFHG*, 472.

145. Though it's not shown or mentioned in the finished film, Matthias escapes his death sentence in the confusion of the Official's stoning, just like Brian will later escape Pilate's court; Matthias will reappear later, with the PFJ.

146. Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun*, 611–12. Donoughue mentions in passing that the PM's "irritated" and "grumpy" mood at Question Time on 30 June 1977 was due to the ongoing, ugly strike at Grunwick (*DSD*, 2.208).

147. *Sanhedrin* chapter 6, Mishnah 4; see the searchable JVL site. These ritual executions would have been a real challenge since the body had to be preserved in its sanctity, even in death.

148. Stonings for adultery in Saudi Arabia and for heresy in Afghanistan were still regularly occurring in the 1960s–1970s, and often made international news. British forces were also regularly pelted with stones in Northern Ireland postings.

149. Leviticus 24:23.

150. For the sixteen-ton weight, see Eps. 4, 12, 23, and 38; for the anarchist bomb see Ep. 8; for the hand of God see Ep. 29 and *Meaning of Life*; and for the giant hammer see Eps. 17, 30, and 35.

151. *MPFC: UC*, 1.270–71.

152. Hollywood produced many cartoons lampooning Hitler—comparing his face to a horse's hindquarters, chasing him into hell—while the British MOI created a "Doing the Lambeth Walk" spoof that caricatured the goose-stepping Nazis. See *BAFHG*, 517; also, the *MPFC: UC* index for the entries under "scorn/ridicule/derision" and "cartoons" for more.

153. *MPFC: UC*, 1.279.

154. "Ancient Origins: Sexual Violence," 29.

155. Davies, "Police Work in Roman Times," 700.

156. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 299.

157. *AJ*, 20.8.8 (Whiston, 422); see also *JURR*, 280–81.

158. "The Roman authorities, for some unexplained reason, did not intervene" (Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 113–14).

159. *AJ*, 20.8.8 (Whiston, 422).

SCENE FIVE

ALMS FOR AN EX-LEPER ***JERUSALEM, OUTSIDE THE CITY GATE***—(PSC) THIS SETTING—OUTER WALLS OF RIBAT, MONASTIR—MIGHT HAVE BEEN RECOGNIZABLE TO THOSE WHO HAD WATCHED THE RECENT *JESUS OF NAZARETH*. THAT FILM VERSION STAGED THE CRUCIFIXION AT THIS PRECISE LOCATION, AND WITH THE SAME ICONIC CITY WALL BACKDROP.

. . . enormous statue of PILATE is being dragged . . .—(PSC) This work seems to be modeled after a combination of two statues, Michelangelo's *David* and a bronze statue of Julius Caesar in Rimini, Italy. The head and face are fashioned to look like Palin as Pilate. Auberon Waugh presaged this move in his "Diary" entry for 17 February 1978: "Perhaps it would be a good idea for public statues to be made with disposable heads that can be changed with every change of popular fashion. The same bodies could be used for Churchill, Wislon, Grocer, or whoever was the hero of the moment."[1] In a way this is also the approach used when the Arch of Constantine (seen during the title sequence) was created between 312 and 315. Portions of the new arch came from previous structures built during the Trajan, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelius administrations, making it much more like a Gilliamesque bit of animation.[2]

Gilliam has already used an image of the David statue in *Flying Circus*, there as part of a title card for *It's the Arts* in Ep. 6.[3] Gilliam has also included an image of an Augustus statue in the title sequence for *Brian*.

Later in the printed script there is a suggestion from Reg that a priapic version of a Julius Caesar should be commissioned; this was a Peoples' Front of Judea (PFJ) demand that could be sacrificed in negotiations with Pilate.

Pilate learned through hard experience that the Roman penchant for displayed cult statues, emblems, and images wouldn't be tolerated in Jerusalem, the city of the temple. Commissioning statues of one's self did occur across the empire, and at many levels, as Wiedemann points out: "A *duumvir* from Cirta in Numidia thought of a cheap way of immortalizing his *munus* [public works, games]: he raised a statue to himself out of the revenue from entrance fees."[4] The new Pilate statue is likely associated with the ongoing modifications to Pilate's palace seen later. Being a prefect, Pilate would have been living in quarters built by Herod and occupied by other prefects before him, so some remodeling is understandable.[5] Notoriously, Caligula would later demand that a statue of himself as Jupiter be erected *within* the Holy of Holies in the temple in Jerusalem, according to Philo.[6] Cooler heads prevailed, putting off Caligula's rash move, and the emperor would die before seeing this sacrilegious renovation to completion.[7]

This is likely a reference to an incident related by Josephus in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, when the newly appointed Pilate "introduced Caesar's effigies" into Jerusalem from Caesarea. Josephus notes that previous procurators (or prefects) had entered the city with such effigies removed from ensigns and the like, in deference to the Jews' law forbidding "the very making of [such] images."[8] The images were part of the standards carried before the troops newly stationed in Judea, at Pilate's command, and what likely inflamed the situation was that the standards could be glimpsed from the temple.[9] There was a great tumult that followed Pilate's thoughtlessness (or guile), with Jews coming "in multitudes" to Caesarea to ask Pilate to remove the images; Pilate refused, claiming it would be an "injury" to Caesar. The multitude of voices against the images continued to crescendo, and Pilate quietly directed his armies to equip themselves and lie in wait. Surrounded by these heavily armed men Pilate sat in his judgment-seat and threatened to kill every protestor who would not leave Caesarea. Their collective response surprised him: But they threw themselves upon the ground, and laid their necks bare, and said they would take their death very willingly, rather than the wisdom of their laws should be transgressed; upon which Pilate was deeply affected with their firm resolution to keep their laws inviolable, and presently commanded the images to be carried back from Jerusalem to Caesarea.[10]

In the Pythons' version of this scenario, the statue is only noticed by Brian, and his mother is certain that's only because the statue is naked and Brian is consumed by thoughts of sex. No one else seems to really notice at all, nor will they notice the corpses nailed to crosses in this same area. As for the Pythons' Jews' willingness to die for a cause (or for God), Matthias seems ambivalent about a painful death, and Otto's crack suicide squad kill themselves for nothing in particular. Everyone else in the film possesses (and enacts) a sense of self-preservation, as will be seen.

A comical version of this historical scene will be enacted toward the end of the film, when Pilate attempts to gain favor with the "people of Jewusalem" and "welease" prisoners from Roman jails as a Passover gift. There, the crowd will also be on the ground, but laughing at the speech impediments of both Pilate and his "gweat fwiend fwom Wome," Biggus Dickus.

Near us are some old crosses with one or two twisted skeletons hanging on them—As recently as 71 BC, after the escaped slave Spartacus had been killed in battle, the Romans crucified six thousand rebel slaves along the Appian Way, Rome's major highway, as a warning to the rest of the enslaved masses that insurrection was a fatal mistake. The British Empire had committed similar atrocities and for similar reasons in India, where Col. James O'Neill executed six thousand Indians during the "Great Mutiny," and another Englishman wrote of his desire to see India transformed into "groves of gibbets" as a lesson to mutineers.[11]

Jewish historian Josephus writes at some length of the Romans' proclivity toward public punishments: "Now it happened at this fight that a certain Jew was taken alive, who, by Titus's order, was crucified before the wall, to see whether the rest of them would be affrighted, and abate of their obstinacy."[12] The detail Josephus relates betrays his clear fascination (and, Ben-like, even admiration) for Roman order, justice, and even mercy and fair-handedness: Some of these were indeed fighting men, who were not contented with what they got by rapine; but the greater part of them were poor people, who were deterred from deserting by the concern they were under for their own relations; for they could not hope to escape away, together with their wives and children . . . nor could they think of leaving these relations to be slain by the robbers on their account; nay, the severity of the famine made them bold in thus going out. . . . This miserable procedure made Titus greatly to pity them, while they caught every day five hundred Jews; nay, some days they caught more: yet it did not appear to be safe for him to let those that were taken by force go their way, and to set a guard over

so many he saw would be to make such as guarded them useless to him. The main reason why he did not forbid that cruelty was this, that he hoped the Jews might perhaps yield at that sight, out of fear lest they might themselves afterwards be liable to the same cruel treatment. So the soldiers, out of the wrath and hatred they bore the Jews, nailed those they caught, one after one way, and another after another, to the crosses, by way of jest, when their multitude was so great, that room was wanting for the crosses, and crosses wanting for the bodies.[13]

Public executions happened, and often, but the leaving of the corpses on their crosses to rot and feed scavengers might have been more challenging in such close proximity to the Holy City and the temple. Those Jews subject to capital punishment could be publicly burned, stoned, beheaded, strangled, or crucified, but then their corpses would have to be dealt with immediately: "Even [after public execution] their lifeless bodies were not permitted to remain exposed overnight, because, as it is stated in the Pentateuch, '(the sight of) a hanged man is an insult to God.'"[14] It may be that *outside* the walls of the city there was more leeway, though when the self-proclaimed messiah Theudas was captured and beheaded by the Romans some twenty years after the time of Christ, according to Rosenblatt, "his cut-off head was displayed in Jerusalem as an example to other would-be rebels."[15] It may have been that the high priests picked their fights with the Romans carefully, protecting the sanctity of the temple while looking away from lesser offenses. Given the Roman emperors' historical acknowledgment of the special case of Jews and their beliefs, even after subjugation by the Romans, the chances that a procurator or prefect would agitate his Jewish population unnecessarily are slim (though Pilate seems the exception here).

From film to film, the Pythons are interested in quite similar set pieces—social and/or communal violence, governmental oppression, and small-group dynamics, as well as piercing, slicing, and segmenting the human body, and earnest journeys brought to dispiriting conclusion. These crucified remains (even though they are being ignored) are window dressing, not unlike the Catherine Wheel and draped skeleton deployed in *Holy Grail* to help set the tone of a violent, barbaric medieval world.[16] Later, as Brian is about to be nailed up, one of these bodies will be in the process of removal, perhaps "thrown into a nearby charnel pit," as well. And as "normal" as this might seem to be—skeletal remains had been part of Disneyland's Pirates of the Caribbean ride since it opened in 1967, and have been found on film sets, in carnival "haunted" rides

and freak shows for decades—it was only in 1968 that archaeological *proof* of crucifixion was discovered. There had of course been talk of crucifixion in the classical writers' works, in canonical scriptures and apocryphal texts, and in modern literature and eventually movies. Most of the major feature films about the events of the Passion at least hint at the crucifixion, and later films, like *Ben-Hur*, *King of Kings*, and the particularly gruesome *The Passover Plot* and *Jesus of Nazareth*, all feature extended crucifixion scenes.[17] But these were all inspired by literature, and not hard evidence: The accidental discovery in 1968 of a burial cave at Giv'at ha-Mivtar, in which the remains of a male crucified during the Roman period were found, has over the years generated considerable scholarly interest. Despite ample literary evidence attesting to the frequency of crucifixion in the Mediterranean region, this was the first direct anthropological evidence of the practice. The original report on the skeletal remains therefore aroused wide public interest and prompted a number of articles by scholars in Israel and abroad.[18]

Three years later, when the scholarly papers began to emerge, British newspapers carried stories about this significant find, as did many newspapers around the world.[19]

This is a common sight—no one pays any attention . . .—(PSC) This could simply be a Pythonesque trope, of course. Theirs is a world where a de-limbed knight can deny his deficit, where characters can live and function with impalements and dismemberments, and where the most obvious atrocities and absurd outrages can pass with just a glance. In Ep. 19 of *Flying Circus*, for example, a school awards ceremony is interrupted by a common thief and Chinese Communists, before descending into a pitched gun battle; all the while, the members of the governing board smile vacantly.[20]

In Roman times, heavily traveled roads were often used as sites of crucifixion, avowedly "for deterrent purposes," according to Cook: "The Spartacus revolt is a famous example. . . . [Six thousand] of the vanquished slaves were crucified on the road from Capua to Rome by Crassus."[21] Almost 136 years later the Judean procurator Florus tried to put down a budding rebellion in Jerusalem by rounding up rebels and others, executing three thousand six hundred, "many by crucifixion."[22] (This rebellion led to the fall of Jerusalem to rebel forces, and initiated Rome's destruction of the city four years later.) The Pythons included this kind of "punishment on display" in *Holy Grail*, as the *visibility* of the fruits of justice were key: "The high visibility afforded these public sorts of punishments served a social purpose in the Middle Ages, according to [Barbara]

Tuchman. . . . 'In everyday life passersby saw corpses hanging on the gibbet and decapitated heads and quartered bodies impaled on stakes on the city walls.'"[23]

There are many instances in the Python oeuvre where "no one pays any attention," no matter how odd or violent the visible act might be.

BRIAN: "Have I got a big nose, Mum?"—Mandy will interpret this as Brian wondering about girls and sex, but it also goes right back to the "big nose" jibes being thrown around in the previous scene. Perhaps it's easier for her to answer questions about her son's budding sexuality than his parentage, which will be discovered in the following scene. For some reason, Mandy is still wearing her beard, even though she's no longer participating in a male-only public act, and there are other females out in public who do not have their faces covered. This reddish fake beard also looks very much like the disguise that Woody Allen's character dons in the 1967 farce *Bananas*, as they attempt to liberate lunch from a local café.

BRIAN: "I'm only just starting to get interested in it, Mum"—If there were those who could only see side-by-side comparisons between Brian and Jesus, this is a moment of divergence. It's likely not an accident that at the point the Christ is about his Father's work, Brian is just getting interested in the birds and bees. Later, he won't "really want to" leave the beguiling Judith alone, sexually, just before he is arrested and taken before Pilate.

***(draft)* MANDY: "It's time you got interested in a job, my lad!"**—In the film, *none* of the PFJ seems to have a job—*except* initiate Brian—none seems to be suffering overly, and none seems particularly worried about the plight of their fellow working men. Perhaps they've managed to achieve a level of "wantlessness," citing Magness. Are these few we meet the typical "lower-class Jews who populate the Gospel accounts"? Are they "villagers who own houses and have a few possessions but are not destitute like the leper who begs Jesus to heal him"?[24] No, not really. These are city dwellers with political agendas and leisure time, situating them closer to the 1970s than 33.

They *could* be a version of Nechaev and Bakunin's "doomed man" revolutionary, the man who "has no personal interests, no business affairs, no emotions, no attachments, no property, and no name."[25] Not likely. The members of the PFJ are situated somewhere between the working class and the city's leadership. Perhaps the most apt comparison of this little clique is to the Works Committee in the seminal *I'm All Right Jack*, a film the Pythons homage throughout *Brian*. The stewards march from meeting to meeting, from stoppage to stoppage, from pronouncement to pronouncement, doing little actual labor.

And the “brothers” they represent spend much more time on the picket line than the assembly line; there’s no such thing as redundancy in this labor-friendly world. This isn’t one of the Pythons’ anachronisms, though. Jeremias talks at some length about just this type of “idler” in first-century Jerusalem, describing them in very familiar terms: However there are others besides beggars that we must mention as support for the impression that Jerusalem had already in Jesus’ time become a city of idlers, and that the considerable proletariat living on the religious importance of the city was one of its most outstanding peculiarities. It was said that it was of the essence of a city that it was a place where “ten idle men” were to be found . . . *i.e.* people who had renounced ordinary employment to devote themselves to worship. There were men like this in Jerusalem too.[26]

Chief Steward Kite and friends are living on the “organized labour importance” of their city, and they’ve given up “ordinary employment” for union leadership; the PFJ are somehow living off the “political importance” of their occupied city, having given up employment for insurrectionary organizing, the latter without obvious means of support. Jeremias goes on, telling us what these idle men of Jerusalem got up to in the second half of the first century: It is amazing how many people of this kind emerged in the last decade before the destruction of Jerusalem; they formed themselves into gangs and terrorized the whole city . . . and later carried on the civil war within its walls. These revolutionaries of course included ardent patriots and men full of religious feeling, but others were simply men whom Josephus rightly describes as a rabble of slaves and the dregs of the population.[27]

Like the shop stewards of *I’m All Right Jack*, the PFJ are more homogenous than those who would become Zealots, but no less idle.

Employment and family benefits were front and center in the British mind across the postwar period. Into the mid-1970s the policy of “family allowances” (eventually called the “child benefit”) had only been paid to families *after* the first child, meaning a Mandy-and-Brian-like family wouldn’t have qualified; by 1977, all children qualified for child benefits. Unemployment insurance was improved and expanded during this same period, “earnings-related supplements” were implemented and increased, and old-age pensioners (like Mandy?) were, by 1975, included in these improvements. A single-parent benefit was also added during this expansion of benefits, with support from both Labour and Conservative parties.[28]

Employment was another matter, given the recent worrying uptick in the ranks of the unemployed. There were almost 1.5 million unemployed in 1977, having

sailed passed the greatly feared one million mark in 1975–1976. By the first third of the next decade (when *Meaning of Life* was produced) employment would be three times as high, as Thatcherism allowed the economy to adjust itself, full employment no longer being a high-water mark. (And unemployment obviously not the poison pill party leaders had feared it would be—Thatcher and the Tories would remain in power until 1997.)[29]

And if Brian doesn't have a job at his age, the question might be, why not? The answer is that the world had changed dramatically in just the Pythons' lifetimes, and jobs in the mills, the mines, in heavy industry, or in the trades weren't as available or as attractive as they had once been. More young people went to university, fewer went to work on the factory floors, and a newer, more diverse society was partly to blame. As part of Harold Wilson's first administration, Home Secretary Roy Jenkins set out to "modernise" Britain, nearly top to bottom.[30] Since the late 1950s Jenkins had been arguing that Britain needed to come into the "progressive" age in regard to its views on abortion, homosexuality, divorce, crime, capital punishment, and censorship.[31] In *Holy Grail*, the mythical, Middle Ages Arthur is consistently flummoxed by the world he's encountering—it's not the world of the divine right of kingship, courtesy, or myth, or even knowing your place: The Britain Arthur might represent here (across the ages), the "older Britain with its military traditions, its thousands of slow industrial and village backwaters, its racism, its clear divisions of class and geography," was being nosed out ([Marr], 265). And far from being the "anarcho-socialist paradise" many in the 1960s hoped for, the new Britain was one that might seem alien to both Left and Right, to the old order or the new. [. . .] Jenkins's Britain was a place where the "State's powers over individual freedoms" were dramatically reduced, and termed "social reform" (251–52). The laundry list of reforms is especially compelling when it's remembered how quickly the changes were implemented, and how far-reaching their effects would be. State executions (by hanging), judicial flogging, the persecution and prosecution of homosexuals, the censoring of plays, the forbidding of abortions, and repressive divorce and immigration laws were all tinkered with or thrown out entirely, and all between 1965 and 1968 (Marr, 251–56).[32]

The generation coming of age during or born just after this period would have necessarily been affected by this abrupt sea change. The Pythons, for example, became entertainers as opposed to entering the traditional workforce, distinctly separating themselves from their parents' generation.[33] By the mid-1970s the punk culture screeched into life in decaying urban areas where there were few

job prospects, if jobs were wanted at all. Hardest hit were the "Third World" areas of the UK: Northern Ireland, Scotland, and northern England.[34] In January 1976, the government announced it had spent a staggering £340 million in unemployment benefits in 1975, not counting December.[35] The poverty rate in Great Britain rose from about 11 percent in 1977 to more than 13 percent in 1979, meaning the numbers of those on the dole—"scrounging," like the lepers and even the birds in *Brian*—increased dramatically.

The following scene features another job-related character and incident.[36] The Ex-leper who, by virtue of being healed by Jesus, loses his ability to pursue his occupation as an effective beggar, manages to only wrangle "half a denary" from Brian. In the scene following "Ex-leper," Brian actually does have a job, selling snacks at the Colosseum. There's no indication how long he's been employed. This setup scene (where Mandy encourages Brian to find a job) may have been cut simply because it didn't jibe with the following "full employment" scene, where Brian is clearly working. The Angry Young Men tended to have jobs they didn't like, too—Joe Lampton works in a low-level municipal office, Arthur Seaton is a factory machinist, and Frank Machin is down at the coal face—their sights were always set higher, though none were able to reach what they thought was the goal without sacrifice and crippling regret.[37] None of the other members of the PFJ seem to have jobs. This may be a nod to the fact that many 1960s and 1970s revolutionaries tended to come from privileged backgrounds, meaning two-parent homes, an education, and prospects.[38] It's likely no accident that the SLA terrorist/victim, Patty Hearst, listed her occupation as "unemployed urban guerrilla" when she was being processed into jail before trial in 1975.[39] As a dope-smoking, disaffected heiress lost in the decadent 1970s, she was the ideal candidate for membership in these groups, coerced or not. Brian's difference from the PFJ's unemployed urban guerrillas may also signal the eventual ease with which Reg and siblings distance themselves from Brian in his new role/job as martyr.

It's also significant that an *absence* of work was one of the hallmarks of this period. In 1978, as the film script was being polished during the Pythons' Barbados working vacation, 9.3 million working days were lost in Britain to strike actions. The following year, as the film was being edited and finished, a whopping 29.5 million days were lost.[40] It seemed to many that more people in Britain were striking than working, with the Labour government under Callaghan first losing control of the unions, then the Party, the Commons, and finally No. 10. The specter of joblessness was everywhere. A *World in Action*

program, “Starting on the Dole,” looked at the incredibly high unemployment rate for school leavers in summer 1977, while another episode from the following spring, “Working on a Pittance,” examined the low-paying work available to the physically and mentally disabled of Britain. Youth like the Ex-leper would have had a struggle being employed in the Britain of 1977–1978 as a union member out on strike; he’s an Ex-leper without a marketable trade.

As they pass through the city gate . . .—The printed script offers no physical description of either the setting or the other beggars sitting around Palin’s Ex-leper. There are actors and actual lepers (a local extra sans fingers can be glimpsed) lined up against the wall just inside the city’s gate. There is a faux-leper sitting to Palin’s right played by Charlie Knode, a costume designer on the film, who also worked on and appeared as a Swamp Castle guard and one of Robin’s minstrels in *Holy Grail*.[41]

Beggars would have been a daily sight at the gates of Jerusalem, though Jeremias writes that there are almost no “Palestinian papyri which give information about Jerusalem,” meaning “literary sources” have to suffice.[42] This Ex-leper beggar, then, is most likely a nod to a filmic source like *Ben-Hur*, which features an ungrateful leper (discussed later). Jeremias can say that Jerusalem had become a “centre for mendicancy,” likely due to its role as home to the temple and religious festivals, and to the “meritorious” giving to the poor that often accompanied these holy events.[43] And since there were more people willing to give to the poor in the Holy City, advantages were bound to be taken, according to Jeremias: It is not surprising that even in those days there were complaints of people who pretended to be blind, dumb, dropsical, deformed and lame. . . . The situation had changed so little that even lepers, whose established begging-place only a few decades ago was on the road to the Garden of Gethsemane, were also to be found in Old Jerusalem.[44] Since they were not allowed to enter the Holy City, they sat sheltering from the weather under the gates, which did not count as part of the city.[45]

The Ex-leper isn’t pretending, but he is hanging on to at least the name of his former affliction as he tries to ply his trade in relation to his new affliction, that of a whole, healthy man.[46] “Begging in Jerusalem was concentrated around the holy places,” Jeremias continues, meaning around the temple, but the Pythons have clearly made no effort to build or even reference the bulk of Jewish spiritual life in the film.[47] Thus, the lepers and beggars in *Brian* are merely at the city gates, as they’d been in other biblical films, before they disappear entirely

from the story. Similarly, in *Holy Grail* the images of a plague-ridden countryside disappear after the initial plague village scene.

The lives of the poor would have been less frequently documented, anyway, and wouldn't even become of interest in Britain, for example, until the Victorian era, when surveys of those living at or beneath the poverty line were first conducted.[48] Jeremias also notes that there were clearly two types of poor in Jerusalem of the first century: those who worked and supported themselves, and those who lived on "relief." Our lepers here at the gate seem to fall into the latter category, though Palin's Ex-leper admits that begging had been his vocation, and now that he's healed he's unfit for such employment, placing him in an odd position between the working and nonworking poor.[49] Bernstein notes that even during the years when Britain's economy was officially "booming" (between 1945 and 1973)—meaning improving and expanding, though other countries (Germany, France, Japan) improved and expanded much more, in comparison—poverty doggedly thrived in Britain. People living below the poverty line at the time of the film's production accounted for about 3–5 percent of the British population, though "if one includes those *at* as well as below the level at which income support kicked in," Bernstein writes, "the percentage jumped up to 14 per cent in 1979."[50] It was this group of people that suffered most during the Winter of Discontent of 1978–1979, and whose plight filled the pages of newspapers as the Pythons completed *Brian*.

Finally, Gilliam and his team worked hard on these sets, though as filming proceeded he would complain about how the sets, props, and costumes were being underexploited, according to Palin: Today [26 September] has shown signs of strain in the unit. Terry G is worried that TJ is driving everyone along at such a frenetic pace that he isn't leaving enough time to get the best shots. Gilliam is especially irked that the elaborately splendid detail of his market place is not being seen. He keeps muttering that this might as well have been done at Shepperton[51] for two million less.[52]

Palin earlier called this option the "Jesus of Shepperton" movie, which they'd considered.[53] Money had been secured for the more expensive location work, Gilliam was overruled, and they eventually found themselves in Tunisia.

EX-LEPER: (Palin): "Bloody donkey owners—they're all the same, innay?"—The ass-driver was one of the "despised trades" in Jerusalem of this period. Most of the trades involving transport of any kind were suspect, and therefore "despised," given the historical potential for rooking of customers by drivers, herders, carters, haulers, *etc.*[54] Additionally, many of these jobs were

occupied by slaves, so ass/donkey "owners" would be rated higher, socially, than their slaves who operate them. (The woman seen earlier who was *not* going to the stoning because of her donkey, is an example.) The donkey owner the Ex-leper is complaining about is actually riding the donkey, not leading it, but it's only clear that the Ex-leper thinks he is an owner, and not a slave.

Jeremias reports that the donkey was used often for "local transport" in Judea, so this would have been a regular sight.[55] Remember that Mary was said to have ridden on a donkey traveling to Bethlehem, and Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday riding an ass. Donkeys were also apparently appropriate conveyance for merchants and teachers, as Jeremias reports that Rabbi Simeon b. Shatach, who was also either a comber or merchant of flax (or both) was "offered [by his pupils] a donkey so that his work would not tire him so much."[56] King and Stager mention that, since horses and horsemen tended to be poorly regarded by "prophets and psalmists,"[57] the donkey was naturally elevated: The kings of Israel rode on donkeys or mules instead of horses when performing official functions. A letter of admonition to King Zimri-Lim from the prefect of the Mari palace conveys the impression it was a long-standing custom: "Since you [Zimri-Lim] are the king of the Khana tribesmen . . . my lord ought not to ride horses; rather, it is upon a palanquin or on mules that my lord ought to ride."[58] This "bloody donkey owner" could have been a rabbi or royalty, then, for all the lepers knew.

This is also one of the few places in the film where *class* politics trump the us-versus-them (Jews v. Romans) language. Class had been a big part of the conversation between Arthur, Dennis, and Dennis's mother in *Holy Grail*,[59] and it raised its head often during the run of *Flying Circus* (i.e., "Upperclass Twits"; City Gents) but, since the Pythons chose to not depict or deal with the religious hierarchy of Jerusalem in the film, class isn't much of a narrative thrust in *Brian*. Gregory is clearly a wealthy Jew, and he and his wife speak with posh accents, but their social and economic advantages don't get them special access to Brian for a healing, or keep them from the cross. The Ex-leper is implying that the owner of a donkey is at a certain level of success in society, and that he's probably not a slave (since he "owns" something of value). The fact that such owners are "all the same," and that his afflicted mate nods along in agreement, means that at least the poorest in first-century Jerusalem understand these societal strata.

EX-LEPER: "Oh, here's a touch"—Meaning a mark, someone to put the "touch" on for a handout of money, generally. The lepers here are obviously

sizing up the crowds that pass through the gate, looking for who might be more willing to part with their money—more willing than donkey owners, clearly.

LEPER: "Alms for a leper?"—Most of these actors and extras are not afflicted in any way, though one, to Palin's left, is missing the fingers on his right hand. (He's also on crutches, likely meaning his legs and feet are affected, as well.) Recent medical archaeology has found *no* evidence of actual leprosy (Hansen's disease) in first-century Jerusalem, the presence of which would be indicated by skeletal necrosis in the fingers, toes, and on the face. The references in the scriptures to afflicted individuals tend to be broader than just leprosy: The term *zara'at* is traditionally rendered "leprosy" because of its translation by Greek *lepra*. . . . The Greek covers a wide range of diseases that produced scales. Greek *lepra* may have included true leprosy, i.e., Hansen's disease, but is definitely not limited to it. In fact, biblical descriptions of *zara'at* do not include the necrosis associated with Hansen's disease. Thus far no skeletons of the biblical period show any signs of Hansen's disease. The term *zara'at* is a generic name, embracing a variety of skin ailments, including many non-contagious types.[60]

The Pythons have included lepers and leprosy not based on actual historical evidence, but on Bible stories and cinematic biblical depictions like those in *Ben-Hur* and *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. This means that a leper scene likely seemed as important for the Pythons in this biblical film as a plague scene was for a Middle Ages film like *Holy Grail*.

These types might also be here due to their presence across the British Empire. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the recently "freed" Egypt welcomed flocks of tourists eager to see the pyramids. They were as often "horrified by the squalor and confusion that reigned in Egypt . . . assailed by touts, pimps and deformed beggars whining for baksheesh" (alms).[61] In *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire*, Brendon concludes: "Egypt provided [for the British traveler] a memento mori of imperial greatness as sublime as the wreckage of classical Rome."[62] The Pythons' version of Jerusalem is likely jaundiced by the Englishman abroad Evelyn Waugh's colorful, acrid accounts of the sights and smells encountered as he traveled around the Mediterranean in the 1920s, earlier enacted by the ranting tourist in *Flying Circus*.[63] Novelist Herman Melville happened to tour the classical sites in 1857 when he was ill, and reportedly detested almost everything: "He hated the Holy Land—'Must have suggested to the Jewish prophets their ghastly theology . . . whitish mildew pervading whole tracts of landscape—bleached—leprosy—encrustation of curses—old cheese,

bones or rock— crunched, gnarled, mumbled.’”[64] Melville had called his own unappreciated work “the Gospels,” incidentally.[65]

EX-LEPER (Palin): “Spare a talent for an old ex-leper . . .”—An enormous amount of money, as Mandy indicates in her reaction. During the First Punic War, for instance, the Roman fleets were able to destroy and seize dozens of Carthaginian ships, force the surrender of Sicily, and demand 3,200 talents in payments. Just a few years later the Romans “seized Sardinia and Corsica and demanded another 1,200 talents.”[66] Just a little later (about 35 BC), Cleopatra was demanding and receiving 200 talents annually from Herod as she leased back to him bits of Jericho over which she’d assumed control.[67] Jeremias estimates that Herod Antipas could claim more than 1,000 talents in taxes from his entire kingdom, throwing into relief the Ex-leper’s rather outrageous request.[68] Much closer to the film’s proposed time, a talent was still quite valuable. It’s estimated that the aqueduct Pilate built leading from springs near Bethlehem to Jerusalem’s city walls was bid out at about 750 talents.[69] By 66, the intemperate procurator Florus was demanding a 17-talent tax payment from the temple treasury, inciting a Jewish riot, Roman reprisals, and even executions.[70] The Ex-leper’s demands, then, are just as ransomous, but will only merit a “piss off” from Mandy.[71]

The amount is likely relative, and plucked from the Bible’s pages without much historical research on the Pythons’ part. In *Holy Grail*, they’d done the same thing. The wedding guards killed by Launcelot “cost fifty pounds each,” and the Cart Driver demands “ninepence” to pick up a nearly dead man in the plague village. In the times depicted in *Holy Grail*, a yearly income for a master carpenter, for instance only came to about fifteen pounds, and if you had income of twenty-five pounds or more you were considered wealthy and thence owed service to the king.[72] As for the “ninepence” quote, during the high times of plague in England a skilled wage-earner could only make about four and a half pence a day, an unskilled laborer even less. At those rates burying a family member could mean three days’ salary for the working poor, which was likely unmanageable.[73]

MANDY: “That’s more than he earns in a month!”—It would actually have been more than many earned in a month. In ancient Greece, the value of just one talent (perhaps 10,000 Attic silver drachmas[74]) was incredible: “One *talent* was the equivalent of around nine years’ worth of wages for a single skilled laborer working five days a week, 52 weeks a year, according to the wage rates we know from 377 B.C.”[75] A more contemporary valuing for the talent can be found

in the worth of a rich tunic that one priest was provided by his mother, “worth 100 minas, that is, one talent”; while another priest’s mother gave her son a finely sewn tunic worth 20,000 denarii, or two talents.[76] Given that Brian is wearing coarse, crudely woven clothing, one or two talents must represent a fortune. Earlier, Mandy had hinted that Brian didn’t have employment, and that he should be more interested in getting a job than sex. It may be that she meant he needed a *better* job than the one we see him plying later—selling snacks at the Colosseum performances in the very next scene.

This situation—where a beggar of sorts demands money from someone of lesser means—is also found in first-century Jerusalem. Since scribes weren’t allowed to charge for their services and it was considered “meritorious” for those with some means to give to the poor religious educators, many scribes adopted the lucrative “habit of sponging on the hospitality of people of limited means,” which often included “widows” like Brian’s mother.[77]

MANDY: ***(to Ex-leper)*** **“Buzz off!”**—A rather more recent colloquialism, the *OED* sets the Cockney phrase to the early twentieth century.

EX-LEPER: “Say you open at one shekel, I start at two thousand . . .”—This isn’t simply a first-century Jerusalem financial lesson. In *Life of Brian* the Pythons grapple with all four contested areas of the postwar economy—“full employment, an expanding economy, stable prices and a strong pound”—balls that had been juggled by No. 10 since at least Macmillan’s premiership.[78] Mandy will bemoan Brian’s job status, the Ex-leper’s chances of “full employment” end when he’s healed, and financial transactions and references to currency value occur throughout, including the buying of stones, donating to ex-lepers, and haggling for beards and gourds. Brian’s later inability to afford an attorney keeps him on the crucifixion queue, and the PFJ’s rapine charges against the “bloody Romans” (“they’ve bled us white”) is simply a tax and tribute lament. There was even a “paying of taxes to Rome” question—followed by a PM-like, platitudinal answer—in an earlier draft of the script.[79]

This kind of upward haggling was very contemporary for later 1970s Britain. The unions targeted PM Callaghan’s ministers and economic functionaries as they clutched after fatter pay packets and higher bumps in new pay adjustments, even as the government kept to a flat 5 percent increase (or lower) in the public sector. Inflation—which “transforms an ordered society into an undisciplined mob”[80]—had climbed to historic highs, forcing Callaghan to hold down pay with a voluntary incomes policy across 1976 and 1977, and which the unions assumed would end in 1978,[81] when inflation had dropped appreciably. The

Callaghan administration pushed on, hoping to beat inflation *and* the unions, and the rank and file members then demanded a return to free collective bargaining.[82] The major shift points came when an assumed election was *not* called in the fall of 1978, and then in October 1978 Ford crumbled to union demands and, instead of offering the agreed-upon 5 percent bump (against the 25 percent increase the union asked for), the car company agreed to give 17 percent. The dominoes began to fall after that, and union after union, big and small, scrambled to force employers into similar pay increases, many of which were approved just to avoid prolonged and expensive strike actions.[83] With a whisper-thin margin in the Commons, Labour had no wiggle room. The government's pay policy was now officially in tatters, and the Winter of Discontent howling under the door.

All this haggling worked on employers and the government, and here works on Brian, too. Instead of giving nothing—as was the original intention—he gives half a denarii, and the Ex-leper is just a little better off.

MANDY: ". . . so piss off!"—The *OED* sites this mild epithet to the Pythons' youth, coming into use by about 1935. This was one of the phrases recorded for eventual looping work on *Holy Grail,* when Galahad tells Tim the Enchanter to "Get stuffed" at the Killer Rabbit's lair. The goal was to have a handful of possible insertions for sound editors to choose from as they edited the film's soundtrack, keeping in mind the potential ratings implications of various words.[84]

giant statue feet—Two of the many set decorations included by Gilliam and his crew in this market set are feet, *giant* feet from an obviously giant statue. They can be seen behind Brian, Mandy, and the Ex-leper as they round a corner, as the Ex-leper changes his tactics and drops his asking price. These feet are likely meant to remind the viewer of Gilliam's animated, crushing foot from the *Flying Circus* credits, but they are also part of Gilliam's classical source material for this film. In Piranesi's frontispiece ("Statue of Minerva") to the *Vedute di Roma* collection there is a jumbled arrangement of broken statues and crumbled monuments. Part of this mess is an enormous, carved foot, which had obviously been part of a statue larger than anything else visible in the frame.[85] Bits and pieces of unused Roman buildings and stone works of all kinds had been plundered over the centuries, so it's not a surprise to see these feet, perhaps even on sale, in a first-century Jerusalem marketplace.

BRIAN: "Did you say 'Ex-leper'?"—This is where the scene goes sideways, in true Python fashion. Brian could have offered the coin at the outset, and then there's no haggling. Instead, he is curious about the odd situation—the man is a

former leper—and that curiosity propels them both through the soukh and the scene. In *Holy Grail*, the sentries could have answered directly about their master, and not sidetracked into coconuts and swallows; later peasants could have simply said that "no one lives" in the nearby castle and they have no lord, rather than espousing a political doctrine not yet hatched. In the latter instance Arthur in his frustration ends up exposing "the violence inherent in the system," and in the first Arthur and Patsy have to simply move on without the information or acolytes they'd sought.

In an earlier *Flying Circus* iteration of "ex-," found in "The Dead Parrot" sketch of Ep. 8, the prefix means the bird is dead—"This is an ex-parrot"—the way Praline uses the phrase.[86] The term here means *former* leper, not dead leper or even dead man, a significant difference.

Behind Brian, Mandy, and the Ex-leper can be seen the great wall used in both *Jesus of Nazareth* and *Life of Brian*. In *Jesus of Nazareth*, the wall—with its diagonal staircase—can be glimpsed in the distance behind the crowd as Pilate (Rod Steiger) addresses the braying crowd who want Jesus crucified. In *Brian*, the wall is dressed as the side of Pilate's palace, where he addresses jeering citizens from his porch. Here, Gilliam and friends have added pole-and-fabric stalls running up the ramp way.

EX-LEPER: ". . . sixteen years behind the bell . . ."—Likely a play on the "behind the badge" phrase heard in regard to police officers.

This scene, featuring a "donkey owner," professional lepers, and Brian (who, we'll see, has a concessions job at the Colosseum), is key in that everyone seems to be gainfully employed or at least able to sustain themselves separate from the state's teat. It actually flies in the face of where Britain found itself in 1974–1979, when millions of "gawdelpus" types were unemployed and the strain on the welfare system was spreading misery all around.[87] Here, a passerby owns a donkey, a valuable animal in the period, meaning he might be a businessman involved in the (despised, but paying) trade of haulage, or it might be a family animal for work and milk products around the house. Brian is on his way home, to a small house he shares with his mother. She seems to make some kind of living offering sexual services to at least the one Roman we see in their home—tawdry, but an income nonetheless—and Brian will go off to his own job soon. The lepers and ex-lepers are begging, but they're obviously treating begging as a legitimate source of regular income—it's their job, they're not unemployed, by their own definition. In this world of first-century Jerusalem there doesn't appear to be mass unemployment or even the suffering brought on by a lack of jobs or

underemployment, unlike what was happening in the world outside the film, or even in the unsettled, starving Jerusalem leading up to the 66 revolt. In 1977, when the bulk of the film's writing took place, the yearly average for unemployment exceeded 1.48 million, more than doubling from 1970. Unemployment would exceed 2 million by 1981, and then 3 million in 1981–1982.[88]

This is one of the few moments where the Pythons don't directly take an obvious, real-world situation plaguing Britain and lampoon it in their creative work. In *Holy Grail* the anti-Anglo French position regarding the Common Market, as well as union leaders like Jack Scargill shouting down management and government took center positions in key scenes.[89] In *Life of Brian*, teeming humanity and even squalor might be hinted at, but with the noted exceptions of the masses of people willing to follow messiahs whenever they appear, and those who can find time in their day to attend stonings, the working class appear to be working. But these mobs disappear as quickly as they form—they're nowhere in sight, for instance, by the time Brian really needs them to save him from the cross. In *Holy Grail* there was an assembled crowd of villagers set on burning a witch, behaving very much like the mob who eventually carry off Simon in *Brian*. The difference for the villagers in *Holy Grail* was that many of them were carrying instruments of their trade—scythes, bread-baking paddles, axes, blacksmithing instruments, rakes, threshing tools, barber instruments, brooms, and so on. These are working people caught out during their working day. In *Life of Brian* the crowds do not march around with their tools or dressed for any particular tradecraft. In this they seem more like ready-made religious mobs simply waiting for a messiah to follow, which is the comment the Pythons are trying to make.

EX-LEPER: ". . . a bloody miracle, sir . . ."—Typically Pythonesque phrasing here, combining a reference to a sacred act with a course intensifier.

BRIAN: "Who cured you?"—Not "how," but "who," meaning these healings must have happened or at least been broadcast about in Brian's lifetime. Brian isn't surprised that the man's been healed, he just wants to know who did the actual healing, which is of course the script's setup to introduce Jesus again, this time as a worker of miracles. In *Antiquities of the Jews* Josephus wrote of one Eleazar who "healed" men of spiritual ills, like the great King Solomon, who had left behind him the manner of using exorcisms, by which they drive away demons, so that they never return; and this method of cure is of great force unto this day; for I have seen a certain man of my own country, whose name was

Eleazar, releasing people that were demoniacal in the presence of Vespasian, and his sons, and his captains, and the whole multitude of his soldiers. The manner of the cure was this: He put a ring that had a Foot of one of those sorts mentioned by Solomon to the nostrils of the demoniac, after which he drew out the demon through his nostrils; and when the man fell down immediately, he abjured him to return into him no more, making still mention of Solomon, and reciting the incantations which he composed. And when Eleazar would persuade and demonstrate to the spectators that he had such a power, he set a little way off a cup or basin full of water, and commanded the demon, as he went out of the man, to overturn it, and thereby to let the spectators know that he had left the man; and when this was done, the skill and wisdom of Solomon was shown very manifestly.[90]

Those possessed by demons will be seen later, when Brian is thronged by followers, just before he is arrested for the final time. A contemporary of Jesus, Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa, was known for miracles brought about by his prayers—healings, stopping and bringing rain, and even surviving a serpent (or poisonous lizard) bite where the serpent died, instead.[91] There were others during this period striving to heal, as well, according to Hankoff, with similar ingratitude displayed in the process: "When Jews in the first century attempted healing in the name of Jesus, the Talmud condemned the practice."[92]

EX-LEPER: "Jesus did. . . . One minute I'm a leper with a trade, next moment me livelihood's gone. Not so much as a by your leave"—This is the second mention of Jesus, by name, in the film. A fairly common name, there was a Jesus known to be a leader of a band of brigands-for-hire who were paid to help protect the "pro-Roman city Sepphoris in the summer of 66," as well as one of the high priests (along with Ananus) "hunted down" by the Idumaeans, according to Josephus.[93] The Pythons could have easily used the common name Jesus for their hero, resulting in a confusion of Jesuses.[94] Very early story ideas for the film, according to Palin, centered on this trope of misidentification and unmet expectations involving a Jesus-like character, with more actions and set pieces involving the actual Jesus throughout.[95]

Given this Ex-leper's reaction to being cured on spec, it's not likely that he followed the prescribed routine for cleansed lepers. He would have had to show himself to a "director of the weekly course" whose job it was to "perform rites of purification" for women after childbirth, adulterous women, and lepers.[96] If satisfactorily cleansed, the Ex-leper would then be pronounced clean at the Nicanor Gate, which would have likely been an inner gate nearer the temple, not

one leading into the city proper (as used in the film). In Matthew 8:4 Jesus tells the leper to show himself to the priest after he's been cleansed, meaning the official pronouncement at the gate would have followed that step.

(gestures in the manner of a conjuror)—(PSC) Here he touches his forehead, more like a faith healer might do. "Healing by touch" is well-documented in scriptural sources, as Hankoff explains: Healing by touch figured dramatically in the career of Jesus. It is also mentioned in the Talmud although no unequivocally first-century episode is to be found. An interesting sequence involves a late second-century rabbi, Johanan ben Nappaha. Johanan was able to cure colleagues of illness by simply taking the sufferer's hand and raising it. When he became ill, another sage visited him and cured him by raising Johanan's hand. It was, of course, asked why Johanan could not cure himself, to which the reply was, "The prisoner cannot free himself from jail." The description of the healing by Jesus of Simon Peter's mother-in-law of a fever uses almost exactly same formula in one Gospel as that of Johanan's healing. Jesus "took her by the hand and lifted her up." This same language appears in the healing by Peter of a lifelong cripple seen at the Temple gate. Peter told the cripple to rise, took him by the right hand and raised him up. The cripple's bones were strengthened, and he leaped up. Jesus cured a leper by touching him, and demonstrated in addition his willingness to make physical contact with this sufferer. Jesus restored sight to two blind men by simple touch.[97]

These stories could be found in the Pythons' modern Britain, as well. The *Times* carried one such note in January 1969, titled "Faith 'Cure'": "After suffering from misplaced vertebrae for more than 10 years, Mr. Richard Pratt, Chief Constable of Bedfordshire, claims to have been completely cured in five minutes by Mr. Kenneth Hebbelthwaite, who practises faith healing."[98] Also in the headlines during this period was US president Jimmy Carter's sister Ruth Carter Stapleton, who was a well-known faith healer. In January 1977 Mrs. Stapleton admitted to being so overworked after her brother's election that blessings sometimes went sideways: "I was giving the blessing in a meeting a while back," she said at a book signing, "and instead of saying 'In the name of Jesus Christ' I said 'In the name of Jimmy' by mistake."[99] The article didn't say whether, given the slight error, the blessing was efficacious. *Private Eye* and even the usually respectful British press treated Carter like a fervent Jesus freak.

The term "conjuror" has historically often had a negative, shady context in British English. In John Wycliffe's c. 1382 version of the Bible, Jews who claimed exorcist powers were known as "*coniureris*," or conjurors. Hankoff

notes that many of the maladies cured in the pages of the Bible were those connected to possession, and not just bodily illness: “Eight of the 24 healing episodes of Jesus in the Gospels and four of the 12 in Acts refer to an unclean or evil possessing spirit. The New Testament descriptions of demonic possession cover a wide variety of illnesses.”[100] Illness was often attributed to possession in the NT as opposed to the Talmud, where “an internal pathological state needed correcting, most usually by removal of a physical bane.”[101] The Markan version[102] of this incident is a bit different, certainly. There, the leper comes to Jesus and asks to be made clean, and Jesus, “moved with compassion,” touches the man and heals him immediately. (The lepers in Luke 17 also cry unto Jesus, asking for his blessing.) Jesus also tells the man to tell no one excepting his priest, and to give offerings in thanks for the healing. The man was obviously too excited about his new health to remember the charge: “But he went out, and began to publish *it* much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter.”[103] This healing (and subsequent advertisement) meant Jesus wouldn’t be left alone.[104] Brian will gain this kind of following after *not* finishing a portion of his mostly nonsensical preaching, his disciples glomming on to the promise of a “secret” something meant just for them, as opposed to a demonstrated blessing or anything he’s actually said. Our Ex-leper is only telling of his Jesus encounter to Brian, though perhaps he’s been rehearsing the unfortunate turn of events to any “touch” encountered at the gate.

There was a very interesting but related sideshow going on in June and July 1972, when *Daily Mail* cartoonists Gary Keane and Neville Randall produced a “Secrets of the Scrolls” series (about eighteen in all) looking at current Dead Sea scroll “discoveries” and controversies. Several are based on the pronouncements of Manchester University’s John Allegro, who’d published a book claiming the Essenes had created the Christ figure and stories, and that Jesus was more factually a “magician” than a savior.[105] Allegro’s translations and conclusions were roundly criticized.[106] The Dead Sea Scrolls and various interpretations and claims remained in the news from 1948 through 1978, and beyond.

This particular shot appears to be one that they picked up much later, back at Shepperton Studio in late June 1979, to try and patch holes in the film’s narrative flow. The background used is a re-dressed version of a set used first for the 1968 film *Oliver!*, according to Palin: “We shoot at the main gate of the old *Oliver* set—in itself a sad and crumbling place, with memories, for me, of *Jabberwocky*.[107] The shooting, between showers and aeroplanes, goes along well

and we even do some hand-held dialogue shots."[108] Palin's hair is quite a bit shorter here, and the bright North African sunshine of October 1978 has given way to the English damp of June 1979.

EX-LEPER: "You're cured mate. Bloody do-gooder"—In an earlier draft of the printed script, he says "You're cured mate, sod you," which is a more profane version and likely one they worked out of the finished film. As *Holy Grail* moved from rough draft script to "shooting" script, the character of God, for example, changed considerably: In the first draft of the printed script, it turns out there are multiple grails found or cobbled together, and eventually they're all presented to God in the coffee shop at Harrods. . . . God isn't pleased, and tells Arthur and mates to go and find the true Grail "somewhere in Italy." . . . Just one page later, the questers steal a chalice from a church in Italy, race outside to where God waits in a VW "getaway van," and they speed off, militarized clergy on their tail. Their van plunges into the sea as God promises to "part this lot" (the sea)—the van sinks, and the credits roll. . . . The ending of the original draft would have likely brought the reproach [*Brian*] invited, but this shirty God who dies with his holy accomplices never made it off the typed page. God, the ultimate authority figure, can expect the same treatment as an Upperclass Twit or a "King of the Britons" in the Pythons' carnivalesque, topsy-turvy world.[109]
The original draft of *Holy Grail* was a handful of unrelated sketches (a boxing match, a department store, a car chase) stitched together by bits of Arthur and his peripatetic knights searching for the Holy Grail at the command of a rather nasty God. Eventually, Palin and Jones ditched the more modern scenes (several found their way in the fourth season of *Flying Circus*) to focus on the Arthurian tale, and God's appearances (and ill-temper) diminished. The *Brian* structure also became much more focused as the script matured.

***(draft)* EX-LEPER: "But it was a living . . ."**—This Ex-leper could have pursued other period jobs *not* directly attached to a salary, or to his ability to beg. Scribes (teachers) of first-century Jerusalem weren't allowed, by religious law, to charge for their services. They either had to hold trade jobs (carpenter, shopkeeper, tanner, etc.) as well, or rely on, essentially, the kindness of strangers. Jeremias writes that "in the main the scribes lived on subsidies": "The learned, or teachers of the wise . . . were dependent on the gratitude of their pupils . . . on some consideration at the distribution of tithes for the poor, and in certain cases also on support from the Temple treasury."[110] Not being a slave, the Ex-leper could have pursued education and then teaching, by his own choice, and still made his "living" by begging.

***(draft)* EX-LEPER: ". . . my family has been in begging six generations"**—Temple slaves working for the Jewish high priests were generational, it seems. Jeremias mentions that Joshua appears to have "given" Gibeonites—"hewers of wood and drawers of water"—to the temple, and that descendants of those slaves continued in that capacity from generation to generation. Jeremias is quick to point out that by the time of Jesus, "in no case do we ever find the slightest indication . . . either in Jerusalem or other Jewish territory, there were still slaves of the Temple."[111] There could have been sixth-and seventh-generation slaves working at the temple in the earlier post-exilic period.

The Ex-leper's laments are of a kind heard since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, when massive mills and factories opened, replacing the decades-old cottage industries in weaving and textiles. The early nineteenth century in Britain saw the Luddite movement lash out against the new technologies, trying in vain to slow the progress toward machine-made goods, or at least to keep individual jobs from becoming redundant.[112] The trade unions plied these waters across the twentieth century, struggling to keep up the "full employment" promise even as new machinery, new technologies, and new industries replaced an outmoded past. Britain watched as postwar Europe (especially Germany and France), the United States, and even Japan raced ahead by *not* kowtowing to big labor but embracing production streamlining and industrial efficiency. Britain's entrenched trade unions—clinging to the Social Contract with Labour—kept such updating from having any real effect, and Britain's economy suffered as a result. Men whose families had been coal miners or shipyard or mill workers found themselves unemployed and unemployable in the mid-to-late 1970s. Bogdanor calls the 1970s and beyond a time when there was, euphemistically, "a more flexible labour market," encouraged by the economy's natural travails as the world changed in the postwar period, as the labor force adapted or did not, and as Thatcher's policies (including relegation of the trade unions) took effect in the early 1980s.[113]

***(draft)* EX-LEPER: "I'm not about to become a goat-herd, just because some long-haired conjuror starts mucking about"**—The phraseology should ring familiar, and it may indicate that Palin (and Jones) wrote this Ex-leper sequence as well as the rantings of Dennis the "Constitutional Peasant" from *Holy Grail*: Arthur: Be quiet!

> Dennis: You can't expect to wield supreme executive power just because some watery tart threw a sword at you . . .
>
> Arthur: Shut up!

Dennis: I mean, if I went round saying I was an Emperor because some moistened bint had lobbed a scimitar at me . . .

EX-LEPER: “. . . a goat-herd . . .”—The Ex-leper clearly sees a shepherd—someone entrusted with angelic visits to announce the birth of Christ a little more than thirty years earlier—as a member of the lower class. And rather than seeing this type as a herder of goats, the Ex-leper may simply see the type as a rustic, someone not fit for life in the city, and therefore beneath him, even if he is a low-born leper (with a trade). Jeremias writes “that there were circumstances—quite independent of ancestry—which carried a whole series of trades which were despised, and those who practised them were, to a greater or less degree, exposed to social degradation.”[114] The people of Jerusalem at Jesus’s time understood which trades were “crafts of robbers,” which were “repugnant” (those often creating noxious smells), and which were “despised,” including those connected with women, or those based on trickery, Jeremias continues.[115] As mentioned earlier, the herdsman appears on the same list as the ass-driver, camel-driver, and butcher, as each was considered likely to rook his customer at any turn. Jeremias reminds us that herdsman . . . did not enjoy a very good reputation. As proved by experience, most of the time they were dishonest and thieving; they led their herds on to other people’s land . . . and pilfered the produce of the herd. For this reason it was forbidden to buy wool, milk or kids from them.[116] . . . The favourable picture of the shepherd which we are given in Jesus’s teaching is quite isolated; in rabbinic literature in general there are unfavourable references to herdsmen, if we abstract those passages which have developed from Old Testament texts, and present Yahweh, the Messiah, Moses and David as shepherds.[117]

During Passover, however, the herdsmen would by necessity and demand descend on Jerusalem to provide animals for the daily sacrificial rites, meaning they were an *essential* part of Jewish religious life.

EX-LEPER: “Which is a pain in the arse, excuse my French, sir”—The phrase “Excuse my French” or “Pardon my French” has been part of the English lexicon since at least the mid-nineteenth century, and is clearly out of place in first-century Jerusalem.

EX-LEPER: “. . . half a denary for my bloody life story!”—Obviously taken as a mean offering, this amount was occasionally phrased into an insult during this period. An Alexandrian nationalist who had been arrested and brought before Claudius used the phrase “twopenny-halfpenny Jew” to insult the emperor and his well-known tolerance of the Jews.[118] On the other hand, the

money-tax to support the temple cult in Jerusalem, a tax applied to all adult male Jews between the ages of twenty and fifty, no matter where they lived, came to two denarii (half a shekel) per year.[119] The Ex-leper has been gifted with a quarter of what Brian would have been expected annually to give to the temple —fairly generous.

It's hard to measure the value of the denarii in today's terms, but a daily wage in first-century Palestine wouldn't have exceeded a handful of denarii, certainly. Jeremias writes that a common day laborer in Jerusalem earned about "one denarius a day . . . with keep."[120] The great Jewish scholar Hillel worked as a day laborer for just *half* a denarius a day, and after the fees to attend school he was left with only half of that for "the maintenance of himself and his family."[121] Smallwood mentions, when discussing large temple gifts (of money, in about 60 BC), that "800 talents = 4,800,000 drachmae or denarii," meaning one talent was equal to 6,000 denarii.[122] (The Ex-leper asks for the equivalent of 6,000 denarii, but settles for just half a denarii; if this is accurate at all, the Ex-leper was masterfully haggled down by Mandy's obstinacy and Brian's inquisitiveness.) If a typical sewer worker (in high-rent Rome) was paid about twenty-five denarii per day, though, as Koloski-Ostrow estimates, then "half a denary" isn't really much, and the Ex-leper's complaint understandable.[123] By way of comparison, the *tributum capitis* was, by the year 30, set at about "one Roman denarius per head, the 'tribute money' of the Gospels."[124] This money paid to Rome is addressed in an earlier draft of the script, but does not survive into the finished film. Another comparison: The Emperor Augustus "broke the legs of his secretary Thallus for having betrayed the contents of a letter for 500 *denarii*"[125] So Thallus lost use of his legs for a long while in exchange for twenty days' wage of a working man.

Incidentally, the Tunisian extras who roll about as Pilate and Biggus try and speak were paid three (modern) dinars each, and Palin reports a near-riot when the payments were being handed out.[126] Palin would also pay the boy who regularly turned down his bed at the hotel one dinar daily.[127]

In the Pythons' everyday life, the value of British sterling and the pound had been in flux, trending downward for some time by 1976–1977, when this film was being written. Living standards fell "two years out of four" after Labour reentered No. 10 in 1974, and "real disposable income (which is what the pay packet will buy after all deductions) fell by about 1.5 per cent from mid-1975 to mid-1977."[128] Between November 1974 and June 1975, the value of sterling against major foreign currencies dropped a precipitous 9 percent, an uneven tide

that Thatcher would eventually ride into No. 10.[129] Thanks to inflation, the British version of “half a denary” simply didn’t buy what it used to. It should be remembered that much of this “crisis” had been, in the opinion of many, kickstarted thanks to the Arab oil cartel’s stranglehold on oil production and exports, and so could be directly connected to Middle Eastern political terrorists and Middle Eastern oil terrorists—not far from the Holy Land of *Brian*.

BRIAN: “There’s no pleasing some people”—This is likely influenced by a famous scene from *Ben-Hur*. Ben-Hur returns to the city after finding his leprous mother and sister. As they approach, we can hear a man with a bell calling out, “Alms for the blind.” The blind man takes Ben-Hur’s coin, at first grateful, but then realizes there are lepers before him. He drops the coin, fearing defilement, providing a neat “there’s no pleasing some people” moment.

In January 1976 the *Telegraph* carried a story about Albert Thorogood, a man who had been unable to find (or had been unwilling to accept) “suitable employment” since 1950. In the intervening twenty-six years he had worked a total of thirty-six weeks, while accepting more than £12,000 in unemployment benefits. He lost his “livelihood” (he was a carpenter) in 1950, and had lived on state benefits ever since. He had been offered a reported one hundred jobs in the past seven years alone, and had rejected all of them because they didn’t “suit” him: “The labour people keep on sending me to the wrong sort of jobs,” Thorogood told the paper. Mr. Thorogood was sentenced to a month in jail in February 1976 for benefits malfeasance. His wife blamed the newspapers for her husband’s predicament, and was certain he would never get a job after his release.[130] In this period of rising dole participation there were dozens of stories about “dole fiddlers,” or those who did everything they could—legal and otherwise—to stay on the dole, increase their benefits, complain about the meagerness of the stipend, and avoid a real job at all costs.[131]

EX-LEPER: “That’s just what Jesus said, sir!”—The other well-known leper story involves Christ healing ten lepers (Luke 17:11–19), and ends with only one who has been healed returning to Jesus to thank him. Christ asks after the other nine, and the man can only answer that he doesn’t know, prompting Christ’s response: “And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.” In that case, the one who gives thanks sets himself apart from others, as opposed to the one here who expresses ingratitude at his loss of trade. Jesus doesn’t actually say “there’s no pleasing some people.”

***(draft)* EX-LEPER: “Thank you sir, you’re a real Jew”**—Far from an insult, which it likely has become over the intervening centuries, according to the

scholar Hillel one sign of a “real Jew” was his almsgiving largesse.[132] But perhaps the Ex-leper is using Brian’s Jewishness as evidence that he’s “a touch” for money? A Roman woman, Fulvia, made a large donation to the temple, given as an offering in good faith. The Jews who collected the money then misappropriated it. Fulvia’s husband complained, and the Emperor Tiberius responded by having all Jews expelled from Rome.[133] The unscrupulous Jews saw the kind-hearted Fulvia as “a touch.” Here it’s likely that the Ex-leper is a Jew trying to wheedle money from another Jew, Brian, meaning the Roman authorities wouldn’t be terribly concerned.

Notes

1. “Wislon” is *Private Eye*’s name for Harold Wilson; Ted Heath was “Grocer.”
2. Gilliam also added to and manipulated the Arch of Constantine.
3. Larsen, *MPFC: UC*, 1.100.
4. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 17–18.
5. The prefect immediately preceding Pilate was Valerius Gratus, who held the office 15–26. In *Ben-Hur*, Gratus is the man nearly killed when the tile falls from Judah Ben-Hur’s home.
6. Brandon, “Pontius Pilate in History and Legend,” 524; also, Maier, *Pontius Pilate*, 319–20.
7. This will be further discussed later in response to Reg’s demand that a grotesquely phallic statue of Caesar be erected in the city. See “The PFJ Plan Their Raid.”
8. Josephus, *AJ*, 18.3.1 (Whiston, 379).
9. Maier provides an entertaining version of these events in his work of historical fiction, *Pontius Pilate*, published (and very popular) in 1968. See chapter 6, pages 63–80.
10. *AJ*, 18.3.1 (Whiston, 379); also Smallwood, *JURR*, 161–62
11. Brendon, *DFBE*, 135–36.
12. Josephus, *WJ*, 5.6.5 (Whiston, 558).
13. *AJ*, 5.11.1 (Whiston, 565).
14. Rosenblatt, “The Crucifixion of Jesus from the Standpoint of Pharisaic Law,” 315–21.
15. Rosenblatt, “The Crucifixion of Jesus,” 319.
16. See Larsen, *BAFHG*, 27, 64n7, 80, 209, 210, 517, and 519.
17. The Pythons screened bits of these “heavy and turgid” biblical epics as they prepped for the film, meaning there were plenty of crucifixion images they could have referenced (Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 351–52).
18. Zias and Sekeles, “The Crucified Man,” 22.
19. “Israelis Unearth Crucifixion Clue,” *Times*, 4 January 1971: 1. The authors of “The Crucified Man” article set out in 1985 to address the inaccuracies generated by the earliest forensic analysis, namely N. Haas’s seminal work. Newspapers published Haas’s grisly versions of the crucifixion pose (knees bent and to the side, feet together, iron nail driven through both heels). See Haas, “Anthropological Observations on the Skeletal Remains from Giv’at ha-Mivtar.” The 1977 BBC documentary/book *Who Was Jesus?* also reported this crucifixion information as the latest archaeological *fact* regarding the time of Jesus (*Who Was Jesus?*, 24). When this crucifixion report was reassessed in the mid-1980s, there wasn’t similar front-page coverage.
20. *MPFC: UC*, 1.319, “School Prize-Giving” sketch.
21. “Envisioning Crucifixion,” 281 and 281n. This scene is memorably reimagined in Stanley Kubrick’s 1960 film.
22. Kotker, *HLTJ*, 114. Josephus notes that Florus’s soldiers killed rather indiscriminately, rounding up “quiet people” as well as alleged rebels. If they weren’t killed where they fell in the streets, they were brought to Florus, “chastised with stripes, and then crucified” (*WJ*, 2.14.9 [Whiston, 485]).
23. *BAFHG*, 248–49.
24. Magness, *Stone and Dung*, 14.
25. Burleigh, *BRT*, 37.
26. Jeremias, *JTJ*, 118.
27. *JTJ*, 118–19.
28. Bernstein, *Myth of Decline*, 309.
29. See Dennan and Macdonald for more. *Meaning of Life* will have two distinct corporate-themed sections, *The Crimson Permanent Assurance* featurette, and the “Very Big Corporation of America,” while “Every Sperm is Sacred” deals with unemployment in Yorkshire mill towns.

30. Jenkins will be discussed later in relation to the Pythons' Pilate, with whom he shares an affectation of speech.

31. Capital punishment in Great Britain, for instance, ceased in 1965. In 1974–1975, when IRA attacks reached a particularly bloody pitch, the reintroduction of capital punishment as a weapon against terrorism was discussed. The call for capital punishment appeared again just after the Tory victory in 1979, but also failed to gain widespread acceptance. *Flying Circus* episodes dealt with all of these social aspects, from birth control and divorce (Ep. 13) through homosexuality (Ep. 28), censorship (Eps. 17, 25), and capital punishment (Eps. 3, 35).

32. *BAFHG*, 142; the citations in the indented block quote are from Marr's *HMB*.

33. Cleese had qualified as a barrister, and Chapman as a doctor, but neither pursued those careers once their writing and performing talents became evident.

34. Speaking for the Pythons, the *Meaning of Life* narrator calls Yorkshire "the Third World."

35. "£340m Dole Paid," *Telegraph*, 21 January 1976: 30. On this same day the Labour government's Employment Secretary, Michael Foot, told the Commons that unemployment wasn't Labour's fault. Given Foot's record of splashing Tory governments with blood-red unemployment statistics in the past, this moment of supreme irony—a Labour government in power while unemployment climbs—allowed the article's author to savor twisting the knife: "So yesterday it was as if Mrs Mary Whitehouse had been caught presiding over a saturnalia" ("Foot Proclaims His Virtue at a Dole Queue Saturnalia," *Telegraph*, 21 January 1976: 30).

36. And later Brian will mangle another Jesus saying (Matthew 10:29–31) when he asks whether the birds have jobs, confusing his potential disciples.

37. Lampton is played by Laurence Harvey, *Room at the Top* (1959); Seaton is Albert Finney, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960); Machin is Richard Harris, *This Sporting Life* (1963).

38. The fact that none of the PFJ have beards, either—which would have been de rigueur for a male Jew of this time—indicates they are meant to be young and impressionable, therefore more likely to harbor revolutionary feelings alien to their fathers, and their father's fathers, and so on.

39. On advice of counsel Hearst would rather quickly try and get that bit of revolutionary nose-thumbing changed to "none," as it became prime fodder during her trial ("Miss Hearst No Longer 'Urban Guerrilla,'" *Times*, 26 September 1975: 8).

40. Jenkins, *Anatomy of Decline*, 103.

41. *BAFHG* 9, 23n41 and 42.

42. *JTJ*, 109.

43. Some of Freud's examined jokes in *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious* involve beggars and the sacred *expectation* for charity in Jewish law (45, 107–8).

44. This is likely figured from the time of the book's first publication (in German) in 1967.

45. *JTJ*, 116–17.

46. He will also complain (in an earlier draft) that "waving muscular suntanned limbs in people's faces demanding compassion" is "a bloody disaster," as far as begging goes, which is the visual part of the joke here—a leper without leprosy.

47. *JTJ*, 117.

48. Including, for example, the work of Charles Booth in the 1880s and 1890s, *The Life and Labour of the People of London*. The nineteenth century also saw the formation of many charities in Britain, designed to assist the poor, children, unwed mothers, and so on.

49. *JTJ*, 110.

50. Bernstein, *Myth of Decline*, 321.

51. Shepperton is the film studio where as late as 25 June 1979 they were shooting pickup shots (trying to salvage the Ex-leper scene), and where Palin had been a member of the governing board since late 1976 (Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 494).

52. Palin, *Diaries, 1969–1979*, 493–94.

53. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 445.

54. *JTJ*, 304.
55. See also King and Stager, *LBI*, 115–16, and 186–87.
56. *JTJ*, 310n36.
57. The "negative attitude" toward horses seems to arise from their use in warfare and for the ostentatious displays of men. See the biblical citations listed by King and Stager (115).
58. *LBI*, 115.
59. The "Dennis" scene is discussed at length in *BAFHG*, 94–160.
60. "Leprosy," *EJ*, Jewish Virtual Library, http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/leprosy.
61. Brendon, *DFBE*, 182.
62. *DFBE*, 182.
63. *MPFC: UC*, 2.71; *Flying Circus* Ep. 31.
64. Bruce Chatwin, *Spectator*, 4 Dec. 1976: 30.
65. Sugarman, "Melville in Jerusalem," *Tablet*, 16 August 2012.
66. Richard, *WWAR*, 7.
67. In *Meaning of Life*, the Hospital Administrator (Palin), proudly points out a machine that goes "ping": "This is my favorite. You see, we lease this back from the company we sold it to, and that way, it comes under the monthly current budget and not the capital account." All clap.
68. *JTJ*, 91.
69. Maier, *Pontius Pilate*, 105.
70. *JURR*, 289.
71. In 201 BC, when Hannibal's troops were defeated by Scipio and the Romans, part of the payment penalty was 10,000 talents (*WWAR*, 9).
72. *BAFHG*, 387–88.
73. *BAFHG*, 83.
74. *JTJ*, 91n13.
75. Engen, "The Economy of Ancient Greece," *Economic History* (unpaginated).
76. *JTJ*, 97.
77. *JTJ*, 114.
78. Jenkins, *Mrs. Thatcher's Revolution*, 5.
79. See the entry "Is it right that we should pay taxes . . ." in scene 19.
80. Raymond Fletcher, quoted in Tomlinson, "The Politics of Decline," 44.
81. Former TUC leader David Lea mentioned this hope, speaking at a conference commemorating the Winter of Discontent in 2009 ("1978–1979: Winter of Discontent," 553–54).
82. Much public opinion ran against the unions. Pundit Waugh was certain that his union (National Union of Journalists) was run by "pigs, stoats, [and] child-murderers," and that other unions were little better: "In Blackpool the Trade Union Congress deliberates its next programme of theft, chaos and destruction in the name of Workers' Power" (Waugh, *FCY*, 10 March and 6 September 1977).
83. "1978–1979: Winter of Discontent"; also Black and Pemberton's "The Winter of Discontent in Britain" (2009). This period is covered in great detail by Sandbrook, Marr, Morgan, and Donoughue.
84. *BAFHG*, 446.
85. Scott, *Piranesi*, 32.
86. *ATW*, 1.8.105.
87. Dennan and McDonald, "Unemployment Statistics from 1881 to the Present Day."
88. Dennan and McDonald, "Unemployment Statistics," 10–11.
89. See the index in *BAFHG* under "Common Market" and "Charles de Gaulle" for more, as well as entries for "Arthur Scargill." The comments for the scenes "Dennis the Peasant" (94–160) and "Taunting by Frenchmen" (270–90) are also helpful for understanding these topicalities.
90. *AJ*, 8.2.5 (Whiston, 173).
91. Hankoff, "Religious Healing in First-Century Christianity, 388; "Hanina B. Dosa," *JE*.
92. Hankoff, "Religious Healing," 393.

93. Horsley, “The Zealots,” 167 and 171, respectively. The high priest Jesus flourished 62–65, while Jesus Barabbas was alive during Jesus Christ’s lifetime.

94. Julian Doyle—editor on *Brian* and jack-of-all-trades on *Holy Grail*—mentions several more Jesus namesakes in his very interesting book *The Life of ~~Brian~~ Jesus*, pages 246–47.

95. See the various entries for the writing of *Life of Brian* in Palin’s *Diaries 1969–1979*.

96. *JTJ*, 163–64.

97. Hankoff, “Religious Healing,” 391.

98. “In Brief,” *Times*, 30 January 1969: 2. The short notice is delivered without tongue in cheek or a wink from the paper—it’s just reported.

99. “Overwhelmed,” *Telegraph*, 24 January 1977: 14.

100. Hankoff, “Religious Healing,” 392–93.

101. Hankoff, “Religious Healing,” 393.

102. Mark 1:40-45. This leper encounter is also mentioned in lesser detail in Matthew 8.

103. Mark 1:45.

104. This is rather eerily handled in *The Passover Plot*, where Yeshua is besieged at night by moaning sufferers.

105. *Daily Mail*, 5 July 1972: 27.

106. See “Apostles May Be Myths,” *Sunday Times*, 16 January 1966: 6; and Geza Vermes, “Neglected Facts in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *Daily Telegraph*, 9 April 1966: 8, among many.

107. Palin and Gilliam had completed *Jabberwocky* at Shepperton, shooting July–August 1976.

108. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 561.

109. *BAFHG*, xvii.

110. *JTJ*, 112–13. The longer quotation is from Franz Delitzsch, *JTJ*, 113.

111. *JTJ*, 342–43.

112. See Bruce Watson’s “For a While, the Luddites Had a Smashing Success.”

113. “Collapse of the Postwar Settlement,” a.t.

114. *JTJ*, 303.

115. See *JTJ*, chapter 14, “Despised Trades and Jewish Slaves,” 303–12.

116. This prohibition meant that herdsman would sell to approved city vendors before the public could buy the products, perhaps diminishing the number and frequency of dishonest transactions.

117. *JTJ*, 305–6.

118. Smallwood, “Jews and Romans in the Early Empire,” 238.

119. *JURR*, 124–25.

120. *JTJ*, 111.

121. *JTJ*, 116.

122. *JURR*, 126n20.

123. See the entry for “. . . we are sewage workers” in scene 11, “In the Palace Sewers,” for more on the typical sewer worker during this period.

124. *JURR*, 151; also, Matthew 17, where the tribute is listed as half a shekel.

125. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 76.

126. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 492–93.

127. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 492.

128. Jenkins, *Anatomy of Decline*, 92.

129. “Fresh Slump by Sterling Puts Shares in Retreat,” *Times*, 27 June 1975: 15.

130. “Man Jobless for 25 Years Is Jailed for a Month,” *Times*, 21 February 1976: 3.

131. In the Goons’ “World War One” episode, a man is celebrating fifty years’ unemployment, always dodging the “fear of work” bell (24 February 1958).

132. *JTJ*, 126–27.

133. *JURR*, 203–7.

SCENE SIX
I’M NOT A ROMAN, MUM!

MANDY: “Oh hello, Officer . . .”—“Officer”? A late fourteenth-century term borrowed from French, according to the *OED*, though Mandy here is addressing the Centurion as a man of the law, not unlike those in the *Flying Circus* world confronted with a constable or detective.[1]

BRIAN: “. . . we don’t owe the Romans anything”—Brian is likely speaking about him and his mother, though he could also be taking the grander view, opining about what the PFJ will be on about soon—“bloody Romans” in Judea. Mandy’s response brings the reference back home, and makes it quite personal for Brian.

MANDY: “. . . you were asking about your . . . er . . .”—Simply a comment about the more Roman, aquiline nose of Brian, meaning he has a Roman father. The “hook nose” caricature of a Jew—not common until much later—can be very similar to a Roman nose, meaning Brian can’t tell where his particular nose might come from, his father or his mother. In a moment Brian will even embrace his “hook nose” Jewish stereotype, along with several others. (To be fair, when arrested he will claim to be a Roman.) **MANDY: “. . . your father isn’t Mr. Cohen”**—We never do meet this bearded father figure, nor will we see the alleged “Nortius Maximus.” As far as the film presents the situation, Brian’s conception is, if not immaculate, certainly immethodical. The name Cohen is a version of *kohen*, the Hebrew word for priest (or augur, soothsayer). If Mr. Cohen *were* Brian’s actual father, Brian might be priestly by birth and tradition (not a Levite, but a Kohen), and therefore higher in the social, religious, and political strata of Jerusalem. As a son of uncertain parentage, however, Brian can be no more than a bastard, which is generally described as “depraved” and worse.[2] See “The bastard!” entry below for much more on this term.

In the final Monty Python film, *Meaning of Life*, one of the piratical chartered accountants is named Mr. Cohen.

MANDY: “None of your cheek!”—A common English colloquialism, “cheek” can be impertinence, rudeness, or just freshness. The in-your-face Mr.

Cheeky—seen at the Sermon on the Mount and later as part of the crucifixion queue—fits this term well.

MANDY: "He was a Roman, Brian!" *(dramatic chord)*—The "dramatic chord" moment is a borrow from not only *Holy Grail* and the run of *Flying Circus*, but also years of radio dramas the Pythons grew up hearing, as well as *The Goon Show*. In Ep. 7 of *Flying Circus*, for example, a similar chord is struck, and a slightly dim-witted female character thinks it's a doorbell. The scientist (Chapman) has to tell her "It's just the incidental music for this scene."[3] Similarly, in the "Ralph Mellish" sketch included on the *Matching Tie and Handkerchief* album (1973), a number of these flourishes can be heard, even as the narrator continues to tell us that nothing out of the ordinary is happening.

MANDY: "He was a centurion in the Roman army"—A centurion was a commander in the Roman army, meaning he ranked with the other centurion depicted in the film (played by Cleese). Given his swift disappearance, however, he easily may have exaggerated his rank to impress young Mandy.

As will be discussed later, Brian should actually be happy about this new fact, since the likelihood of a Roman citizen—more specifically the *honestiores*—being crucified was extremely rare.[4] Other methods of capital punishment, however, were still at the prefect's disposal, especially for *humiliores*, the lower classes of Roman culture. The fact that Brian is also part Jewish problematizes his situation.

BRIAN: "You mean . . . you were raped?"—This would have been a tricky legal definition at the time. Rape was illegal under Roman law, and women could bring charges against an accused rapist, but the woman had to be a Roman citizen. If the woman were a slave, then the rape charge could be downgraded to a violation or even theft of chattel—property owned by another Roman citizen. In a time of war and conquest, especially, the chances of any prosecution being brought for a rape among the enemy seem unlikely.

Elisabeth Vikman writes of the use of sexual violence in antiquity, noting that the ancient Greeks, Romans, and even the Israelites practiced (and often defended) rape against their conquered. The easiest and perhaps most understandable reason is the use of violence as justified against the "other," especially "during these early holy wars" among the Israelites.[5] In fighting the Midianites, for example, "the victorious may do as they wish with defeated peoples," and prophetic, scriptural backing underscored it all.[6] And since the Israelites practiced it, Mandy shouldn't be surprised when the Roman invaders did the same. If, as Paul Bentley Kern mentions, "the raping that frequently

followed the fall of a city starkly symbolized total victory in a total war," then the subjugation of Judea qualifies as total war for the Roman forces. As depicted by the Pythons here, though, Mandy admits to the initial violence of the act, then backpedals as she admits the promised benefits—exotic travel, food, and riches—changed her view of the rape. This walking back will be revisited later, when Reg's charges against Rome are questioned by the rest of the PFJ, who remind Reg of how good life is in Jerusalem after the initial violent, penetrative act.

Problematically, it's mentioned (by Ziolowski) that the "sexual attractiveness" of the potential victims meant that "fair women" had a much better chance of survival, even including the rape scenario: "It is important to remember the subsequent enslavement of enemy women common in ancient warfare. Attractive women would then hold a higher economical value and this may be an additional motive to spare their lives."[7] This being said, was Mandy "sexually attractive" thirty years earlier? She was raped, she admits, and she did survive. But the script calls her a "rat-bag" when we first see her, with the infant Brian, and she's now just an older rat-bag. This is the Pythonesque trope of using men-as-ugly-women who somehow manage to still be attractive, in the narrative world. Remember that Nortius also promises Mandy gifts and *la dolce vita* back in Rome, essentially honey-talking her into a premarital romp—it sounds less like a marauding conqueror raping at will, and more like a hormone-besotted twenty-something willing to say anything to get *everything*.

MANDY: "Well at first . . . yes . . ."—Nineteen-year-old Patty Hearst was, at first, a kidnap victim, taken by the Symbionese Liberation Army because she was the coddled scion of a powerful, moneyed clan representing everything rotten in modern America.[8] Kidnapped from her Berkeley apartment in February 1974, authorities assumed that her participation in the group's insurrectionary efforts became voluntary very quickly (she was participating in an armed robbery by April 1974), which is why she was eventually convicted of bank robbery and sentenced to prison. During the course of the sensational trial the sexual activity between Hearst and members of the SLA became prime fodder. Hearst and her lawyers claimed that she was raped by leader "Cinque" and that sex with Willy Wolfe happened because she was "afraid," but prosecutors were convinced she had entered into a willing physical relationship with at least Wolfe, a.k.a. "Cujo." The more tawdry portions of the trial were covered in depth in local (Bay Area) newspapers, and especially graphically in countercultural underground papers like the *Berkeley Barb*, university papers including UC Berkeley's *Daily Californian*, and even *Playboy*.[9]

MANDY: “Nortius Maximus . . .”—The two names indicate this man at least could claim to be a free Roman citizen before entering the military.[10] There are many Maximus-named men in history, including a handful of Roman generals and governors. One Magnus Maximus (335–388) had usurped the empire’s throne as a commander in Britain, and would lose the seat in battle five years later. Maximus was technically *from* Britain when he usurped Gratian’s authority, bringing him closer to these English-speaking Romans depicted in *Brian*. As will be discussed below, “Nortius Maximus” is most likely a *Carry On*–type name, meant to wink at the character’s extreme level of naughtiness.

MANDY: “. . . promised me the known world . . . taken to Rome . . . house by the Forum . . . slaves . . . asses’ milk . . . as much gold as I could eat . . .”—Reminiscent of the excesses enjoyed by the ex-slave character Trimalchio in Petronius’s *Satyricon*, who “has scores of slaves around him to pick up fallen objects, carry him, offer their hair as towels, massage him, and make music.”[11] Mandy’s version of this “absurd feast” includes milk from an ass and “as much gold” as she can eat. But given that *Satyricon* dates to approximately Nero’s reign (54–68), Nortius Maximus couldn’t have read it (or heard it read) and simply be aping the portions he remembers. (The Pythons could be allowing him this anachronism, of course, something they’ve enjoyed in *Flying Circus* and *Holy Grail*.) Brian himself will later try to emulate Jesus’s teachings to escape the Roman soldiers, mangling Beatitudes and parables almost beyond recognition. This actually just seems to be Nortius’s line to convince young Mandy he’s a real catch.

Mandy doesn’t say if she was promised marriage, but if she had then that should have been the first clue that something was amiss: Roman soldiers were actually *forbidden* to marry until 193, during the reign of Septimus Severus. More recent archaeology indicates that a number of Roman outposts offer clear evidence of women and children in domestic situations, so practice may have kept its distance from principle.[12] Perhaps she was to be a mistress, and not a wife, but Mandy isn’t forthcoming.

The fringe benefits that allowed Nortius Maximus into Mandy’s garden of earthly delights include: **“. . . taken to Rome”**—Interesting that Mandy’s idea of bliss is to leave Jerusalem and head for Rome, the heart of the empire that has enslaved her people. For many, though, Rome was the center of the universe, hence the medieval adage, “All roads lead to Rome.”

These philo-Romans would include the historian Josephus, who was born a Jew but ended his life as a celebrated and favored Roman citizen. As the Jewish

military leader Joseph, he had surrendered in Jotapata (discussed in detail later) and been taken to Rome, likely for execution. Instead, the clever man offered Vespasian an aggrandizing version of a known prophesy, and Vespasian allowed Joseph to live. Once Nero and his short-lived successors Galba and Otho died, Vespasian was, with some military intrigue, in line for the throne, and Joseph's future was also assured. Josephus would enjoy many of the niceties on Mandy's list as he later wrote his histories, safely nestled in Rome.

This also may be a contemporary reflection of the very split opinion in Northern Ireland (and Ireland in general) over the significance of *Catholic* Irish "popery"—a "Home Rule as Rome rule"[13] that the *Protestant* Irish wanted to avoid at all costs—the Irish themselves split down the middle. For many in Ireland, then, the specter of being ruled by Rome, with a host of staunch Catholic citizen foot soldiers ready to do the pope's bidding—so it was feared—was a frightening reality throughout most of the Pythons' lifetimes.[14] Men like the Rev. Ian Paisley, "a fire-breathing standard bearer of Protestantism"[15]—likely asked the rhetorical "And what have they ever given us in return?" among themselves, as their Catholic neighbors welcomed their faith's allegedly foreign influence.

"House by the Forum . . ."—Essentially the center of the public life in Ancient Rome, the Forum was actually a handful of buildings around a rectangular courtyard. The contemporary equivalent might be the promise of a house in London's Kensington, or a Park Avenue apartment in Manhattan.

". . . slaves . . ."—In *Life of Brian* there is only one identifiable slave, a "small boy" holding a parasol over Gregory at the Sermon on the Mount and on the cross. The script doesn't identify the boy's color or race, though in the film he's black, and likely a local North African extra. Jeremias mentions that slaves seem to have comprised an insignificant portion of Jerusalem's population, and were generally domestic servants. In other more Roman cities, including Rome itself, slaves would have been more plentiful (all able-bodied peoples conquered by Roman forces were fair game for enslavement), and slaves were needed for public works projects and the popular, deadly games staged regularly across the empire.[16] Many countries and ancient peoples took slaves as spoils of war, including the Israelites and Greeks. Homer would write, according to Vikman, of a "gendered ideal; men are slaughtered whereas women and children are enslaved."[17] This seemed to be true across many peoples in Greece; while among the Israelites there were both Hebrew and Canaanite slaves, and laws for treatment of each group. Like the temple and most of Jewish religious life,

slavery is another practice prevalent in first-century Judea that the Pythons avoid in *Life of Brian*.

“. . . asses’ milk . . .”—Mentioned earlier by the Ex-leper, the donkey had been a crucial part of Ancient Israel’s life for several thousand years. Pliny the Elder wrote of the benefits of donkey’s milk, as Jill Bough records in her book titled, appropriately, *Donkey*: It is generally believed that asses’ milk effaces wrinkles in the face, renders the skin more delicate, and preserves its whiteness; and it is a well-known fact, that some women are in the habit of washing their face with it seven hundred times daily, strictly observing that number. Poppaea, the wife of Emperor Nero, was the first to practice this; indeed, she had sitting-baths, prepared solely with asses’ milk, for which purpose whole troops of she-asses used to attend her on her journeys.[18]

Pliny’s *Historia naturalis* also includes other benefits of this milk, noting the liquid could “combat poisonings, fever, fatigue, eye strains, weakened teeth, face wrinkles, ulcerations, asthma and certain gynaecological troubles.”[19] Milk from the donkey doesn’t seem to have been high on the lists of fresh milk sources for ancient Israelites, but many Romans clearly enjoyed its benefits. Nortius may have mentioned the milk’s cosmetic and health properties, perhaps another one of the reasons Mandy is willing to travel to Rome. Given this list of uses, it’s no wonder the woman seen earlier carrying her donkey home would want to nurse the valuable creature back to profitable health.

In *Carry on Cleo*, the voluptuous Cleopatra (Amanda Barrie) is bathing in asses’ milk when she first meets Mark Antony, an image the Pythons likely encourage viewers to conjure in relation to our Mandy and Nortius.

“. . . as much gold as I could eat . . .”—In the Goons’ “The Fear of Wages” episode, two corrupt Army Pay Corps’ representatives are trying to abscond with all the wages in their charge. At one point they are hiding as much as they can on Moriarty’s person—£10,000 in the linings of his socks, £100 under his wig, and “£50,000 in loose silver” that he needs to swallow.

Gold wasn’t meant to be eaten, nor was expensive and much-coveted marble meant to be trod under foot, but that’s where Jerusalem found itself a few years before the city fell to the Romans. In the year 64, the temple was finally completed and celebrated. Unfortunately, the thousands of workmen who had been gainfully employed for years as the temple slowly progressed were now without work. The city’s fathers decided to create more public works to help offset the unemployment—hopefully staving off idlers’ violence and even revolt

—and with the leftover marble from the building of the temple, began to repave the streets of Jerusalem.[20]

Just six years later, the plight of Jerusalem had gone well beyond a lack of employment for ex-lepers or public workers. With Titus's forces surrounding the city, then breaching first one wall and then another, many Jerusalemites tried to sneak out of the city to escape both the Romans and starvation. Many "ate" their gold and silver and jewelry, and then fled in the dark of night. These furtive decampments dwindled when word spread that those who were captured by the Romans were immediately slit open, and their guts searched.[21]

MANDY: ". . . then—he, having his way with me, had, voom! Like a rat out of an aqueduct"—In the well-known "Dead Parrot" sketch in Ep. 8 of *Flying Circus*, the Shopkeeper (Palin) assures Praline (Cleese) that the parrot would fly away—"voom"—if it hadn't been nailed to the perch. Praline is certain that even "four thousand volts" wouldn't make this ex-parrot "voom."[22]

Rats could move around from area to area on grain carts, on ships, in deliveries of all sorts across the ancient world. Rats would have used these waterways as sources of fresh water, of course, but also safer pathways under, above, and simply away from the city's human inhabitants. During times of flooding, parts of Rome could experience significant rising water levels, forcing populations of rats out of sewers and waterways and into homes.[23] (It may be that Nortius Maximus had been stationed in Rome initially, and was simply serving in the Jerusalem garrison when his honeyed words seduced Mandy, and then "voomed" back to Rome.) Koloski-Ostrow even tells of an octopus said to have used the Puteoli sewer to clamber up into a home, regularly pilfering pickled fish from a wealthy merchant's larder.[24] Of more concern than rats in aqueducts, especially in Jerusalem, were rats and other vermin living and dying in the city's cisterns, where fresh water was stored.[25] These complex subterranean waterways were necessary to keep the city's meager water supplies from rapidly evaporating in surface storage. Aqueducts will be discussed again in more detail in relation to PFJ member Xerxes asking about one of the benefits of the Roman occupation.

Auberon Waugh fortuitously points out an equally "advantageous" relationship in the real world that is echoed in Mandy's experience with Nortius Maximus. In a 1977 issue of *Private Eye*, he mentions Mary Whitehouse's attempt to prosecute *Gay News* for blasphemy:[26]

> Mrs Mary Whitehouse is an old friend and very remarkable woman. I also happen to find her very attractive physically. But I can't help feeling she has let zeal outrun her discretion in prosecuting *Gay*

> *News* for allegedly blasphemous libel. Normally, of course, some kind High Court judge would restrain her from making a fool of herself in this way. On this occasion, she had the misfortune to draw a fanatical enemy of the Press in Judge Bristow *and is left holding the baby, as the saying goes*.[27]

The obviously "physically attractive" Mandy was confronted not by an authority figure who puts her in her place as one conquered by Rome; it's her "misfortune" to be taken advantage of by a "fanatical" enemy of Jewry, a centurion named Nortius Maximus who has his own agenda, and Mandy is eventually left holding the baby, Brian.

***(draft)* MANDY: "I went down to the barracks . . . you've been had, Missus"**—In this draft version Judith is part of this conversation, and has invited Brian over to her house for dinner. Her parents are the "Iscariots," meaning she's actually "Judith Iscariot," a very *Carry On*–sounding name. There were more of these easy gags in the early days of the idea and then script, including a Fourth Wise Man who always gets shushed, a "Ron the Baptist," an Otto who was much more clearly a "Nazi-rene" looking to annex neighboring countries and cleanse the homeland, *etc.*[28] This Nortius Maximus moment won't reemerge until later, when Pilate asks the Centurion if such a man is part of the local garrison.

These barracks would have likely been found within the impressive Antonia Fortress, one of Herod's many military and civic structures built during his reign. The high priest's vestments were also kept in this fortress.

BRIAN: "The bastard!"—In first-century Jerusalem this wouldn't have been just a mild insult. There was disagreement over just what constituted a bastard in the eyes of Jewish law, including whether betrothals or promises had been made when there was conception, whether the woman was already married, etc., but these were minor arguments that paled in relation to the larger question: Who were regarded as bastard in Jerusalem before the destruction of the Temple? Traditional teaching allows only the following conclusion to be drawn. M. Yeh. iv.13 relates: "R. Simeon b. Azzai (c. AD 120) said: 'I found a family register in Jerusalem and in it was written: Such-a-one is a bastard through [a transgression of the law of] thy neighbour's wife.'" We see then that in Jerusalem children conceived in adultery were declared bastards.[29]

We don't know if there actually was a "Mr. Cohen" to whom Mandy was married when she had relations with Nortius, or whether the centurion was already married. Likely Mandy was young and single, and so was Nortius, and therefore the act was not adulterous. The subsequent birth was still problematic, even if Brian wouldn't have been considered a bastard by the mores of the time.[30] He could have been called "fatherless," if his true father were indeed not

known, which clearly could have been the case when rape was alleged. Both fatherless and "foundling" children were blemished, and were nearly forbidden to marry at all. The reason? Since their parentage was unknown, there was no certainty that a forbidden, incestuous marriage might not be accidentally entered into with a close relative.[31]

According to Jeremias, Jewish law treated "tainted" births and peoples quite punitively, at least in principle. For example, a bastard like Brian could only intermarry within the group including "the proselyte, freedman, bastard . . . [temple slaves] . . . [fatherless] and . . . [foundlings]."[32] He could not intermarry with "priestly, levitic and (full-)Israelitish stocks," nor even in the second category, which added "impaired priestly stocks."[33] Brian's family would have been described as having "grave blemishes of ancestry," so his chances of finding a suitable wife or be accepted as a son-in-law were slim. Other lists of appropriate marriage partners forbade bastards from marrying other bastards, given their uncertain parentage.[34] Brian was also a bastard of a Gentile father, which pushed him further down the list,[35] and as a bastard he could also never be part of the Sanhedrin or hold public office.[36]

This is another of those moments in the film where the Pythons will make direct connections to the time they are portraying, if only by accident, and even to Jesus. Given the Jews' strictures regarding birth and parentage, Brian, as the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier, and Jesus, the alleged (to many) son of God, both carry "grave blemishes of ancestry" (or at least charcoal gray areas), and it's no surprise that Brian ends up suffering the same fate as Jesus—crucified, in part, for being on the outside of acceptable Jewish culture in first-century Jerusalem. Finally, from Jeremias: "When we consider that the stigma of bastardy marked every male descendant . . . for ever and indelibly, and that a bastard family's share in Israel's final redemption was most vigorously disputed . . . we shall understand that the word 'bastard' constituted one of the worst insults to a man; and anyone using it was sentenced to thirty-nine lashes with the whip."[37] No one is punished for saying "bastard" in the world of the film, just "Jehovah."[38] It's clear the Pythons *didn't* truly appreciate the volatile concept of bastardy in relation to Brian specifically and ancient Jerusalem in general.

BRIAN: "I'm a Kike! A Yid! A Hebe! A Hook-nose! I'm Kosher, Mum. I'm a Red Sea Pedestrian and proud of it!"—More of a childish temper tantrum than anything else, this is a shortened version of a Python staple, the "thesaurus sketch" trope, in this case a "vituperative verbal list" that Cleese and Chapman pioneered in *Flying Circus*.[39] This Python favorite will be discussed

again, when Reg has to be reminded of the Roman contributions to Jerusalem, and where Reg finally puts a stop to the unhelpful flow of information with a characteristic "Shut up!"

Also, it's interesting that Brian is here claiming his provincial, even *humiliores* status in front of not only his mother, but a Roman centurion. If only he'd appreciated that later, in front of Pilate, he would need to change his tune and claim Roman kinship and status.[40] There he could have enlisted this man—a Roman citizen and soldier, with all attendant rights and privileges—as a witness to his Roman heritage, and therefore his rights, one of which was the chance to avoid execution, as will be discussed later.

"Kike" is a derogatory Jewish epithet, more American than British, and likely emerging from the nineteenth or twentieth century, perhaps in relation to the increased immigration of Jews into the United States. The British TV character Alf Garnett spewed these terms regularly on the edgy and incredibly popular sitcom *Till Death Us Do Part*.[41]

A "Yid" is another nineteenth and twentieth century insult, which, according to the *OED*, was often used by Jewish persons to refer to other Jews. Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts (the British Union of Fascists) were known to shout "anti-Yid slogans" as they marched through the East End in the 1930s, and later Hitler was known to call Churchill "this Yid-ridden, half-American souse."[42] "Bloody Yid" and "filthy Yid" seemed to have been fairly popular epithets in Britain during the 1970s, spoken just before a fight got out of hand.[43] When novelist Evelyn Waugh's *Diaries* were released in September 1976, the *Sunday Times*' Frederic Raphael reviewed the work in the article "Portrait of the Artist as a Bad Man." The language Waugh often used (and that Brian uses here) is the language of the public schoolboy, and Waugh is acknowledged by the reviewer as being both "odious" and "terribly funny": Surely there was more to him that that? Yes: he was also mad, and quite possibly bad, and undoubtedly dangerous to know. "Mad" is a term which recurs *un peu partout* in his Diaries. It is applied to the unremarkable schoolboys whom he was forced to teach, because he needed the money after coming down from Oxford in a haze of expensive alcohol (there were not better hazes in his long experience) and it is applied, thirty and more years later, to assorted worthies and unworthies, including his dearish dearest friends, Cyril Connolly and also Randolph Churchill.[44] (Well, he didn't call them niggers or hook-nosed Jews or oiks or wops, did he, the eternal Public Schoolboy?) Was he mad? Hilaire Belloc[45] was asked, after a first muted meeting with the unusually deferential enfant terrible, what he made of him. "He

is possessed," replied the sage-old Yid-hating, Papist semi-Frog. Well, touché certainly. For if the Comic Muse was his enviable familiar, there were always more sinister demons leering at his shoulder. Such are the cradle gifts of the Gods: you cannot, and Waugh certainly could not, be blessed with the one without being cursed with the others.[46]

The Pythons are also clearly "eternal public schoolboys," ready for a poop joke or racial slur should the need arise, *un peu partout*.

"Hebe"—short for Hebrew—is a more recent, Depression-era epithet, and seemingly more popular in the United States than in Britain. In July 1972 critic Alan Brien was watching DeMille's *Ten Commandments* with his son at the Casino cinema, and began to wonder why the Jews were never called "Jews," rather "Hebrews" or "Israelites." Even the Pharaoh dances around the name, leading Brien to conclude: This reluctance to give your enemy the name he calls himself is usually the mark of the discreet racialist. He prefers to say "the Chosen People," or "those of the Hebrew persuasion," or "coloured folk," or "those of African descent"—thus giving the impression, even to some Jews and blacks, that "Jew" and "Black" are the equivalent of "Yid" and "nigger."[47]

"Hebe" was also the approved and oft-used shortening for "Hebrew" in the pages of *Variety* for many years.[48] Much of the Hollywood film industry had been run by Jewish families and individuals, *Variety* included.

These kinds of racial slurs (and insensitive racial depictions) seemed to be everywhere as the Pythons grew up, in cinema cartoons, advertisements, political cartoons, on the radio and TV, and in letters to the editor. A "Golliwogg" character (based on a Negro minstrel doll) became very popular during the Pythons' youth, appearing on dozens of consumer items, from greeting cards to jam.[49] The Goons regularly made racial jokes at the expense of their only colleague of color, bandleader Ray Ellington—who was often the initiator (at the performance level) of the joke. The Goons also presented Scotsmen as penny-pinching, the Welsh as dim but pleasant, the French as "frog-eaters," and Arabs as "wogs." The Goons' harmonica player, Max Geldray, a Dutch-born Jew (Ellington was also Jewish), also got to hear about the size of his "conk" on a regular basis. Principal writer and Irishman Spike Milligan wrote as many self-deprecating Irish jokes as others; his "racialist" references seemed to be on par with the more racially insensitive spirit of the times.

"Hook-nose" is the only insult here not specifically connected to the Jewish people. There are many instances historically where "hook-nose" has been used to simply describe the facial features of a criminal, for example, or a character

introduced in literature, distinct from any racial or religious attachment. (The nose prosthesis worn by Alec Guinness—playing Fagin—in David Lean's *Oliver Twist* is a noted exception to this race-free description.) A 1975 archaeological find in Sakkara, Egypt, for example, was a bas-relief image of King Tut's general, Horemheb (later pharaoh himself), which, according to contemporary news reports, depicted "a fat man with a hooked nose and a double chin."[50]

"Kosher" simply means Brian is claiming to live according to Jewish custom and law, including eating meat that has been properly killed and prepared. Both the Pythons and the Goons made "kosher" jokes. In *Flying Circus* Ep. 3, a barrister (Cleese) is running late after having trouble finding a "kosher car park," while: in *The Goon Show* episode "King Solomon's Mines," Bluebottle (Sellers) is thrown into the river, and shouts out: "Help! I've fallen into non-kosher water!" Other instances include "kosher margarine" in "The Tales of Old Dartmoor," "yellow kosher boots" in "The International Christmas Pudding," and "kosher wine gum" in "The Pevensey Bay Disaster."[51]

In *Flying Circus* Ep. 26, the lost-at-sea sailors are worried not about having to eat one of their fellows, but that he be killed and prepared in accordance with kosher laws if he is to be eaten.[52]

Finally, a "Red Sea Pedestrian" is fairly self-evident, though its origins are clouded. Slang dictionaries cite it as both an Australian and British reference, and it simply means one who crossed the Red Sea on foot (Exodus 14:21).[53] Unlike some of the other slurs, this one is generally considered to be more jocular. The slanted references to Jews in *Flying Circus* are few, and are missing entirely from their look at Britain of the early Middle Ages, where such references might seem most appropriate: The Pythons make no direct or even glancing references to Jews or Jewishness in [*Holy Grail*], even though the place and plight of Jews in the medieval period was significant—they were allowed to lend money with interest (their souls were damned anyway, was the prevailing thought), and they suffered horrifically during the many pogroms, especially following the worst of the plagues.[54]

In *Meaning of Life*, a Jew-baiting reference from a charwoman results in a bucket of vomit being dumped on her head.

Alf Garnett himself erupts with a splenetic along this same vein, though it's only after his son-on-law has goaded him, the *Telegraph*'s Alan Yentob remembers in an article looking at Jews in the British entertainment business: Over the years, the British approach has been more subtle—on occasion, even

subversive. One of the funniest moments in any sitcom that I can remember is when Alf Garnett, the irredeemable but likeable "bigot" from *Till Death Us Do Part* is confronted by his socialist son-in-law and accused of being a Jew. "How would you like it if I called you a Yid? You're Jewish, aren't you," he taunts him, only to be greeted by an expression of utter horror and humiliation, and Alf's repeatedly hysterical response, "What are you talking about! I am not a Yid!! I am not Jewish!! It's lies. It's all lies."[55]

She moves towards the CENTURION—Nothing in the printed scripts say anything about why the Centurion waits, or what actual relationship he might have with Mandy. As filmed, Mandy moves toward the Centurion and just begins to kneel in front of him. The implication is that she performs sexual favors for him, he pays her or rewards her somehow, and she and Brian live on in this way without a husband or master. (This after chiding and tsk-ing Brian for only thinking about "Sex, sex, sex!") As will be discussed later, the scriptures offer very few similarly *unattached* women who are capable of supporting themselves, so Mandy and Brian have managed to buck the odds; that, or she is more of a 1970s construct, a "liberated" female who chooses her lifestyle.

Notes

1. See the many entries for “constable” in the index for Larsen, *MPFC: UC*.
2. See Prawer’s *The History of Jerusalem*, 272.
3. *ATW*, 1.87–88.
4. Cook, “Envisioning Crucifixion,” 263–64.
5. The Pythons have previously “othered” homosexuals, women, toffs, and so on, often culminating in a violent act. See the index entry in *MPFC: UC*, “othering/others,” for more.
6. Vikman, “Ancient Origins: Sexual Violence,” 23; see Deuteronomy 21: 10–14; Numbers 31.
7. Quoted in Vikman, “Ancient Origins: Sexual Violence,” 28.
8. She was the granddaughter of newspaper magnate (and ur-Charles Foster Kane) William Randolph Hearst. She and the SLA will be discussed later.
9. For more see “The Parts Left Out of the Patty Hearst Trial, Parts 1 and 2” (2002), at disinfo.com, by Paul Krassner, who also wrote *Patty Hearst and the Twinkie Murders* (2014).
10. Adoption was possible. Jewish historian Josephus (born Joseph ben Matityahu) added “Titus” and “Flavius” to his name as a token of respect (or obsequy) to the Flavian dynasty, and specifically to Vespasian and Titus. He became known as Titus Flavius Josephus.
11. Rodriguez, *The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery*, 549. Both Trimalchio and Petronius’s *Satyricon* and Horace’s *Satires* will be discussed later in the scene at the Colosseum, where Brian is flogging “Roman rubbish” to the audience.
12. Archaeologist Elizabeth Greene discussed her new interpretations of female figures found on Trajan’s Column at a conference; her own article on the subject has yet to be published. For coverage, see “Women Present, No ‘Second Fiddle’ in Roman Military,” in *Western News*, 5 February 2015.
13. Brendon, *DFBE*, 304.
14. Remember the earlier-mentioned invasion of the IRA, in its conception at least a Roman church-following body armed to the teeth and bent on domination?
15. “Paisley’s £180,000 Church,” *Times*, 4 October 1969: 6.
16. See the entries later in the “Colosseum” scene for more on slaves, gladiators, and the games.
17. Vikman, “Ancient Origins: Sexual Violence,” 26.
18. Bough, *Donkey*, 39–40.
19. Bough, *Donkey*, 40.
20. Kotker, *HLTJ*, 114.
21. *HLTJ*, 123. This search for plunder was payment to the Roman soldiers for their sufferings as the siege went on, depredations that also included rape and murder of the city’s inhabitants.
22. *ATW*, 1.8.105.
23. See Aldrete’s *Floods of the Tiber in Ancient Rome*, 127.
24. Koloski-Ostrow, *ASRI*, 83.
25. See Ernest L. Martin’s notes (esp. footnote 15) related to reviews of his book, *New Evidence of the Site of the Temple in Jerusalem* (2000), Associates for Scriptural Knowledge website.
26. See entries in the “The Stoning” scene for more on this case, and its influence on the Pythons and the in-progress *Life of Brian*.
27. *Private Eye*, 7 January 1977: 16; italics added.
28. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 352 and 224, respectively.
29. Jeremias, *JTJ*, 340.
30. Palin summed up Brian’s story as they worked out the film treatment (a pre-script) in December 1976, referring to Brian as a “bastard,” simply meaning born out of wedlock.
31. *JTJ*, 343.
32. *JTJ*, 271.
33. *JTJ*, 271.

34. *JTJ*, 271–72.
35. *JTJ*, 273.
36. *JTJ*, 298n102.
37. *JTJ*, 342.
38. The word is used at least fourteen times in the film, and *always* as just a simple insult.
39. *MPFC: UC*, 1.43.
40. As the Apostle Paul (of the free city Tarsus) did to avoid corporal punishment and ensure a fair trial; see Acts 22. Brian, born in Bethlehem and living in Jerusalem, doesn't appear to be a Hellenistic Jew. This will be discussed later when Brian claims to be a Roman, in the "Court of Pontius Pilate" scene.
41. Viewership reached upwards of half the homes in Britain in the late 1960s, and Garnett "went on to supercede fictional status and became a cultural phenomenon, attracting seismic media coverage" (Malik, *Representing Black Britain*, 93). See also Larsen, *BAFHG*, 279–80.
42. "Mosley's Blackshirts," *Times*, 25 October 1968: 11; and "Plays That Remain," *Times*, 22 May 1976: 10.
43. ". . . And Tranquilisers Can Make People Violent," *Sunday Times*, 2 February 1975: 2; "The 'New Left,'" *Telegraph*, 26 March 1971: 18. In February 1978, just after the Pythons returned from Barbados, an Islington-area comprehensive school created a list of words that would be banned on campus, including "coon," "wog," and "yid." This was following the discovery of a National Front recruiting leaflet at the school ("Head Bans Race Words in National Front Drive," *Telegraph*, 3 February 1978: 6).
44. Cyril Connolly was a writer and literary critic. Evelyn's son Auberon blasted Connolly often in the pages of *Private Eye* and *Spectator*, and for years promised he was writing a book about him. The Pythons mention him in their song "Eric the Half-a-Bee." Randolph Churchill was both a journalist and a Tory MP.
45. The Pythons have also mentioned Belloc—an "ardent Catholic"—in Ep. 2 as perhaps "a closet sexual deviant" (*MPFC: UC*, 1.28).
46. Frederic Raphael, "Portrait of the Artist as a Bad Man," *Sunday Times*, 5 September 1976: 27.
47. "Alan Brien's Diary," *Sunday Times*, 30 July 1972: 24.
48. Rawson, *Wicked Words*, 189.
49. See *MPFC: UC*, 2.31, the "Nigger-Baiter" entry.
50. "Pharaoh Was Probably Fat," *Telegraph*, 21 February 1975: 17.
51. *MPFC: UC*, 1.55.
52. *MPFC: UC*, 1.390.
53. See *The New Partridge Dictionary of Slang*, as well as Rawson, *Wicked Words*.
54. *BAFHG*, 289n57.
55. "Now That's What I Call Chutzpah," *Telegraph*, 22 May 2011.

SCENE SEVEN

THE COLOSSEUM, JERUSALEM ***A HUGE ROMAN AMPHITHEATRE SPARSELY ATTENDED***—FOUND IN CARTHAGE, TUNISIA, THIS LOCATION IS ACTUALLY AN ANCIENT ROMAN AMPHITHEATRE, THOUGH QUITE DILAPIDATED, AND HAD TO BE DRESSED CONSIDERABLY BY GILLIAM AND CREW. THE LOW WALL WITH ARCHES AND RINGS, THE GATED ENTRY, AND THE PODIA HAD TO BE BUILT AND DECORATED ONSITE, WHILE A (POSTPRODUCTION) PAINTED GLASS MATTE PROVIDED THE UPPER BACKGROUND.

The matinee could be “sparsely attended” simply because the Pythons have a habit of creating mock epic moments in their film and television worlds. In Ep. 12 of *Flying Circus* a handful of cheering debutantes watch the Upperclass Twits compete themselves to death, while in Ep. 28 one small flag-waving child stands ready to send off the intrepid Mr. and Mrs. Brian Norris (Palin and Chapman) as they set off to trace the historic migration from Surbiton to Hounslow.[1] It’s also true that by the year 33 the Roman emperor Tiberius would have been in power for almost nineteen years, and he was known to be “notoriously hostile to public shows.”[2] By the year 57, the emperor Nero would announce the “banning [of]

provincial governors and imperial procurators from giving gladiatorial *munera*, *venationes*, or theatrical shows of any kind in the provinces."[3] This means a provincial ruler like Pilate (or the local *aedile*) would have been unable to stage the pitiful gladiatorial display in Jerusalem or anywhere else in Judea after 57.[4] Gladiators and their games would remain viable, however, through the fourth century at least, in smaller contests (perhaps tatty ones like this), and further away from seats of power.[5]

Considering the film's budget, the Pythons had likely shot their wad (in regard to extras) for the "Sermon on the Mount" and the "Pilate's Address" scenes, where dozens of costumed extras wend their way toward the mount and roll in the dust, respectively. There are handfuls seen in the bazaar scenes, as well, but other scenes feature fewer and fewer people. It's also possible that they could have added any number of games audience members on the matte painting portion of the shot, if they'd wanted to go that way. As presented, the painted upper portion of the Colosseum is as sparsely populated as the live portion below.

SUPER TITLE: The Colosseum, Jerusalem—Herod the Great is known for his massive building program that included almost all of Caesarea, and the temple, fortresses, theaters, and games arenas near Jerusalem, the last bringing Hellenized Rome and Roman games to Judea.[6] There was no Colosseum-type building in Jerusalem, but Herod's quinquennial games to honor the emperor (Augustus) meant gladiators were likely fighting in or near Jerusalem, and Josephus found that disturbing: On this account it was that Herod revolted from the laws of his country, and corrupted their ancient constitution, by the introduction of foreign practices, which constitution yet ought to have been preserved inviolable; by which means we became guilty of great wickedness afterward, while those religious observances which used to lead the multitude to piety were now neglected; for, in the first place, he appointed solemn games to be celebrated every fifth year, in honor of Caesar, and built a theater at Jerusalem, as also a very great amphitheater in the plain. Both of them were indeed costly works, but opposite to the Jewish customs; for we have had no such shows delivered down to us as fit to be used or exhibited by us; yet did he celebrate these games every five years, in the most solemn and splendid manner.[7]

Games were held regularly in Caesarea, where Pilate would live, though Jewish residents refused to participate: "[The Jews] could not forgive [Herod] for insulting their religious feelings by forcing upon them heathen games and

combats with wild animals."[8] It was also in Caesarea in 70 that many Jewish captives rounded up in the fall of Jerusalem were slaughtered in gladiatorial games. The Herodian theater, amphitheater, and a hippodrome described by Josephus do not survive, except by description, and in archaeological remains.[9] The "sparsely attended" events the Pythons have presented reflect the Jewish resistance to these pagan celebrations: "The Pharisees scorned the Greek civilization that Herod encouraged in the country," Kotker writes, "and they were shocked when he built a hippodrome for chariot racing in Jerusalem and an amphitheatre outside the city walls where men fought with wild beasts and with one another in gladiatorial combats."[10] Smallwood suggests that rather than being *religiously* offended (as they might be by graven images), the Jerusalem Jews "were disgusted by the barbarity of the bloodshed of the amphitheatre . . . not any actual contravention of the Law."[11]

In the closing pages of his fascinating and oft-reprinted book *Those about to Die*, Daniel Mannix gives a handy list of regions beyond Rome but still part of the empire where large, games-related amphitheaters had been constructed, and where the spectacles were well attended: "So all over the Roman world great amphitheaters appeared, hardly less magnificent than the one in Rome itself: at Capus, Pompeii, Pozzuoli[12] and Verona in Italy; at Arles and Nimes in France; at Seville in Spain; at Antioch in Palestine; at Alexandria in Egypt; at Silchester in Britain; at El Djem in Tunisia."[13] Judea and Jerusalem are not part of this list.[14] Wiedemann's comments indicate this absence shouldn't be surprising: "References to gladiators in Hebrew texts are virtually non-existent."[15] The possibility of confusion as to which Roman-occupied cities might have had amphitheaters built to feature gladiatorial events is understandable. In the popular picture book *Wonders of the Past*, for example, the two-page spread of an image of Jerusalem during Herod's time clearly depicts a large (circular) Roman colosseum in the far distance, inside the city walls.[16] As a city occupied by the Romans, it makes sense that artists would have assumed the Romans had eventually built *all* their usual entertainment structures.

Under the "The Colosseum, Jerusalem" title is a medium, zoom lens shot of heralds blowing trumpets,[17] each trumpet draped with red and gold banners. These types of banners have been seen earlier, in the opening credit sequence, there with the names and job titles of production personnel.[18] These banners clearly pay tribute to the revered Caesar Augustus (SPQR DIVO AUGUSTO CAESARI[19]), who had died in the year 14, about nineteen years before the depicted events. Tiberius had been the Roman emperor since 14, and would be

until 37. It is certainly possible that these paltry games are being staged in tribute to the deceased emperor.[20] In the third century Tertullian will write of the games as honoring the dead, at least initially, and that "what was offered to appease the dead was counted as a funeral rite. . . . It is called *munus* (a service) from being a service due—a rendered . . . service to the dead."[21] If this is the case, then the memory of Augustus is being served in a paltry way, with a "weedy" victim and a weak-hearted gladiator—very Pythonesque. This historical infidelity could be a simple mistake, or a purposeful inclusion for convenience sake. In *Jesus of Nazareth*, Pilate's Great Hall is decorated with what appears to be a statue of the emperor Trajan, who wouldn't be born until twenty years *after* the events depicted in the film. His may have been the most convenient large statue to acquire for the film's needs, the producers knowing most filmgoers would never notice. Could the banners have been leftovers from some previous games? There's no textual support for this, but, as Richard reminds, "the typical provincial hardly noticed any change from one emperor to the next," so remaking expensive decorations from past celebrations might be a moot point.[22]

Perhaps the Romans assume the crowd was illiterate, and wouldn't know the difference between a living and dead emperor's printed name? The survival of many coarse, clever bits of graffito and myriad advertisements across the empire would belie this: "Election posters, shop signs, and public notices were intended primarily for common people."[23] The lowly born Brian can only write grammatically inelegant Latin, yes, but he can still read and write.[24] Whatever, Pilate and his household would have known at which emperor's convenience he served, even if he was only in charge in Judea for about a decade. The Pythons had spent the run of *Flying Circus* (and, separately, on shows like *I'm Sorry I'll Read That Again*, *At Last the 1948 Show*, *Do Not Adjust Your Set*, and *The Complete and Utter History of Britain*[25]) showing off their collective university educations, citing and even being conversant with ancient and modern philosophy, history, and high culture through the mouths of Pepperpots, Pewteys, and Pralines.[26] They even, for particularly on-point historical mentions in Ep. 26, referenced and cited the author they were relying on, G. M. Trevelyan, and included the page number of the citation.[27] So, to flesh out an argument between coal miners about the Treaty of Utrecht (Ep. 26), and later to make precise a description of Charles XII's troubles in the Northern War (Ep. 37), the Pythons resorted to an old-fashioned, academic practice—they looked it up.

This is all brought in to suggest that the Pythons' inclusion of Caesar Augustus in the time of Tiberius *might* have been an accident. It may also have been

purposeful, given the fact that most viewers who had any grounding in Bible stories would have heard and could recognize the famous passage from Luke: "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed."[28] Moreover, just one chapter later, in 3:1, Tiberius is much less memorably mentioned as being in the "fifteenth year" of his reign, and Pontius Pilate is his governor in Judea. Emperors Augustus and Tiberius are mentioned within pages of one another in the early section of the Christ story, and the Pythons chose the historically inaccurate but better known one anyway. To illustrate this process from another angle: In September 1978 at the Trades Union Congress in Brighton, PM Callaghan teased journalists (who were desperate to hear a proposed election date) by singing a bit from a music hall ditty made famous by Vesta Victoria.[29] The PM remarked, however, that the tune came from Marie Lloyd, and sang away. Adviser Donoughue recorded in his diary that the PM *knew* when he wrote the speech that the performer was Victoria and not Lloyd, but Callaghan and his civil servants who read the drafts were certain that the more well-known Lloyd was the better, more identifiable name for the anecdote.[30] (Interestingly, just nineteen days later, a columnist in the *Sunday Times* took up the unreality, referencing the PM's "Marie Lloyd song and shuffle," perpetuating this new myth.[31]) "Marie Lloyd" it was, and the anecdote went over well; "Caesar Augustus" is acknowledged for the games, and he's also given nominal credit for the sewer the PFJ will later crawl through.

In the background can also be seen a marble archway, labeled PILATVS IVDAEOS REGET OK. This bit of the set will be seen later, in Pilate's main room, and will be discussed at that point.

Shot 1—As the camera pans along the trumpets the set decoration comes into view. A bas-relief border of miniature Elgin-type marble figures adorn the podium where the nobles are meant to sit. On closer inspection these do appear to be plaster cast versions (or simply reproductions) of several Parthenon frieze sections now housed in the British Museum, specifically the "hydria-bearers" (north frieze) and a version of the procession of horsemen (west frieze). Gilliam and the Pythons have used images from the collections of British museums and art galleries since the first season of *Flying Circus*.[32] In the title sequence for the first series, for example, local gallery visits become apparent as four separate works from the National Gallery are featured.[33] The bas-relief frieze section is here much more accessible and viewable than when it was originally part of the

frieze section above the shaft, capital, and architrave of the Parthenon, more than twenty-five feet above most visitors' craning vantage points.

As the camera movement ceases, the back end of an animal statue and portions of an inscribed obelisk are also revealed. Both are made to look as if they have been cast in bronze. The statue actually appears to be a version of Dürer's very popular 1515 woodcut "The Rhinoceros." The Pythons have already used a version of the print in their first episode created for German television, known as *Monty Python's Fliegender Zirkus*, in 1971. The Dürer sections of that episode were created to "celebrate" the five-hundredth anniversary of the artist's birth.[34]

The obelisk looks to be a type of conical pillar, inscribed, not unlike those found at the turns of the Circus Maximus track. The carvings on this pillar also make it look like a version of Trajan's Column—which sports a spiral *bas relief* depicting Trajan's victory in the Dacian Wars—or the Column of Marcus Aurelius. The conical shape, however, more resembles the three obelisk-like *metae* at the ends of the *spina* in Rome's Circus Maximus.

This is also perhaps a version of Jean Goujon's rhinoceros and obelisk statue, created in 1549. This same statue, set on a tall plinth, can be seen behind the Centurion in the "Latin Lesson" scene, as well. The statues and set decorations are used more than once in the film, due to budget constraints, but this economy had also become standard for the Pythons. As they shot *Holy Grail*, the original plan to use multiple castles in Scotland and Wales was scaled back dramatically, thanks to time and money concerns. Doune Castle served for almost all of the interior shots, and many of the exterior ones, as well, while Castle Stalker served as the Grail Castle at the end of the film, necessity being the mother of invention: Three other castles are depicted in the film. One is the "model" castle built from plywood as noticed by Patsy; the second is a filmed image of Kidwelly Castle, doubling as the exterior of the "Swallows" castle; and the third is a filmed image of Bodiam, meant to be Swamp Castle. Doyle captured the Kidwelly and Bodiam footage separate from the Pythons, after principal photography was completed.[35]

On the *Life of Brian* shoot, the same handful of walls and alcoves will be dressed and used as a setting, then redressed and reused for a new scene setting. The wall Brian graffitis becomes the backdrop for the soukh, which becomes Pilate's outside porch area, and so on.[36]

***SUPER TITLE*: Children's Matinee**—While there weren't special children's shows at these life-and-death events, the day's events were divided up, according to Wiedemann. The *venatio* (killing of wild animals) was scheduled

for the morning, followed by the *munus* (gladiator games) in the afternoon. In between, lunch was taken. During lunch, "public executions of prisoners of low status" were displayed, though "the audience was not required to stay."[37] Wiedemann continues: "The educated classes were free to leave after the *venatio* . . . to take their lunch and their siestas before the gladiators appeared in the afternoon."[38] These were clearly games conducted by some of the more humane emperors. Suetonius[39] notes that the "macabre" Caligula would go out of his way to offend and disgust. He would "have the canopies removed at the hottest time of the day and forbid anyone to leave; or cancel the regular programme, and pit feeble old fighters against decrepit criminals; or stage comic duels between respectable householders, who happened to be physically disabled in some way or other."[40]

Emperors Claudius and Commodus would also delight in the blood-spatter and debauched killings, truly enjoying the pleasures of others' sufferings.[41]

The scene we're being presented in *Life of Brian* seems to be one following on the heels of a particularly gruesome *munus*, where several gladiators lost lives and limbs.

Shot 2—This is a lower angle shot aimed up at the podium, composed so that the majesty of the games and the Colosseum can be seen in the background, and the decapitated gladiator being dragged off as a visual gag in the foreground. In the middle ground can be glimpsed a version of the famous Romulus and Remus statue, just to the left of the Roman archway. There are a number of these statues in Rome, including the Lupa Capitolina in Pallazo dei Conservatori.[42]

Suspended above the draped viewing stand is an *aquila* (eagle), an insignia carried before most legions across the Roman Empire. This version looks much more like the Nazi version of that same symbol, however, the *Reichsadler*, perhaps purposefully. Incidentally, this was the same Roman Eagle image that had so incited the sophists Matthias and Judas during Herod's reign, though there adorned in brilliant gold. These men and their students conspired to pull the symbol down from the temple, where Herod had placed it, and were executed by Herod for their efforts.[43] See the entry for "What's this then?" in scene nine, "The Latin Lesson," for more on the significance of such idolatrous images to the Jewish people.

This shot is clearly modeled on the famous Jean-Léon Gérôme painting, *Pollice Verso* (1872). In both the painting and the scene as filmed by the Pythons, the point of view (or camera setup) is nearly on the sandy floor of the arena, looking identically up toward the inner wall, spectators, royal podium,

and, in the far background, even the upper, statue-graced ring of the Colosseum. The Pythons have also dressed their gladiator very much like the one depicted by Gérôme. In the painting he is a Secutor with his foot on the throat of a Retiarus, the defeated Retiarus's trident and net on the sand next to him. See the notes for "*A huge GLADIATOR*" later for more on these arena characters.

The upper third of this shot is clearly a matte painting created and inserted in the postproduction process, and is meant to resemble the original splendor of Rome's Colosseum (including liminal statues). The source is likely a borrow from a pen-and-ink-type work from an artist like Hector D'espouy, and looks to be an image of the third floor of the structure. Several of the most distant audience members are standing, and their heads are cut off by the lower line of this process shot. During the shot, one spectator even sits, coming fully back into view. This same technology is used on dozens of biblical epics, including *Quo Vadis* and *Ben-Hur*, so that only the lower portions of the large, city-size sets had to be built; the upper portions could be added later, less expensively, as part of a glass painting.

The Pythons dress their Colosseum appropriately, with regularly spaced spears jutting into the arena from the lowest wall, and netting strung between them. The Colosseum in Rome was similarly decorated, with large elephant tusks thrusting into the gaming space, and thick nets draped between them. The nets and sharp objects were meant to prevent the wild animals from leaping into the crowd, and especially onto the platform where the nobility would have gathered to watch.[44] These nets would only have been in place, however, when the wild animals were part of the show; as soon as the venator (hunter) segment of the performance was complete, the nets were removed to allow a better view.[45] In the Python version there are also a number of large metal rings hanging from the walls between the half-arches. These are likely inspired by Piranesi's *Carceri* drawings mentioned earlier, which Gilliam used as source material. The rings don't seem to serve any practical purpose, but they look forbidding. This scene, in its entirety, looks like a tatty version of the big budget *Quo Vadis*.

. . . a large group of Romans . . .—The editor of the games (or perhaps the *aedile*) would have been among this group, the wealthy man who paid for the staging, and who—if this were Rome—may have been running for public office and looking for votes.[46] He may be the man who complains that what he sees is "dreadful." These patricians are not seen again in the film.

. . . OLD LADIES are busy cleaning up . . . putting limbs into their baskets—Mannix mentions that these bodies and parts of bodies were cleaned up between

events, and quickly, with the carcasses often chopped into food for the animals.[47] Slaves would have performed this grisly function, and then quickly spread clean sand to cover the bloodstains.

This level of grotesquery isn't overstated, given the Roman penchant for public spectacle, especially during hard times. To try and quell two weeks of riots in the streets of Rome, Nero announced the staging of two full weeks of games, the likes of which had never been seen: Special announcement was made by heralds that the finest chariot races on record would be held at the Circus Maximus. Three hundred pairs of gladiators would fight to the death and twelve hundred condemned criminals would be eaten by lions. Fights between elephants and rhinos, buffalo and tigers, and leopards and wild boars would be staged. As a special feature, twenty young women would be raped by jackasses. Admission to the rear seats, free. Small charge for the first thirty-six tiers of seats.

> Everything else would be promptly forgotten. The gigantic stadium, seating 385,000 people, was jammed to capacity. For two weeks the games went on while the crowd cheered, made bets and got drunk. Once again the government had a breathing space to try to find some way out of its difficulties.[48]

It's not likely that the slaves cleaning up after the battles would be allowed to keep anything of value. For one thing, those that were fighting were slaves of a sort to begin with, so their adornment would have been provided by owners. Secondly, those in the ring as prey would also have been prisoners or slaves of the lowest sort—no worldly goods there. In any event, the organizer of the games would have kept any valuables as spoil.

COLOSSEUM ANNOUNCER (OS) (Palin): "Frank Goliath, the Macedonian Baby-Crusher . . . and Boris Meinberg"—This is an example of the sweetening and finishing work that goes on during postproduction on any feature film. As happened during the finishing work on *Holy Grail*, Jones and Palin spent the most time on the editing and sound process, often dubbing and adding voiceovers to assist continuity.[49]

In *Flying Circus* there are several fighting-ring sketches. In Ep. 2, a monsignor and a Cambridge don wrestle to prove the existence of God; in Ep. 5 there is a surreal boxing match where the opponents change as the fight moves on; and in Ep. 18, Ken Clean-Aire Systems (Cleese) boxes his tiny female opponent (Connie Booth), beating her badly.[50] A ring announcer accompanies most of these. In a film insert for the second *Fliegender Zirkus* episode, as well as *Live at the Hollywood Bowl*, Colin "Bomber" Harris (Chapman) wrestles himself into submission.

“Frank Goliath, the Macedonian Baby-Crusher ”—Names meant to inspire fear and awe could be found in the Pythons’ world, with “Carlos the Jackal” occupying headlines around the world in the 1970s. “Frank Goliath”[51] is likely meant to mimic the over-the-top announcers and names from professional wrestling like Andre the Giant or Killer Kowalski. There were a number of gladiators who enjoyed this kind of fame (or infamy), including Flamma and even the emperor Commodus, but they didn’t sport similar names. Caligula’s name meant “little boots,” which isn’t nearly so fear-inducing (his acts of madness were terrifying, though). As he battled the Seleucids, Jewish guerrilla leader Judas came to be known as Judas “Maccabee,” which many interpreted as meaning “The Hammer (of God).” Contemporary figures would have been Martin McGuiness, the IRA leader whose reputation had led to him being called the “Butcher of Bogside,” as well as the fanatical Shankill Butchers and Lenny Murphy who regularly kidnapped, tortured, and murdered Catholics in Belfast.[52] More “affectionately,” according to journalist Hugo Young, Labour MP Dennis Skinner was known as “Beast of Bolsover.”[53] This is also the second time that “Goliath” has been mentioned. Mr. Cheeky asked about “Goliath’s big brother” at the Sermon on the Mount dust-up.

Macedonia was a Roman province from 146 BC, and one of the regions in the area was Thrace, home of the vaunted Thracian gladiators, including the rebel Spartacus. Caligula’s favorite gladiators were also Thracian, and he “chose Thracian gladiators to officer his German bodyguard.”[54] The “baby-crusher” sobriquet was, unfortunately, based in actual events across this period. Marauding soldiers, often acting on an emperor’s orders, killed rivals as well as their families, all ages. One of Dore’s illustrations for the Bible, “The Massacre of the Innocents,” depicts the killing of children.[55] There they are being stabbed or crushed against stone walls.

There was also the unfortunate contemporary case of Nigel Briffett, who killed his young stepson Wayne Brewer and earned the nickname “baby crusher” from those around him. The death followed the boy’s release into his stepfather’s custody, even after the local social services recommended against it. Briffett was found guilty of manslaughter, and served five years.[56]

“Maurice Feinberg”—Or, since the recording isn’t clear, it could be “Boris Weinberg.” Likely chosen to represent a recognizably Jewish name, like Brian’s last name, Cohen, and a particularly spindly opponent for an accomplished gladiator. (The ancient men of the Crimson Permanent Assurance—hard of hearing, wearing pacemakers, dentures, and glasses—will manage to best the

Very Big Corporation of America in *Meaning of Life*.) ***He has a tray round his neck and is selling tit-bits***—Chapman had gone door-to-door with a tray in *Flying Circus* Ep. 45, trying to flog Icelandic honey; Idle had done the same but with novelties items in Ep. 15; and Cleese carries a tray of albatross (and "gannet on a stick") for sale, without "bloody wafers," in Ep. 13.[57]

BRIAN: "Larks' tongues . . . Wrens' livers . . . Chaffinch brains . . . *(with spirit)* Jaguars' earlobes!"—Mannix notes that the "wealthy class of Rome" actually ate very similarly, noshing on "thrushes' tongues in wild honey and sow's udders stuffed with fried baby mice."[58]

As the camera follows Brian, the upper edge of the existing amphitheater can be glimpsed, consisting of rubble, fencing, and light posts. This delimitation was covered by a matte painting in the previous shot, but the film crew clearly hoped the composition of this shot could hide the horizon, and they were nearly right. This theater is still in use today. This shot also clearly reveals the dais where the emperor would have sat with his guests. His expensive chair is there, under the canopy and *aquila*, along with four *curule*-type seats, but there is no sign of an emperor, his prefect, Pilate, or even an editor or *aedile* for these games.

REVOLUTIONARIES—REG, FRANCIS, STAN and JUDITH—At this point the camera begins a zoom in on the huddled revolutionaries seated across the arena. The sparse crowd watches with little interest whatever is going on down on the bloody sand, perhaps because the most popular part of most games, chariot racing, isn't part of this event. The film also acknowledges the significance of the audience as opposed to the games—"The great spectacle at the circus is not the games but the spectators"—and we focus on the members of the PFJ rather than the combat below.[59]

JUDITH: ". . . Any Anti-Imperialist group . . ."—The Pythons have cast their first-century rebels in a favorable light, which wasn't always the case in academia. Brandon notes that, following Josephus, much Western scholarship depicted these Zealot types as "brigands and fanatics, who by political murder and sabotage pushed their nation into its fatal revolt against Rome."[60] And the reasons? "Josephus' [negative] evaluation . . . evoked a ready acceptance from people proudly conscious of their imperial mission of bringing well-ordered government and civilisation to non-European nations," Brandon writes. "Accordingly, to those troubled by revolutionaries, whether Russian, Irish or Indian, who threatened the stability of Western capitalist society or British rule, the character and activities of the Zealots in first-century Palestine seemed only too familiar."[61] So, the British Empire. Brendon notes again and again how

voices across the years of the British Empire favorably compared it to the Roman Empire, bringing order and democracy to a violent, backwards world.[62] And even though, as Bernstein notes, "from the 1890s on, generations of British children were educated to identify national pride and power with the empire," the Pythons have lampooned the British version and especially its waning influence (in their lifetimes) since the first days of *Flying Circus*.[63] By the end of the second season, they were, like Gray, tolling "the knell of parting day," chronicling the empire's diminution. In Ep. 25, a caption crawl announced: "In 1970, the British Empire lay in ruins": By 1970, the British empire had changed drastically since Queen Victoria's day, and perhaps especially since the end of WWII. Australia, Canada, and New Zealand were granted "Dominion" status in 1926 (translating to autonomy in the Empire), followed in 1947 by Pakistan and India being granted a peaceful independence. Many others, including Cyprus, Zambia, the Seychelles, Zimbabwe (Rhodesia [Ep. 45]), and Malaysia also were separated (forcibly, often) from the British Empire in the twentieth century. So in the short lifetimes of the Pythons, the British Empire had indeed diminished in size and international significance.[64]

Brandon sees the partisan experiences of the Second World War as key to changing this perception of the irritating revolutionary. During the war, significant anti-Nazi resistance activity helped carry the war in the Allies' favor, concomitantly stirring "a new and sympathetic interest in the Zealots."[65] The Pythons grew up in the immediate postwar era, and went to school under the academics writing these new appraisals of first-century Judean revolutionary activity.

This "anti-imperialist" rhetoric had been part of the political lexicon since at least 1949, when Mao's guerillas came down from the mountains and took control of China. The term was thrown around in pronouncements from the Soviets, East Germans, and forces in Northern Ireland, as well as most African countries seeking independence from colonizers. In 1965 the president of Indonesia called for an "Anti-Imperialist Axis" across Asia to counter the American influence in Vietnam and beyond.[66] Students in France in 1968 were staging regular anti-imperialist days, while those in London tried and failed to motivate the working class into joining their anti-Vietnam War, anti-American demonstrations.[67] Many of these student organizations were as woefully ineffective as the PFJ will prove, their failures likely influencing the Pythons as they wrote the film. Entertainments weren't left out, either. Critic Alan Brien writes of a performance of a new play in London in 1972, one clearly meant to

point the finger at the British establishment, but which ended up just looking silly: At the Aldwych,[68] *The Island of the Mighty*, by John Arden "with Margaretta D'Arcy." (Why not "and"?). He claims it is anti-imperialist, but the director, David Jones, has made it pro-imperialist. If anyone gets the wrong end of the stick, it is the audience. Three acts, each one hour and twelve minutes, with two twelve (more like twenty) minute intervals. Who does he think we are —the delegates at a Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union?[69]
The PFJ is clearly performing theater, as well, and the inner core—Reg, Francis, Stan/Loretta, and Judith—will know just when to leave the stage.

JUDITH: ". . . group like ours must <u>reflect</u> such a divergence of interests within its power base"—Not so, often. By the 1960s, the solidly anti-West Soviets and Chinese couldn't see eye to eye on anything, with China smelling a Soviet-American conspiracy to encircle East Asia for destruction and the disputed lands between the countries trembling beneath an awful two-edged axe.[70] That slow-motion wrestling match would rumble on through the 1970s. As for terror groups, both the German Red Army Faction and the Japanese United Red Army, to name just two, dealt harshly with members who backslid, moved from Marxist to Maoist or the opposite way, or displayed "ideological weakness" or "counterrevolutionary thought" of any kind. The infamous purging of less-motivated URA members in the frozen mountains of Japan in winter 1972, followed by the murder of former RAF member Ulrich Schmücker in June 1974 meant that ideological fidelity couldn't flag—there couldn't be an acknowledged "Uh, well one" among them who didn't believe what everyone else believed.

As for student groups, the attempted October 1968 uprising in London started off well. The National Liberation Front had put out the call for all students and trade unions to mass together and confront the United States (and Britain, in her support for the United States) over Vietnam. The "divergence of interests" within this movement meant that some of the marchers were against the war, clearly, while some were plotting the downfall of the capitalist British government. So some wanted a war to end, while others actually wanted a revolution. In this row, the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign (VSC) and the Maoist Britain-Vietnam Solidarity Front (MBVSF) could never agree on coordinated goals. What happened to these "splitters" should read very familiar: The Maoists insisted on a march on the American Embassy in Grosvenor Square as the main objective and the adoption of the slogans "Victory to the N.L.F." and "Long Live Ho Chi-minh." The V.S.C.'s October 27 ad hoc committee could not accept

that the “imperialist lair” should be the main target, and so the front decided to act on its own. With it went some nine smaller groups.[71]

The PFJ’s ad hoc committee will experience similar dissension. And in a prescient moment for the coming PFJ-Campaign for Free Galilee tussle, the VSC also decided that it would be appropriate to use their own march to block off the MBVSF march on Grosvenor Square. So, one activist group fights another activist group somewhere near the seat of power, and both fail to shift the oppressor—their “divergence of interests” clearly too divergent.

This call for a respect for differing interests wouldn’t hold water within and between other terror groups, either, as will be discussed later, when Brian nearly brings the “Fifth Legion” to the PFJ’s headquarters.

FRANCIS: “. . . provided the Movement never forgets that it is the inalienable right of every man . . .”—“Inalienable” is a charged political term, a manifesto word, heard and read often in the volatile postwar years, emanating from the Sino-Soviet blocs and the emerging Third World colonial and postcolonial countries. The “First Conference of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America” convened in Havana in January 1966, hosted by Cuba and the Communist Party, and the conference resolution is telling: “The Conference proclaims the *inalienable right* of the peoples to total political independence and to resort to all forms of struggle that are necessary, including armed struggle, in order to conquer that right.”[72] The January 1973 peace accords to end the war in Vietnam declared that “the South Vietnamese people’s right to self-determination is sacred, inalienable, and shall be respected by all countries.”[73] A 1974 UN resolution for the recognition of the PLO announced “the inalienable right of the Palestinians to return to their homes and property from which they have been displaced and uprooted,” and acknowledged the right to “self-determination without external interference” and “national independence and sovereignty.”[74]

This same Jeffersonian language is employed during this period by Biafrans demanding their own country, by unions reminding the world of their rights to strike, by OPEC asserting its rights as a cartel, by Britain clearing all blocks to North Sea oil flow, by journalists demanding access to “secrets” held by the Civil Service, by the National Trust demanding their right to “inalienable” declarations, by Jews in confirming their rights to a peaceful Passover, and by Young Liberals demanding squatter’s rights for the homeless of England.[75] This was an “I know my rights” time—as *Holy Grail*’s Dennis confirms—and with the help of a voracious media, everyone else could know them, too.[76]

FRANCIS: "Where was I?" REG: "I thought you'd finished"—Likely a very telling moment, where the endgame to the PFJ's hoped-for revolution was to have been presented, discussed, and perhaps even agreed upon, parliamentarily. Thanks to Stan/Loretta, however, they are sidetracked and the goal remains undefined. But this isn't just the Pythons as the PFJ engaging in expected Pythonesque silliness, it's a reflection of the late 1970s and the decade-old student-cum-revolutionary movement, according to Dobson and Payne: They became intellectuals "with a pistol in the drawer." Revolution and terror became the first priority and eventually ends in themselves for people who no longer had clear ideas about what sort of world they would try to build once they had torn down the old system. The very act of destruction was sufficient, they argued. Something better was certain to emerge from the ruins.[77]

The PFJ wants to overthrow the Roman Empire, but they're not claiming their own place as leaders in the vacuum that follows. Reg later calls for "world supremacy," but without a transition plan. Most of the terror organizations of the 1960s and 1970s had short-term goals that were reachable—acts of terror drawing attention to a minority cause—but no plan for what to do if they succeeded, or even what "success" might look like.

In an early draft of the script, it is Otto who talks about the future. He sees a Jewish Reich, essentially. Otto is styled somewhat after the German terrorist Gabriele Kröcher-Tiedemann, who led the attack on Air France Flight 139 in June 1976.[78] With her German accent she barked orders at passengers, separated Jews from others, reminding many on board of a Nazi death camp worker.[79] Kröcher-Tiedemann had already been arrested for terror activity and freed as part of a ransom demand in the Peter Lorenz kidnapping, discussed later.

REG: "Furthermore, it is the birthright of every man . . ."—In 1977, this was not only a Third World political issue but a First World body issue. Dr. Helena Wright, of International Planned Parenthood, interviewed in the *Sunday Times* as she contemplated turning ninety, announced that "the voluntary control of fertility is the birthright of everyone." Stan/Loretta would have likely agreed.

Francis's gendered language was also under attack in Britain at this time. In 1975 the World Council of Churches had agreed to remove "all 'sexist' language from its constitution and its deliberations."[80] New and trendy books like *Words and Women* published in 1977 laid out the "thesis that sexist language contributes to downgrading women," and were popular reading and made for good newspaper copy.[81] Elsewhere, a move that Stan/Loretta would have applauded occurred in California two years before work on *Brian* began. In 1974

the voters of California agreed that "reverence for the status quo was obsolete," so language in the state's documents could change: "They voted to remove words like *congressmen*, *assemblymen*, and the pronoun *he*, *his*, and *him* from their Constitution entirely."[82] And since Stan/Loretta will be seen to be in charge of the group's recorded minutes, he/she could facilitate that change, too.

REG: "Why don't you shut up about women, Stan. You're putting us off"—The then-editor of *Punch*, William Davis, wrote a column about this very topic in March 1973.[83] He had recently returned from a visit to the United States where he appeared on *The Dick Cavett Show*, and was followed around New York thereafter by boisterous feminists unhappy with his allegedly backward views on women. In the editorial "Let's Get Laughter into Lib," Davis bemoans the "solemn, dogmatic" and "intolerant" feminists who "don't have a sense of humour." He sounds like Reg as he patronizingly tells women everywhere to lighten up: In their eagerness for publicity they invite ridicule by concentrating on trivial issues—and get angry when one takes up the invitation. One of the sillier causes is the argument about "sexist language." There is no reason why we should not have chairpersons, and I dare say we could bring ourselves to name hurricanes "George" instead of "Agnes." But these are unimportant subjects, detracting from the very real arguments which gave birth to women's lib.[84]

Davis is being put off by the women like Reg is being put off by Stan, thinking he's just overly "on about" women. Reg is certain that Stan's idée fixe is going to put them all onto a sidetrack, which it actually does. They've digressed from defining their movement and its goals, now twice, and won't get back on track until Brian accepts his "little job."

STAN: "Women have a perfect right to play a part in our movement, Reg"—Again, yes and no. In Tsarist Russia, "terrorism was one of the few areas where women could play an active role," Burleigh writes, "with their views being accorded equal respect to those of men."[85] Closer to home, many Tories were certain that Margaret Thatcher wouldn't survive more than a few months as leader of the party, with some almost immediately planning for the next leadership fight when "normalcy"—white male leadership—would be restored.[86] To many, Thatcher was always "that bloody woman," her gender front and center in their opprobrium.[87] Marcia Williams must be mentioned here, as she and Thatcher were the two highest-profile women in British government (well beyond MPs Barbara Castle and Shirley Williams, or even the Queen) during the 1970s, but for different reasons. Williams had been Wilson's kitchen cabinet

leader—and her temperament, penchant for nepotism, and venality jaundiced Wilson's final years at No. 10. The tendentious Williams was an easy target for pundits and a blessing to *Private Eye*—responding to criticism with insults, expensive writs, and political threats.[88] In 1975, when Williams's book *Inside Number 10* about her Downing Street years appeared, her publisher, George Weidenfeld, put "her face on the front of every No. 11 bus," so she was very much in the public eye.[89]

As for guerrilla terror cells, those revolutionary groups in Britain, Germany, Japan, and the United States were made up of men and women (mostly men), but as will be discussed, women *did* "play a part" in many terror operations, building on the Russian example. Herbert Marcuse saw this as a potential positive, since "all domination up to today has been patriarchal," and the New Left had the opportunity to change that imbalance.[90] This wasn't so in first-century Judea, where women would have had their place in above-board life, and likely had *no* place elsewhere, Jeremias writes: "We have therefore the impression that Judaism in Jesus's time also had a very low opinion of women, which is usual in the Orient where she is chiefly valued for her fecundity, kept as far as possible shut away from the outer world, submissive to the power of her father or her husband, and where she is inferior to men from a religious point of view."[91] This understanding of contemporary culture would have precluded Judith from participating with the PFJ in any meaningful way, meaning this inclusiveness is a modern affectation, something borrowed from the Red Armies and SLAs of the 1970s.

Given this conflict between a woman's place in the years 33 and 1973, we should have expected the pope to chime in here for the official viewpoint of the Church. Paul VI's 1974 Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultis* positions Mary as a model for the "modern woman." The pope writes that the "Modern Woman" who wants to participate in the community of decision makers already knows that Mary gave "active and responsible consent"—in "dialogue with God"—to be the mother of Jesus; that Mary chose virginity to "consecrate herself," and moreover: The modern woman will note with pleasant surprise that Mary of Nazareth, while completely devoted to the will of God, was far from being a timidly submissive woman or one whose piety was repellent to others; on the contrary, she was a woman who did not hesitate to proclaim that God vindicates the humble and the oppressed, and removes the powerful people of this world from their privileged positions (cf. Lk. 1:51–53).

She does sound Judith-like in her support of the oppressed (people of Jerusalem) and the appeal against the powerful (Romans). The pope goes on to remind that Mary was actively strengthening the apostolic community and was a maternal exemplar—"clearly . . . the figure of the Blessed Virgin does not disillusion any of the profound expectations of the men and women of our time but offers them the perfect model of the disciple of the Lord."[92] Skeptic Auberon Waugh can only say this of the pope's missive to the modern woman: "His latest claim that the Mother of Christ was a thoroughly Modern Mary and early apostle of women's lib will put a heavy strain on the credulity of the faithful."[93] Judith doesn't seem ready to accept this kind of role, either. (Nor does Loretta, for that matter.) "Women played key roles in the Baader-Meinhof gang," is the flat statement from Ovid Demaris, and not just in the Red Army Faction.[94] In contemporary terror groups, the place and employment of women varied, depending on the group. The JRA could claim a number of highly-placed, intelligent, and dangerous women in their organization; six of the twelve founding members of the SLA were women (while abductee Patty Hearst became an infamous de facto member); Leila Khaled led PFLP hijackings in 1969 and 1970; women (including the Price sisters of the Provisional IRA) fired guns, planted bombs, and waged hunger strikes; and the RAF of West Germany boasted dozens of committed women, including Gudrun Ensslin and Ulrike Meinhof. The German and Japanese terror groups were particularly open to women, it seems. According to Dobson and Payne, speaking of the RAF: Even greater distress was caused to traditionally-minded Germans when they realised how great a part in the terrorist campaigns was played by women. In the original Baader-Meinhof band there were no fewer than twelve women among the force of twenty-two. The girls carried and used guns as willingly as their menfolk. As Dr. Stumper[95] put it: "There is a very high female content in the terrorist organisations . . . We often find that they are the ones who ginger up the men and push them on to greater deeds of violence."[96]

In *Private Eye*, Claud Cockburn discussed an article written by an Irish woman, Christina Murphy, for a German newspaper focusing on the place of women in the Baader-Meinhof gang. Murphy pointed out that most of the faces on the "hundreds of thousands of posters advertising wanted terrorists" in Germany are female, and that a German police source told her "the majority of terrorists we are looking for are women."[97] Cockburn's take on the situation was guided by an Irishman, Andrew Fowler, writing in response to Murphy's article, alleging that the women were being "used to do the dirty work" by the men, who led the

group from a safe distance. In *Life of Brian*, Reg remains behind while the novitiate Brian makes the dangerous attack on Pilate's home, where he is caught. Judith has no part in the planning or execution of this raid. Judith was also not part of Brian's assault on the walls of Pilate's palace. Rather than the men being "gingered up" by the women, however, as Dobson and Payne allege, Fowler is certain that bombing is "a particularly vicious type of crime which appeals more than any other to the temperament of the female terrorist," no male prodding needed.[98] So female party members like Judith are clearly leading the way toward the more violent acts, for Fowler. Cockburn has now found the thread he's looking for, and turns his "eyes homeward" to see Margaret Thatcher: Indeed . . . turn them backward along the grim vista of history. Think of Heath. Confrontation. Three-day week. Ruin. Defeat. At that moment in time, was there any sane man, repeat man, who wanted to be a Tory leader? There were a couple of obvious zanies, but no one that counted. The Tories—the sane male Tories—caucused. They realised that leading the Tories was, in Fowler's words, "a particularly vicious type of crime which appeals more than any other to the temperament of the female terrorist." That Tory male caucus realised, too, that even in this day and age the power of men is such that it can draw women into hideously undesirable activities. "If," they reasoned, "it can be done in Germany, it can be done here. Women," they said in their essentially male way, "are women." And the next thing you knew, they had handed the dirty work to poor little Margaret Thatcher. . . . Of the faces which "peer dourly from the posters," hers is among the most prominent. The whole affair will go down in history as a monstrous example of male cunning and malevolence.[99]

So the female leader of the opposition party as an active but mind-controlled terrorist? In one of the most fitting last-laugh moments in history, sixteen months later Margaret Thatcher would become prime minister.

As for levels of commitment, the JRA and especially the United Red Army, its more violent splinter, could boast particularly nefarious female activity, according to Demaris: Of the sixteen jailed for the [internecine] killings,[100] six were women. About a third of the URA members who followed Fusako Shigenobu to the Middle East were women. Some Japanese argue that the URA and other radical factions provide an extreme outlet for women's frustrations in a society where they are still very much second-class citizens.[101]

But what about the women who weren't part of the admittedly patriarchal Japanese society? Less internationally known but no less violent, there was a women's section of the Ulster Defense Association (UDA) in the Sandy Row

area of Belfast. In February 1975 “The Faces of Terrorism” frowned from the pages of the *Daily Mail*—ten unsmiling mugshots, all female. They had just been found guilty of stomping another woman and leaving her to die by a roadside. None of the defendants expressed remorse, no matter how young. Perhaps influential for the Pythons, for most of September 1970 the PFLP’s Leila Khaled had been under arrest and held in the Ealing area, Greater London. The Pythons were shooting the first and second series of *Flying Circus* in Ealing area at this time—their BBC home was then in nearby Shepherd’s Bush—and they had a high-profile female terrorist living just around the corner.

The media did notice the inclusion of the fairer sex in these violent men’s clubs, and, citing Kipling and his *The Female of the Species*, some columnists and terror experts were certain that the future promised more women terrorists and much more appalling female-wreaked violence. Perhaps the title of an October 1975 editorial comment in the *Daily Mail*—“The Day of the Female Jackal”—says it all. Short mentions therein of Marion Coyle, Patty Hearst, Leila Khaled, Lynette Fromme, Ulrike Meinhof, and the Price sisters—“callous harpies” all—opine that they have abandoned “all mercy and tenderness for the sake of a political abstraction.”[102] It’s likely the author was male.

Lastly, in a February 1978 issue of *Private Eye*, the “Wayside Pulpit” column addresses the recent elevation of Anna Ford to lead presenter at ITN news, following Angela Rippon’s earlier ascendancy to a similar post at the BBC. There were voices against these front-and-center females on the previously male-dominated news desks, which *Private Eye*’s pseudonymous “Rev. J. C. Flannel” sends up, kindly connecting us to first-century Jerusalem, as well: We hear a lot these days about whether women should be allowed to administer the news on television. Already the BBC has permitted a woman, Miss Angela Rippon, to preside over its traditional 9 O’clock News spot. Is nothing sacred, some people ask? Others ask, under what authority are we contemplating this great break with the time-honoured way of doing things? What would our Lord himself have done? Certainly there is nothing in the scriptures to indicate guidelines one way or the other, on this supremely important question. It is true that when Our Lord himself sent out his team to preach the “Good News,” he did not name a woman as one of the Squad. There was no “Angela” among the “Evangelists”! But times have changed.[103]

The PFJ won’t have much use for their token woman, Judith, as she is simply put up with, and isn’t in on the actual combat missions or much of the decision making. In this same issue of *Private Eye*, another short blurb allegedly from

BBC Radio mentions a typical BBC panel seated for a typical roundtable discussion, including three men of note—"Lord Longford, Malcolm Muggeridge, Lord Robens"—as well as "Ms Statutory Woman," the token stroppy feminist who doesn't even get a name.[104]

FRANCIS: "Why are you always on about women, Stan?"—In the 1959 film *I'm All Right Jack*, young Cynthia Kite (Liz Fraser) listens as the company directory (Dennis Price) lectures in the canteen at lunchtime on the benefits of working hard and selling their product abroad ("'Export or Die' is no empty phrase!").[105] Cynthia leans over to her beau (Ian Carmichael[106]) and whispers: "What's he on about, Stan?" The design of the working PFJ has come directly from this film, with the officious Mr. Kite leading the way as chief shop steward. Our Stan will want to be called "Loretta," of course.

Terrorist Evelyne Barges[107] may have felt that the male-dominated French press damned her with faint praise, or perhaps just indulged in a ham-handed compliment when the *Journal du Dimanche* called her alternately "a true revolutionary, a professional of clandestinity and of terror attacks," and also, "Carlos in a skirt."[108] Judith, at least, seems to want to rise above this kind of sexism. But Carlos could have also been understandably "on about women," because so many had helped him do his work. He had lived an unassuming life in London with his mother, quiet and seeming the comfortable, apolitical son, simply enjoying the sweets of Western culture. By July 1975 three women were being charged with aiding the terrorist: a Columbian student, a Paris bank worker, and a quiet British secretary. Guns, explosives, forged passports, and detailed maps, journals, and plans for future actions were found in relation to these arrests, exposing a good deal of the complex terror network.[109] (When the Romans search Matthias's flat later, they will find a spoon.) The most recognizable female in a position of power during this period wasn't any terrorist, of course (unless the Far Left was being polled), it was Margaret Thatcher, Tory leader from 1975, and prime minister from May 1979. Thatcher was most often treated with the same smirking toleration seen in Reg's attitude toward Judith, and of course Loretta/Stan.[110] Over the course of many Prime Minister's Questions in 1975 and 1976, Labour special adviser Donoughue gloats every time he records a win for his "relaxed and amusing" bosses, Wilson, then Callaghan, stinging their opposite shadow number, Thatcher, and "putting [her] down gently but with patronising contempt." Donoughue concludes: "Even the Tories were roaring with laughter."[111] Thatcher had no support or respect from Labour, little support and little respect from her own party, but she would

grab the ring just two years and nine months later when she entered No. 10 as the new prime minister. Labour would then be in opposition for eighteen years.

STAN: "I want to be a woman. . . . I want you all to call me Loretta"—So in the midst of the PFJ's struggle against the Roman Empire's oppression, one of its few members is sidetracked by a gender reassignment fixation, and another Pythonesque digression emerges. We know that the movement cannot be taken seriously after this, what with the constant niggling of appropriate gender identifications threatening to sidetrack any PFJ decision. Loretta isn't alone in being politically committed and distracted. The members of West Berlin's Commune 1 wanted the world to change, yes, but there were priorities: "The Vietnam War is not what interests me," one member said in 1967, "but difficulties with my orgasms do."[112]

Patty Hearst had become "Tania X" in April 1974, completing her transition from heiress to revolutionary. Other SLA members also "became" as their revolutionary personalities emerged, including Patricia Soltysik, who wanted to be known as "Mizmoon," Willy Wolfe, who answered to "Cujo," and leader Donald "Cinque" DeFreeze. *Salon* writer Andrew O'Hehir grew up in the Bay Area in the same neighborhoods as Hearst, and remembers that it didn't take long for the shock of her kidnapping, crime spree, arrest, trial, and conviction to become a neighborhood joke, so much so that his school-age friends could get in on the fun: In other words, by the time my friend Jennifer performed her Tania shtick on the stage of the Berkeley Community Theater [in 1979] . . . the story of Patty Hearst really had receded into the background clutter of California insanity and become kind of a joke. The earnest but deranged Berkeley radicals of the SLA . . . were a joke. So was their ludicrous vision of revolution—along with the simultaneously hysterical and incompetent reaction from officialdom. The bewildered finishing-school princess with a submachine gun was a joke, and so were her anguished old-money parents.[113]

Baiting the Roman Empire, the PFJ share this same "ludicrous vision of revolution." From the distance of London, the joke must've been all the funnier—the Pythons poke fun at revolutionaries Cujo, Mizmoon, Cinque, Tania X, "Brian, who is called Brian," and "Loretta."

STAN: "Don't you oppress me!"—Women in biblical Israel would have been regularly, or *ritually* "oppressed" as part of the patriarchal culture: The Bible was written and compiled by males who had no special interest in women's roles. They focused principally on the male aspects of life, such as warfare, governing, economy, and worship, in which women were not directly involved

or to which they contributed only minimally. In addition, Israel's laws were addressed only to men. The domain of a woman's activities was the household, where she exercised authority in her role as mother.[114]

Reading back over this, the Pythons' written world across *Flying Circus*, *Holy Grail*, and *Life of Brian* follows most of these same rules. They had little interest in women's roles, except in *playing* those roles themselves. *Brian* focuses on warfare (the terror "waid"; Roman reprisals), governing (Pilate; the Chief Shop Steward Reg), and economy (buying rocks and beards; begging and haggling) and ignores worship completely; and the woman in the households the Pythons offered were generally cross-dressed and exaggerated.

REG: "I'm not oppressing you, Stan—you haven't got a womb. Where's the foetus going to gestate? You going to keep it in a box?"—This might sound like a scene from David Lynch's experimental film *Eraserhead* (1977), but the years 1976–1978 were exciting times for "alternative" pregnancies. As early as 1968 headlines like "Embryos Outside the Body" were becoming commonplace, and the term "test-tube baby" had entered the cultural lexicon.[115] Principal work in the area was being conducted in Britain, as well, and British newspapers would bid for the rights to the exclusive story.[116] The world's first test-tube baby was born 25 July 1978, and the pregnancy had been front page news since before October 1977—when she was "conceived"—which of course coincides with the writing, reading out, and rewriting of *Brian*.

This subject would have definitely had Catholics "tittering" nervously and gathering their belongings; one letter from a concerned Englishwoman speaks for many, placing the blame for such adventures on the dark, changing world: Sir.—The recent news of the possibility of a "test tube" baby fills me with despair for the future. I cannot refrain from trying to express my horror and to register some measure of protest. . . . Over the last 10 years the "permissive" society with its emphasis on licence, on abortion and sterilization, its insistence that Christianity is utterly outdated has turned our country into a travesty of the England which is so dear to many people. I cannot believe that it is only those of my generation who feel this. For the sake of the thousands of young men and women who I am convinced still believe in and know the meaning of love, I beg the leaders of Christian thought and morals to call a halt before we reach the nadir of the slippery slope. Yours faithfully, Mary Middleton Murry.[117]

Reg isn't tut-tutting Loretta's personal, moral choice to become a mother who can "have babies" (remember, that was a choice ascribed to Mary by the pope, so it is an ennobling act), just the scientific, biological impossibility of such a

thing. And Reg is right, actually, since even the eventual celebrated "test-tube baby" was only *conceived* in vitro; the nine-months gestation took place after the fertilized egg was returned to the mother's uterus.

JUDITH: ". . . which is nobody's fault, not even the Romans', but that he can have the *right* to have babies"—In October 1975 a failed Liberal candidate Mr. John Campbell embarked on a "symbolic fast" to draw attention to the lack of Liberal MPs in the current parliament. There is a wonderful picture of him in the *Times* stolidly refusing a glass of milk proffered by "Mr. Cyril Smith, MP," and "Mr. Jeremy Thorpe, the Liberal Party leader."[118] Campbell drank only water for thirteen days, one for every sitting Liberal MP. Campbell certainly had the "right" to perform this protest, but it was as ineffective as Stan's wish to be "Loretta" and have babies—David Steel's Liberals *lost* two seats in the following election.

REG: "What's the point of fighting for his right to have babies when he can't have babies?"—Fighting for a symbolic thing is an age-old concept, and this silly version—fighting for a right to something that is impossible or at least unlikely—is another borrow from the shop stewards group in *I'm All Right Jack*. Mr. Kite and the other stewards find out that a non-union man is on a forklift, then march in to management to demand action. They want him fired, and management is keen to agree. This quick agreement unnerves the stewards, certain that something must be up. They withdraw and confer (as the PFJ will do at the end of the film), and upon reentering: Kite: My colleagues here have instructed me to put to you one question, Major.

Major: Certainly! Go ahead my dear fellow.

Kite: Is it or is it not your intention to sack this man?

Major: Sack him, of course.

Kite withdraws again for a brief whisper with the gathered stewards outside the door, then returns.

Kite: I'm obliged to point out, Major, that if you sack this man the company is in breach of its agreement with the union.

Major: Surely he's not a union member?

Kite: Correct, but that is merely technical.

Major: But didn't you say that he was incompetent and couldn't do his job properly?

Kite: We do not and cannot accept the principle that incompetence justifies dismissal. That is victimisation.

The other stewards all nod in agreement.

The shop stewards will now fight for the man's right to work even though it is a symbolic fight—he isn't a union member and he isn't qualified for nor able to do

the job. This shambolic silliness will reach a head when both union and management begin to look ridiculous in the media, and then agree to work together to get rid of the man, and all will be well again.

FRANCIS: "It is symbolic of our struggle against oppression"—Verbiage from terror group manifestoes across the middle of the century, really. Chilling contemporaneous references for these symbolic struggles can be found in the aftermath of two kidnappings and a mass killing, all three in South America.

The US ambassador to Brazil, Charles Elbrick, was kidnapped in Rio de Janeiro by the Revolutionary Movement 8th October and held for ransom in 1969. The demands involved freeing fifteen political prisoners, and the threat was the life of the ambassador, whom the group labeled "a symbol of exploitation" in its manifesto released to newspapers.[119] Elbrick was released after the Brazilian government met kidnappers' demands. In Uruguay in January 1971, British Ambassador Geoffrey Jackson was kidnapped by the Tupamaros guerrilla group. Jackson was targeted, according to the Tupamaros, as "a national symbol of institutional neocolonialism," and was held for eight months.[120] He was released unharmed in August 1971 after more than one hundred Tupamaros guerrillas escaped from prison. Uglier were the mass murder and mass suicides in Jonestown, Guyana, in November 1978. The leader of the People's Temple, Jim Jones, and more than nine hundred of his followers died in an eschatological frenzy. The paranoid and drug-addicted Jones was reportedly concerned that "CIA infiltrators" were planning a raid, and would keep the faithful from being "translated" to another planet.[121] Cyanide-and sedative-laced fruit drink was mixed and given to everyone.[122] Thomas Szasz reported on 24 March 1979 that these "struggles" were happening often, and for myriad reasons: "During the weeks and days immediately preceding the [Jonestown] massacre [it] is evident . . . that a dinner benefit, called 'A Struggle Against Oppression,' was planned for the People's Temple in San Francisco for 2 December 1978. . . . It was cancelled after the massacre."[123] Jones had lectured about his version of Marxist Christianity for many years prior to taking his followers into the jungle.

Many of the kidnappings, bombings, and acts of insurrection in general were communicated as being "symbolic" of neo-and postcolonial oppression. References were made in Africa and Argentina, where shanty towns had become symbols of "colonialist oppression," and in the postcolonial West Indies, it was the "British Crown" acting "as a symbol of past oppression."[124] Francis and Judith are simply quoting from the headlines of the 1960s and 1970s.

REG: "It's symbolic of his struggle against reality"—Most of the terror groups' actions—lashing out against monolithic institutions, even in discrete, symbolic acts—were themselves symbolic of the guerrilla groups' struggle against reality, of course. Western democracies were not brought down by the Angry Brigade or the Baader-Meinhof gangs, nor was political or economic equality achieved by the efforts of Carlos or the PLO. Virtually all of the terror cadres were eventually run to ground, ending their active, reactionary lives in prison, in exile, or in death.

A SAMARITAN is pushed out into the arena—There is no visual indication of this man's race or background, but in the credits he is called a "Weedy Samaritan." "Weedy" means he's a bit of a weakling, kind of wet, and not much of a physical specimen. According to Cupitt, observant Jews viewed the Samaritans as "schismatic and half-pagan," so seeing one committed to the brutality of the games is understandable.[125] *Cheering* for that unrepentant outsider is a bit more surprising, except that this means the PFJ are now really cheering against the Romans, which indicates their revolutionary bona fides. In *Flying Circus* Palin and Jones play characters also described as "weedy."[126]

There is a small spattering of applause from the sparse CROWD—This description belies the historical record, at least for the bulk of larger cities in the Roman Empire. By this period, according to Mannix, the popularity of the games had reached new heights, with the number of gladiatorial combats rising significantly during Julius Caesar's reign, and even higher in the new millennium under emperors Claudius and Marcus Aurelius.[127] Given Jerusalem's Jewish population and theocratic leadership, it's unlikely that Roman, pagan blood sports would have been tolerated within Jerusalem's walls. The combats held further away in Caesarea, where Pilate lived, were as bloody as any.

The atmosphere resembles the second day of a mid-week cricket match between Northamptonshire and the minor counties at Kettering—(PSC) Northants Cricket had a secondary field at Kettering, where the matches were likely smaller, more intimate. Those matches seem to have stopped as of 1971, though the Pythons are likely thinking of the years they were growing up and watching cricket as impressionable youngsters. In newspaper coverage of the matches it was regularly reported that even though a "full day's cricket" was planned for Kettering or Derby, for example, attendance was often "sparse," while there were also plenty of "sleepy" matches where not much happened. Northamptonshire is west of Cambridge and north of Oxford, and just south of Leicester, where Chapman grew up, and east of Wolverhampton, where Idle

went to school. Both Northants and Kettering are mentioned in *Flying Circus*.[128] In the Ep. 20 mention, a handful of old gentlemen watch a cricket match, and one dies as the match moves on. The announcer (Cleese) tells us it's the "second day of the first test," and nothing has happened ("already they are nought for nought"). The film clip then shows a bowler bowling to the batman, and nothing happens. The batman is eventually carried off, stiff, and replaced by a piece of furniture. The ball is "extremely well not-played."[129] This likely would have qualified as "dreadful" play to many fans of county cricket.

The sparsely attended or even tatty games reproduced here aren't ahistorical, either. The further from Rome, the more likely the games could be second tier, or worse, in Martial's[130] eyes, especially if elected officials or even "city-priests" weren't in charge: Outside Rome, there were many other givers of games, too, and Martial is extremely caustic and snobbish about the low status of some of the men who succeeded in achieving this ambition. He complains that a shoe-maker sponsored contests at the cultured city of Bononia, and a fuller at Mutina (Modena), wondering sarcastically which will be the first town to have a show organized by a publican.[131]

SAMARITAN: "It's dangerous out there!"—This is voiced as the unwilling fighter is pushed back out onto the bloodied sand. The actor is Neil Innes, but the voice has been added later by Idle. This alcove was built for the film.

A huge GLADIATOR advances on him . . .—This man would have been one of only three types: a captured warrior from another kingdom, a man condemned and "of servile status," or a nobleman who has broken ranks with his class to join the combats.[132] The last would be the least likely and fewest in number; there were criminals aplenty for *naumachia* or to reenact famous land battles; while the most elaborate, entertaining games featured colorful, exotic enslaved combatants from the far reaches of the empire. If he did happen to be a free man who chose to associate himself with this low level of society, he would have taken "the gladiator's oath": The words of this most noble oath are the same as those of that most dishonourable one: to be burnt (i.e., branded), to be chained up, and to be killed by an iron weapon. A binding condition is imposed on those who hire their hands out to the arena and consume food and drink which they are to pay back in blood, and that they should suffer such things even if do not wish to.[133]

As for the gladiator the Pythons have placed into the arena, there are no indications as to what brought him into service—his crime, servile status, or personal choice as a free man.

. . . the SAMARITAN sets off at full speed . . .—Many of the more staged acts in these arenas did require the victims to flee in terror, and as the victims tended to be criminals, slaves, or prisoners of war (often women, children, and the elderly), running for their lives was likely a natural response, though ultimately a futile one.[134] Just as often, however, the victim was chained or tied to an animal, a post in the arena, or to another victim, and fleeing wasn't an option.

Juvenal, writing of the effeminate Gracchus[135] in the arena, illustrates a period version of this fleeing Samaritan: The games! Go there for the ultimate scandal, Looking at Gracchus who fights, but not with the arms of a swordsman, Not with a dagger or shield (he hates and despises such weapons), Nor does a helmet hide his face. What he holds is a trident, What he hurls is a net, and he misses, of course, and we see him Look up at the seats, then run for his life, all around the arena Easy for all to know and identify.[136]

In the notes to this section, the "running" is explained, and also explains the props our gladiator and prey are carrying, beginning with the trident the Samaritan drops immediately: Fuscina, a sort of three-pronged fork or trident, used by a particular kind of fencer or gladiator, who was armed with this, and with a net; hence called Retiarus. His adversary was Mirmillo . . . and was armed with a shield, scythe, and headpiece, with a figure of a fish on the crest. The Retiarius tried to throw his net over the Mirmillo's head, and so entangle him. . . . The Mirmillo is sometimes called the secutor or pursuer, *because if the Retiarius missed him, by throwing his net too far, or too short, he instantly took to his heels, running about the arena for his life, that he might gather up his net for a second cast; the Mirmillo, in the mean time, as swiftly pursuing him*, to prevent him of his design.[137]

So the fleeing looks silly and Pythonesque, but is based in actual events as played out numerous times on the arena sand. It's not likely, though, that many pursuers had to give up the chase due to heart attack. Also, if the pursuer did fail, his life might be forfeit, and his prey might be granted a reprieve; that, or the editor or emperor could rematch the pursued with another gladiator, and the fight would continue.

. . . the CROWD is disgruntled . . .—At the height of the games, a baying, bloodthirsty crowd could decide which gladiators or victims lived or died, which acts were successes and which were not, and the canny editor and emperor allowed the public its head: If a convict fought bravely enough, the community might be sufficiently impressed to be prepared to give him back his life. A brave fighter might rise from the dead, and re-join the society of the living. That was

not in the gift of the president of the games, magistrate or even emperor, but in the gift of society as a whole: of the Roman people, present in the amphitheatre.[138]

The scattered crowd in this arena don't seem to be any real threat to Roman power, and as the assembled rabble cheer for the nimble Samaritan, the reclining Romans simply mutter their disgust. Also, the crowd won't be giving this gladiator "back his life," but clearly the Samaritan has won their admiration.

Gladiator crowds did tend to be excitable, especially if the fighters didn't perform as expected, according to Lactantius: "They are angry with the fighters, if one of the two is not quickly killed, and as though they thirst for human blood, *they hate delays*. They want similar and fresher fighters to be given to them, so that as soon as possible they can satisfy their eyes."[139] The emperor could also disapprove of the events as they unfolded. Suetonius reports one such fight in front of Caligula, Grant quotes: A group of net-and-trident *retiarii*, dressed in tunics, put up a very poor show against the five *secutores* with whom they were matched. But when the emperor sentenced them to death for cowardice, one of them seized a trident and killed each of his opponents in turn. Caligula then publicly expressed his horror at what he called "this most bloody murder," and his disgust with those who had been able to stomach the sight.[140]

The "dreadful" display of blood seemed to have upset Caligula infrequently (if ever, truly).

The Pythons' gladiator is costumed as a "Secutor," complete with armor on one arm and one leg, and wearing a helmet.[141] The victim is given a two-pronged spear[142] and a net, and is clearly meant to be seen as a "Retiarus." The Secutor was the "chaser," while the Retiarus was the "netman," and as the frightened potential victim runs away, he's performing just the way his "role" demands, and would have been expected by knowledgeable spectators.

In the "final" version of the printed script—that which appears in book form—this is essentially the end of the scene, at least as far as the contestants in the arena are concerned. We are left with the image of the lumbering Gladiator chasing the Weedy Samaritan, and "the Samaritan is going to take a lot of catching."[143] The balance of the scene focuses on Brian and the PFJ, and transitions to Brian's nocturnal graffiti mission. Another version of the script (as read aloud) offers a quick cutaway to the staggering Gladiator as he has a heart attack. In that version, the quick-thinking Samaritan grabs the Gladiator's sword and stabs him, to muted applause from the Jews, and disgust from the Romans.

Notes

1. *ATW*, 1.12.155–58 and 2.28.60–62, respectively; also, see the entries for “Upperclass Twit” (1.12.184–200) and “Emigration from Surbiton to Hounslow” (2.20–39) in Larsen, *MPFC: UC*.

2. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 133. This reluctance to host games was overcome about twenty years later as the Colosseum was under construction in Rome, eventually setting the high-water mark of theatrical presentations for eager crowds.

3. Wiedemann, 134.

4. Pilate had been, of course, deposed and recalled to Rome by 36. Part-Jewish Agrippa II (27–c. 100) was in charge of Judea at this time.

5. Grant, *Gladiators*, 122–24.

6. See Ames, “Herodian Judea”; also, Smallwood, *JURR*, 83–85. Unlike Pilate, who lived in Caesarea, Herod had spent most of his rule living in Jerusalem, and it’s likely Herod’s palace that Pilate calls his own in the film.

7. Josephus, *AJ*, 15.8.1 (Whiston, 328); Josephus doesn’t specifically mention gladiators fighting in these Jerusalem arenas, but he does describe in some detail full-fledged gladiatorial games in “the Roman colony of Berytus,” where “seven hundred pairs were made to fight, including any condemned criminals Agrippa had available” (Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 146). Wiedemann concludes that “there was a substantial feeling amongst those versed in Jewish law . . . that Agrippa’s behaviour was improper” (146). Perhaps the scattered crowd offered by the film wasn’t far from the reality of *Jewish* attendance at these games.

8. “Herod the Great,” *JE*. Remember that Herod was an Edomite, raised as a Jew (his father had converted), and clearly pleased the Romans enough (he kept order, which should have impressed the PFJ) to secure his throne for many years.

9. Jerusalem has been built up, torn down and scattered, and built up again over many generations (see the introduction section of Smallwood’s *JURR*). The image the film begins with is a much later version of Jerusalem than Christ’s time, one that features structures not present in the first century. It’s only as recently as 1999–2000 that archaeologists announced the potential discovery of more parts of Herod’s palace, the substructures of which have been intermittently uncovered since the 1960s. See Schürer, 45–46.

10. Kotker, *HLTJ*, 40.

11. *JURR*, 84.

12. Gilliam uses a photograph of a portion of this structure in the opening credits animation.

13. Mannix, *TAD*, 141.

14. Wiedemann, citing Golvin, sets the number of cities “certain” to have these structures across the empire at 186, “with another 86 probable, purpose-built amphitheatres” (22).

15. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 146.

16. *Wonders of the Past* was first published in 1923, and reprinted often thereafter. The view is from the Mount of Olives. The Hippodrome structure is a part of many later Jerusalem cityscapes, though it moves around a bit. The editors of the book attribute the image as a version “after the painting by H. C. Selous,” who created *Jerusalem in Her Grandeur* (c. 1860).

17. Gilliam had created these kinds of images for the animated sequences of the titles in *Holy Grail*, and had, as Patsy, blown a herald note at the French-held castle.

18. The first to unfurl is for “1st Asst. Director Jonathan Benson.”

19. Translated as “The Senate and People of Rome [make this donation to] the Divine Augustus Caesar.” Thanks to Dr. Roger Macfarlane, who also points out that the Latin on the banner is “utterly conventional and grammatically correct,” so kudos to the Pythons there.

20. An example of a tribute like this would be Julius Caesar (100–44 BC) holding games in the memory of his daughter Julia (c. 76–54 BC), who died as a young wife during childbirth (Richard, *WWAR*, 34; also *Gladiators*, 27). In the draft version, Reg will later mention Julius Caesar in relation to demands the PFJ are

making for the safe release of Pilate's wife, and it's not clear there, either, why the sitting emperor Tiberius isn't the emperor mentioned.

21. Grant, *Gladiators*, 11.

22. The possibility that the Pythons and their production team gathered the banners and other props from previous Holy Land film and TV productions is a real one, too—they'd utilized the BBC's vast wardrobe and prop department throughout the run of *Flying Circus*. They are reusing some of the same buildings, walls, and Sousse/Ribat settings the Zeffirelli production had used in 1977.

23. *WWAR*, 90. These are common *Roman* people, of course; those made subjects to the empire were likely tasked with learning the language of the oppressor on their own.

24. Reg also reads from prepared scrolls twice, Francis is able to create a workable map, and Stan/Loretta takes notes on a wax tablet more than once.

25. *I'm Sorry, I'll Read That Again* (BBC Radio, 1964–1973) starred Cleese and was cowritten by Idle; the *1948 Show* (ITV, 1967) featured Chapman and Cleese; *Do Not Adjust Your Set* starred Idle, Jones, and Palin (1967–1969); and *Complete and Utter History of Britain* was created by Jones and Palin in early 1969 for London Weekend TV. These shows are discussed in more detail in *MPFC: UC*.

26. The Pepperpots are the doughty but indefatigable women (played by the Pythons) who can be both "ratbag" and "revisionist"; Arthur Pewtey is a myopic nebbish; and Mr. Praline is the slick-haired, Mac-wearing know-it-all. See the *MPFC: UC* index for much more on these characters.

27. See *MPFC: UC* 1.394 and 2.133. They transposed the page number slightly, by the way—the reference is on page 486, not 468.

28. Luke 2:1.

29. This portion of the speech appeared in major British newspapers, including the *Times*, *Telegraph*, and *Daily Mail* the following day (6 September 1978).

30. See Donoughue's *DSD*, 2.356, and Shepherd's *Crisis? What Crisis?*, 28.

31. See Kenneth Fleet, "The Baskets Get at Jim," *Sunday Times*, 24 September 1978: 53.

32. The young Pythons would have made the trek to these galleries on occasion as school outings. To this day, clusters of uniform-clad schoolchildren roam the halls of these spaces, listening (allegedly) to a docent and taking notes.

33. *MPFC: UC*, 1.5.

34. *MPFC: UC*, 1.350, 372; 2.111, 128.

35. *BAFHG*, 227n2.

36. During *Flying Circus* the Pythons drew from the same BBC prop department as shows like *Doctor Who* and *Benny Hill*—shared props can be glimpsed from time to time (*MPFC: UC*, 1.154, 248).

37. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 63.

38. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 63.

39. Suetonius (c. 69–122) was a Roman poet.

40. Grant, *Gladiators*, 104.

41. Grant, *Gladiators*, 113.

42. There is a two-page spread of these statues in the Timmers and Van Der Heyden picture book *The Glory of Rome*, pages 10–11.

43. The two rabbis refused to recant or give any obeisance to Herod, and were burned to death (Brandon, "The Zealots," 633); also Smallwood, *JURR*, 99.

44. *TAD*, 43–44.

45. *TAD*, 69–70.

46. Grant, *Gladiators*, 51.

47. *TAD*, 69.

48. *TAD*, 5.

49. This voiceover line doesn't appear in various printed versions of the scripts, and was likely created by Jones and Palin as they stitched the film together. Idle was obviously also in on the postproduction work;

it's his voice that says "It's dangerous out there!" when the Samaritan (Neil Innes) is pushed into the arena. At the end of the "fight," when the gladiator is dying, it's Jones's voice we hear.

50. See *MPFC: UC*, 1.26–49, 79–92, and 278–88.

51. There is also a "Mr. A. T. Hun" in *Flying Circus* who turns out to be Alexander the Great, or "Mr. A. T. Great" (*ATW*, 1.13.173–74).

52. See Burleigh's *BRT*, 304–9.

53. Skinner was a miner, union official, and Leftist Labour MP.

54. Grant, *Gladiators*, 62.

55. *DBI*, 165.

56. "Inquiry Accuses JPs in 'Baby Crusher' Case," *Telegraph*, 3 March 1977: 3.

57. See the entries in *MPFC: UC* for these.

58. *TAD*, 6.

59. *TAD*, 18.

60. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 24.

61. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 24.

62. See Brendon, *DFBE*, index under "Rome."

63. Bernstein, *The Myth of Decline*, 8; see "British Empire" in the *MPFC: UC* and *BAFHG* indexes.

64. *MPFC: UC*, 1.373.

65. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 24.

66. "President Sukarno Proposes Anti-Imperialist 'Axis,'" *Times*, 18 August 1965: 6.

67. "French Confusion Over Students' Revolt," *Times*, 17 May 1968: 12; and, "Why Revolutionary Firebrands Failed to Spark the Workers," *Times*, 28 October 1968: 8.

68. The Pythons had shot a portion of Ep. 36 at the back door of the Aldwych Theatre, the home of the Royal Shakespeare Company of Stratford-upon-Avon at this time, and the debut stage for many more frankly political and sexual plays of the day (*MPFC: UC*, 2.121).

69. "Alan Brien's Diary," *Sunday Times*, 10 December 1972: 32.

70. "Peking Forces Final Rift," *Daily Mail*, 24 March 1966: 2.

71. "Why Revolutionary Firebrands Failed to Spark the Workers," *Times*, 28 October 1968: 8.

72. Dobson and Payne, *Carlos Complex*, 13; italics added.

73. "23 Steps to End the Killing," *Daily Mail*, 25 January 1973: 18–19. Less than two years later North Vietnam forces overran South Vietnam.

74. Peter Strafford, "Pro-Palestinian Votes by General Assembly," *Times*, 23 November 1974: 6.

75. Respectively: *Times*, 8 November 1967: 7; "CBI Mood Hardens," *Times*, 15 October 1969: 22; "Solemn Declaration," *Times*, 18 March 1975: 9; "Full Speed Ahead for Britain's Oil," *Daily Mail*, 1 February 1974: 1; "Scandal of the Street of Secrets," *Daily Mail*, 11 September 1975: 6; "National Trust Fears Threat by the State," *Telegraph*, 3 June 1974: 9; "Passover and Its Message of Freedom," *Times*, 22 March 1975: 16; "Young Liberal Group Urges Support for Squatters," *Times*, 9 September 1975: 14.

76. *BAFHG*, 122–23.

77. Dobson and Payne, *Carlos Complex*, 11.

78. Kröcher-Tiedemann had also been Carlos's number two earlier in the storming of the OPEC offices in Vienna in 1975, where she had killed two people. This will be discussed later in relation to Brian's graffiti attack, and the PFJ's failed raid for Pilate's wife.

79. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 203–6.

80. "Grievance Cultivation," *Telegraph*, 27 May 1975: 12.

81. "Sexist Language," *Times*, 14 December 1977: 15.

82. Miller and Swift, *Words and Women*, 128.

83. Auberon Waugh calls Davis "Kaiser Bill Davis," a poke at Davis's birth in Germany. Waugh's editors seem certain that Davis (born "Gunter Kase") was also a member of the Junior League of Hitler Youth (Waugh, *FCY*, 21 April 1975).

84. *Punch*, 27 March 1973: 13.

85. *BRT*, 30.
86. Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun*, 666–67.
87. Bogdanor, "Thatcherism, 1979–1990," a.t.
88. The *Evening Standard*, for example, paid libel damages to Williams (known as "Lady Forkbender" in *Private Eye*) in 1975 rather than face trial (*FCY*, 19 July 1975).
89. Donoughue, *DSD*, 1.520.
90. From a 1978 interview with Bryan Magee, which will be discussed later in more detail.
91. Jeremias, *JTJ*, 375.
92. Section 37 of the 1974 *Marialis Cultus* found at http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul06/p6marial.htm.
93. *FCY*, 9 April 1974.
94. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 224. The RAF made its first violent attack in May 1972, setting off bombs at military, civil, and political installations. The RAF blamed the bombings on US military activity in Vietnam.
95. Dr. Alfred Stumper was the chief of police, Interior Ministry of Baden-Wurtemberg.
96. Dobson and Payne, *Carlos Complex*, 151.
97. *Private Eye*, 9 December 1977: 12.
98. Nineteenth-century Russian terrorist Vera Figner is discussed in this vein in *BRT* (29–32).
99. *Private Eye*, 9 December 1977: 12.
100. The winter 1972 killings. See entries in scene 10, "The PFJ Plan Their Raid," for more on this grisly series of events.
101. *Brothers in Blood*, 29.
102. *Daily Mail*, 30 October 1975: 6. Coyle was a Provisional IRA member who spent a decade in prison for political kidnapping; Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme was a Manson family member who tried to assassinate President Ford in 1975; Hearst, Khaled, Meinhof, and the Prices are discussed elsewhere in this book.
103. 17 February 1978: 12.
104. "Any Questions," *Private Eye*, 17 February 1978: 13. Muggeridge along with the Bishop of Southwark will later upbraid Cleese and Palin for *Life of Brian*. See Hewison's *Monty Python: The Case Against*. The first pages of Miller and Swift's *Words and Women* looks at this same absent name, absent identity issue.
105. This film was based on Alan Hackney's novel *Private Life*, published in 1958. Like the Pythons' work, Hackney's novel reflected the social and economic unrest of the time, as his obituary acknowledged: "In the film's main character . . . Hackney created one of those comic figures . . . who seem to embody a particular moment in British social history" (*Telegraph*, 19 May 2009). Hackney lampooned contemporary labor and class in everyday dress; the Pythons do the same, draping their contemporary satire across a biblical setting.
106. Liz Fraser would also appear in a number of *Carry On* films in the following two decades.
107. Barges had helped in September 1970 hijackings, and the bombing of Rotterdam oil refineries.
108. Dobson and Payne, *Carlos Complex*, 29.
109. "British Woman Charged in Paris with Aiding 'Carlos the Jackal,'" *Times*, 7 July 1975: 3; also "The Cocktail Party Revolutionary," *Daily Mail*, 7 July 1975: 14–15.
110. See the "feminists" entry later, in scene 21, "The "PFJ Discusses," for more.
111. *DSD*, 2.59. To be fair, Donoughue acknowledged Thatcher's triumphs, as well. In January 1979, during the Winter of Discontent, Thatcher used a Commons debate to blast Labour's truckling to the trade unions. Donoughue called the shadow leader's arguments "extremely effective, passionate" and "[t]ypical of her at her best, articulating popular resentment and prejudices" (*DSD*, 2.424). See also Sandbrook's *Seasons in the Sun*, pages 738–39, where he notes that even the Labour-leaning *Guardian* offered Thatcher deserved kudos for this "blazing attack."
112. *BRT*, 228.
113. O'Hehir, "Insane Time and Place."
114. King and Stager, *LBI*, 49.

115. “Embryos Outside the Body,” *Times*, 4 May 1968: 6.

116. Associated News, owners of the *Daily Mail*, won the bidding.

117. “‘Test Tube’ Life,” *Times*, 27 February 1970: 9.

118. “Fast Is Unbroken,” *Times*, 24 October 1975: 4. Jeremy Thorpe lost his seat in the following election, as well as the leadership of the party (earlier, in 1976).

119. See Richard Wigg, “Brazilian Urban Guerrillas,” *Times*, 9 September 1969: 8; also, Elbrick’s entry in Newton’s *The Encyclopedia of Kidnappings*, 96.

120. “Sir Geoffrey Jackson,” in *Eyewitness 1970–1979*. See also the entry for Jackson in Newton’s *Encyclopedia of Kidnappings*, 147. More on these kidnappings later, as the PFJ are discussed.

121. “The Cyanide Messiah,” *Sunday Times*, 26 November 1978: 17. See also Ligasor, “The Art of Attrition: The Erosion of Peoples Temple and Jim Jones.” The Rev. Jones even called his armed guards “Red Brigade.”

122. This is where the macabre phrase “Drinking the Kool-Aid” comes from.

123. “Was Jim Jones Mad or Bad?” *Spectator*, 24 March 1979: 15.

124. See “Argentina’s Revolt is Part of a Social War,” *Sunday Times*, 7 April 1963: 4; and “Royal Tour Shows West Indies Are Still Loyal,” *Sunday Times*, 6 March 1966: 6, respectively. The flip side of this last coin: For many years, the working thesis of the British Empire as a power that could project itself around the globe and thrive as an economic superpower had to be attenuated—“after 1850,” Bernstein writes, “This empire was more a symbol of power than a source of power” (Bernstein, *Myth of Decline*, 22). See also Brendon’s *DFBE*, passim.

125. Cupitt and Armstrong, *Who Was Jesus?*, 62.

126. *ATW*, 1.1.11 and 1.21.280.

127. *TAD*, 34–35.

128. *MPFC: UC*, 1.320, 2.68.

129. *ATW*, 1.20.274–76.

130. Martial (c. 38–102) was a Roman poet born in what is now Spain.

131. Grant, *Gladiators*, 52.

132. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 102.

133. Quoted in Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 107.

134. See Grant’s *Gladiators*, passim.

135. According to Madan, “Gracchus had been one of these Salii [priests of Mars] but had left them and had sunk into . . . effeminacies and debaucheries” (*Juvenal and Persius*, 56).

136. Quoted in Grant, *Gladiators*, 61.

137. Madan, *Juvenal and Persius*, 58–59; italics added.

138. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 105.

139. Cook, “Crucifixion as Spectacle,” 75; italics added.

140. Grant, *Gladiators*, 62.

141. *TAD*, 21–22; *Gladiators*, 58–59.

142. This should be a trident for a proper Retiarus, and the armor-clad Secutor would have sported a “fish insignia on his helmet as did the Gauls” (Mannix, 21). It’s not clear what designs are on this character’s helmet. See also *Gladiators*, 57–63.

143. *Monty Python’s The Life of Brian (of Nazareth)*, 17.

SCENE EIGHT

THE PEOPLES' FRONT OF JUDEA *THIS SCENE IS VERY NEARLY CONTINUATION OF ACTION OF THE PREVIOUS SCENE, AND THE ACTIONS WILL OVERLAP AS BRIAN AND THE PFJ MEET AND CONVERSE.*

BRIAN: "Larks' tongues . . . otters' noses . . . Ocelot spleens"—In one of Auberon Waugh's diary entries for 1973, he describes Mrs. Walter Annenberg's "very dainty *fricassee* of nasturtium leaves, served in a sauce of brandy, cram, Grand Marnier, *foie gras truffe*, caviar and crushed nightingales' tongues."[1]

In the world of the film, this list implies that there is ample food available in the Pythons' Jerusalem, at least for purchase. Juvenal wrote that satisfying the Roman people (of the empire, not the republic) eventually came down to two items: bread and circuses (*panem et circenses*). Once they had abdicated their duties, as Juvenal saw them, the Roman people and subjects could be well controlled by simply being fed and entertained.[2] The PFJ complain about Roman rule, but they also attend Roman entertainments and eat Roman food after just a token fuss. (To be fair, they also second-guess Jesus's message earlier, and will eventually abandon Brian to his fate, but also plan an insurrection while watching the Roman *munera*.) Later they'll tick off a long list of the benefits of Roman rule, too. In life, these terror types often came from privileged First World backgrounds, not Third World poverty—Burleigh mentions that there was no consideration of the *lumpenproletariat* in the literature of West Germany's RAF-type groups—so contradictions are plentiful.[3]

As it is, no one in *Brian* is seen to be starving. Lepers and ex-lepers beg, but as a job; in a draft of the film script Brian has been invited to dinner with Judith's family, and there is also a "Last Supper" scene; and a mob (and a single hermit) can be fed on wild berries. Food and eating are not a major part of the world of the finished film. As in *Holy Grail*, the Pythons don't spend much time on feeding their characters, nor on plot points that hinge on either food abundance

or scarcity. Food is a major part of the settings and props throughout *Meaning of Life*: A lack of work meaning lack of food forces the Catholic father to sell his children for medical experiments, and there are dinner/meal settings in the "fiercely proud" Protestant scene, the World War I, medieval Hawaiian restaurant, Live Organ Donor, and dinner party scenes, as well as in the penultimate "Christmas in Heaven" scene. This film is, admittedly, often more domestically sited—like *Flying Circus* was, as well—meaning kitchens and dining rooms (and the routines therein) are more likely to appear.

REG: "You got any nuts?" . . . "I don't want any of that Roman rubbish"—Perhaps a sign that these are truly rebels, since Magness notes that many Jews had come to enjoy Roman foods, that they were "open to Roman culinary influences and prepared to try and taste new food."[4] Simple foods would have been the fare for most Romans, though, and for most citizens of the Roman Empire. Nuts would have been available, including almonds, pistachios, pine nuts, and peanuts.[5] "Roman rubbish" includes any food that was exotic, difficult to prepare, or just rare and expensive. Spices from across the empire—cinnamon, nutmeg, or pepper—and unique dishes like roasted thrush or stuffed dormice could be found at Roman banquet tables. Horace's *Satires*, written about sixty years before the events depicted in the film, list a similar array of exotic and perhaps grotesque delicacies served by "Nasidienus, the rich man," whose slaves carried to the table, followed by a giant board, a crane served into parts and coated well with salt and crumbs, the liver of a fig-fed, albino gander, and rabbit legs torn from the trunk: that way they're daintier *etc.* than if still connected to the rabbit. Next course was boiled blackbird breasts served with de-assed doves, quite a treat without the lecture his lordship gave about their cause and essential natures.[6]

The guests then "fled" before tasting any of these latter delicacies, dismissing this haute cuisine like Reg and the PFJ. Other tidbits served earlier at this feast included "Lucanian boar," all sorts of expensive wines, skirret root, fish-pickle, cakes, birds, oysters and fish, various livers, sugar apples, and Lamprey eel on a bed of prawns.[7] This same disdain for unacceptable items is heard in *Flying Circus* Ep. 37, when peasants reject the latest items of "bloody silver" from the redistributor of wealth, Dennis Moore, demanding "Venetian silver," instead.[8]

Trimalchio's feast as described in Petronius's *The Satyricon* is equally rich and exaggerated—the Pythons' "ocelot spleens" and "otters' noses" fit right in: On arches built up in the form of miniature bridges were dormice seasoned with honey and poppy-seed. There were sausages, too, smoking hot on a silver grill,

and underneath (to imitate coals) Syrian plums and pomegranate seeds . . . [and] a lot of peafowl's eggs. . . . Trimalchio turns his head at this, saying, "My friends, it was by my orders the hen set on the peafowl's eggs yonder; but by God! I am very much afraid they are half-hatched. Nevertheless we can try whether they are eatable." For our part, we take our spoons, which weighed at least half a pound each, and break the eggs, which were made of paste. I was on the point of throwing mine away, for I thought I discerned a chick inside. But when I overheard a veteran guest saying, "There should be something good here!" I further investigated the shell, and found a very fine fat beccafico swimming in yolk of egg flavored with pepper. . . .

> An immense circular tray bore the twelve signs of the zodiac displayed round the circumference, on each of which . . . a dish of suitable and appropriate viands: on the Ram ram's-head peas, on the Bull a piece of beef, on the Twins fried testicles and kidneys, on the Crab simply a crown, on the Lion African figs, on a Virgin a sow's haslet, on Libra a balance with a tart in one scale and a cheesecake in the other, on Scorpio a small sea-fish, on Sagittarius an eye-seeker, on Capricornus a lobster, on Aquarius a wild goose, on Pisces two mullets. In the middle was a sod of green turf, cut to shape and supporting a honey-comb. Meanwhile an Egyptian slave was carrying bread around in a miniature oven of silver, crooning to himself in a horrible voice a song on wine and laserpitium.[9]

Also, imagine and add as much liquor and wine as the guests could drink.

JUDITH: "Why don't you sell proper food?"—For Jews, meat would have been boiled, generally, though occasionally roasted, as a paschal lamb on a spit. Other foods included bread, made daily, "flour cakes sweetened with honey or figs," griddle and barley cakes, myriad vegetables, figs, olives, wine and parched grain, beans, fruit, cheese, stews made with lentils and herbs, and meat sparingly.[10] This is quite a variety of food, but we see almost no eating or producing of food in the finished film. Jeremias notes that there was plenty of food and wine for the buying during festivals, but that Jerusalem was also prone to food shortages exacerbated by drought or times of siege.[11]

The idea of what's "proper" changes over time, of course, and by culture. Much in the news during this period was the Iran situation, where the long-reigning Shah had begun to institute the White Revolution, an attempt to curtail Islamic sectarian activism while borrowing the more progressive ideas for modernization.[12] Influence from the West, and specifically America and Israel, were the targets of these Islamic religious backlashes, with the notion of "proper" food, dress, and behavior changing as their influence grew. Under the influence of the Westernized Shah, Iran had been dining on American food, "Zionist" food, if you will, and the Shiite clerics wanted an end to this gluttony.

During the Pythons' youth there had been significant and mandatory rationing of food in the UK, both during the war and for several years after. In *Flying Circus* Ep. 29, Klaus (Idle) is being offered "rabbit fish" by his irritated wife (Jones), in place of "proper food": Rationing (from January 1940) was a part of life in the UK for many years, with coffee, meats, sugar, butter, bacon, etc., all diminished as the war pushed on—remaining scarce in the frugal postwar years, until at least 1954. (A Milligan character in "The Fireball of Milton Street"—Sir Jim Nasium—asks several times if anyone knows what happened to "that crisp bacon" they had "before the war," and is shot for his troubles.) Beginning in 1940 each family registered with the local government and were given coupons for precisely what they deserved, by age and number of family members, and no more.

> In the larger cities especially, where there was less chance of growing a useful garden, Brits had to scrounge and resort to illicit sources for all sorts of items, from cigarettes to tea and, eventually, even bread. Londoners reported many days when bread and milk were the only meals, when housewives had to travel outside the city to buy black market vegetables and dairy products from small farms, and when virtually any kind of animal—including horse—could be justified as a meal.[13]

Marr mentions that beyond even the horsemeat ("regarded as disgusting") made available to a hungry population, Ministry officials imported whale meat from Commonwealth partner South Africa, which was meant to be eaten like tuna, as well as the tropical fish "snoek," also tinned and also from South Africa, but also ignored by British consumers except for the making of "a great joke in the newspapers and in Parliament."[14] On the whole, the young Pythons and their countrymen turned up their noses at food they considered to not be "proper."[15]

Moving away from food, one of the genesis points for Irish nationalism was the decline of the speaking and teaching of Gaelic in Ireland across the mid-nineteenth century. Activists sought to increase the presence of Gaelic speech and literature, the "proper" language of a free Ireland.[16]

BRIAN: *(reluctant to move away)*: "Are you the . . . Judean Peoples' Front?"—This would have been an easy mistake to make in the 1970s. There were diverse political action groups at most British universities, for example, including the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and its splinters, as well as the Radical Student Alliance (RSA), the Revolutionary Socialist Students' Federation (RSSF), the National Front (NF), the British-Vietnam Solidarity Front (BVSF), and the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign (VSC). There were many more of these groups, large and small, as well as versions of many that were more and less Trotskyist, Marxist, Maoist, or Revisionist.[17]

In 1975 the *Times* profiled Japan's young terror groups, finding a dizzying array of names and leftish ideologies. "Besides the Red Army and the three major rival movements of student radicals," Hazelhurst[18] writes, "the Chukakua (6,500 supporters), the Kakumarha (the Revolutionary Marxists, with 4,500 supporters), and the Hanteigakuhyo (the Anti-Imperialist Student Council with a force of 2,000)—it is estimated that another 25 militant and fanatical groups, supporting different shades of leftwing ideology, exist in Japan today."[19] The JRA would become inextricably connected to the PFLP after leader Fusako Shigenobu went to work with the PLO, and spent more than thirty years in the Middle East.

REG: "Fuck off!"—An equivalent of this phrase that has been traced to this period—and even found scrawled on the wall of the Stabian baths in Pompeii—is "*in cruce figarus*," or "get nailed to a cross."[20] Graffiti in the Roman Empire will be further discussed later, in relation to Brian's anti-Roman slogans painted on the palace walls.

This language was one of the reasons that the film offended so many upon its initial release, but the specter of larger-than-life (and in this case "biblical") characters using such language shouldn't have been a surprise. The recent revelations from the Watergate affair, for example, displayed an American president's penchant for cursing and racial slurs,[21] and *Private Eye* reported the following in March 1976: The recent vote against the Government on the public spending cuts seems to have gone to Chancellor Healey's head. On the evening of the vote he was seen to be in the House of Commons, standing over a mild-mannered Scottish Tribunite MP, Denis Canavan, and shouting over and over again, very loudly indeed: "You—you're a *fucker*. You, you're a *fucker*. A *fucker*, do you hear?" (And so on for about ten minutes.)[22]

Other filmmakers had already slipped things holy into bed, often literally, with things profane. Buñuel's ascetic saint Simon (in *Simon of the Desert* [1965]) is tempted by worldly things, including sex and popular culture; Pasolini's celebrated *Canterbury Tales* (1972) and *The Decameron* (1971) offered everything Mary Whitehouse and the NVLA could have found offensive: "This Italian New Wave retelling of the Boccaccio work . . . features mud, filth, excrement, sex, Church-bashing, death, plague, etc.—quite Pythonesque, actually."[23] The fact that such films weren't greeted with the same righteous indignation as James Kirkup's poem in *Gay News*[24] or Pythons' *Life of Brian* might be the fact that this "filth" was both foreign (Pasolini an Italian; Buñuel an itinerant Spaniard), and that both attacked, at some levels, popery and the

Catholic Church, no sin for many English "Christians." Pasolini's nuns were breaking their vows, but Jesus himself wasn't implicated.[25]

Incidentally, this was where Palin, at least, thought the film was heading most fruitfully in the early days of writing. As the troupe tried to write funny sketches based on actual Gospels events, moments like the Immaculate Conception and the miracle of Lazarus were subjected to sketch treatment, to fitful results, Palin records: The sketches, or fragments, which work least well at the moment are those which deal *directly* with the events or characters described in the Gospels. I wrote a sketch about Lazarus going to the doctors with "post-death depression," which, as I read it, sounded as pat and neat and predictable as a bad university revue sketch. The same fate befell John and G's sketch about Joseph trying to tell his mates how his son Jesus was conceived. The way the material is developing it looks as though the peripheral world is the most rewarding, with Jesus unseen and largely unheard, though occasionally in the background.[26]

The fact that these types of sketches—where Christ could have played a significant role—were not working early in the script process likely saved the Pythons from even more backlash as the film was being completed.

REG: *(incredulously)* Judean Peoples' Front!??? We're the Peoples' Front of Judea"—This is a misunderstanding that would have been common in the postwar period, as anti-imperialist groups proliferated in various colonial countries. The Goons had made this joke already as early as October 1954. In that year the French military control of Vietnam was ended, Vice President Nixon admitted the possibility of American troops going to Vietnam, the Algerian struggle for independence from France began in earnest—in the guise of the Algerian National Liberation Front—and the unsettled Labour Party swirled helplessly in the eddy of a thirteen-year absence from No. 10. *Goon Show* writer Milligan adroitly tosses all political groups—new and old, traditional and revolutionary—into the mix. In "The Lone Banana" episode a single banana tree, characterized as "the last symbol of waning British prestige in South America,"[27] is the focus of an armed incursion: Moriarty: It is the revolution señor—everywhere there is an armed rising.

> Seagoon: Are you in it?
>
> Moriarty: Right in it—you see, señor, the United Anti-Socialist Neo-Democratic Pro-Fascist Communist Party is fighting to overthrow the Unilateral Democratic United Partisan Bellicose Pacifist Co-belligerent Tory Labour Liberal Party!
>
> Seagoon: Whose side are you on?
>
> Moriarty: There are no sides—we are all in this together.[28]

Among the expected antis, pros, fronts, and -isms Milligan has lumped in all three British political parties, picking no favorites. This jab at domestic politics is apropos, given the contentious and divisive nature of the ongoing "Gaitskellite" coup endeavors in the Labour Party of the 1950s and 1960s. The Gaitskellites[29] of the right side of the Labour Party, named for Hugh Gaitskell, had been working to pull the party away from the extreme Left, led by Aneurin Bevan. The application of the principles of socialism—whether forced upon, suggested for, or chosen by the electorate—were the sites of contention in this fight. There were many who believed—perhaps Milligan, too—that this political chasm helped keep Labour out of power between 1951 and 1964, when Harold Wilson's more moderate views and colleagues finally brought Labour out of opposition status. In other words, internecine squabbling *can* prevent anything significant being accomplished in a political group, as the PFJ will discover before the film is done.

Later, during the 1970s, the anti-imperialist revolutionary groups proliferated, split from each other, and renamed themselves with confusing regularity. Even earlier, though, in the violent postwar years across the Middle East and spawned from the sprawling Palestinian refugee camps in Gaza and Jordan, for example, came many new terror groups: This period saw a proliferation of Palestinian "resistance" groups. The Arab Front of the Liberation of Palestine was formed when three other organizations combined: the National Front of the Liberation of Palestine, the Palestinian Revolutionary Movement, and the General Command of Palestinian Self-Organization. Societies calling themselves the Red Hand and the Black Hand came into being and were followed by the Palestinian Military Organization and the Arab Palestinian Fedayeen. . . . The Palestinian Rebels Front of Mohammed Abu Sakhila; the Palestinian Liberation Front; and, most notable, the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM), which merged with the Palestinian Liberation Front to form the PFLP, still exist today [in 1977].[30]

In 1969, Burleigh identifies at least fifty-two separate, active "armed Palestinian groups" in Jordan alone.[31] By the period closer to the film's creation there were terror groups whose names weren't as easily shortened, including Shining Path (Peru), the Red Army Faction (West Germany), the Japanese Red Army, the 2 June Movement (West Germany), the First of May Group (Spain/England), and the Tupamaros (Uruguay), among many. A short list of terror groups active in the 1970s offers a confusing array of acronyms, including the DFLP, PLF, PLO, PFLP, PFLP-EO, PFLP-GC, PNLM, PPSF, PRFLP, SLA, and SOT, to mention just a handful.[32] A number of these groups are offshoots of the PLO and Fatah

(based in the Middle East and North Africa), splinter groups either more or less dedicated to the use of violence in attaining, for example, the liberation of Palestine, or, in the case of the American-born SLA, the overthrow of capitalism, patriarchalism, racism, sexism, and on.

Dobson and Payne note that specifically Arab groups in the 1970s could be fairly cavalier in regard to names, aims, and revolutionary goals, though all tended to have an anti-Zionist plank, at least, and then an axe to grind with the Western (read: imperialist) powers supporting Israel. When in 1975 Carlos's motley group stormed the OPEC headquarters in Vienna, they demanded all sorts of comforts and supplies, and that a missive be read out on Austrian radio: This was easily agreed to. It was a verbose and banal document couched in all the clichés of Arab extremism. The gang announced that they were "The Arm of the Arab Revolution." The name means nothing except that it places them in the leftwing of the Arab spectrum. Every operation is undertaken by *groups which seem to choose their own names, either for glorification of some martyr or to confuse their origins*. Black September[33] was itself chosen as a name to hide its Fatah parenthood.[34]

The Pythons have already mined this ore, in *Holy Grail*, where the "Knights Who Say Ni" announce their name change ("We are now no longer the Knights who say Ni!").[35]

Clearly the closer-to-home "Troubles" in and from Northern Ireland also produced a hodgepodge of acronymed, terror-bent groups, with British newspapers taking great pains to separate the IRA from the Provisional IRA (and then from the Official IRA) from the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) from the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) from the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), and on. It didn't help when one group, for example, the IRA, blamed another group, the USC (Ulster Special Constabulary, the B-Specials), for explosions in April 1969, explosions that had been blamed on the IRA by the government just days earlier.[36] In an Ireland Cabinet Committee meeting in December 1974, Bernard Donoughue admits to passing a note to a new private secretary "comparing the IRA to the PLO."[37] The Pythons would simply take the next step and create their own acronymed group, the PFJ, reflecting the actual terror organizations so prevalent in newspapers and on the evening news.[38]

The most active group directly involved with Holy Land terror in the 1970s was the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a more radical PLO "splinter." In September 1970, for instance, the PFLP were responsible for multiple hijackings and attempted hijackings, holding hostages to secure the

release of comrades, and generally showing up the Israelis and the world with their "daring piece of 'theatre.'"[39]

FRANCIS: "Wankers . . . "—This can mean masturbaters, but it also has a more general, desexualized connotation that means the person is merely "objectionable or contemptible."[40] In his diaries for 27 September 1977, Bernard Donoughue mentions a very PFJ-type group he came across: "Then went to North St Pancras Labour management committee. What a bunch of wankers!—not a serious working person there. All part-time polytechnic lecturers. Terrible. Did not finish till 11."[41] Similar epithets, like "sod," have also accrued both sexual and simply pejorative meanings, depending on the situation and usage. In the lyrics for the "*Brian*" song under the opening credits, Brian is mentioned as having "one off at the wrist," meaning he masturbates. His mother will later tell him to "leave it alone; give it a rest."

JUDITH: "Splitters!"—"Party splitter" was a common term in parliamentary politics of the day. In July 1974, Roy Jenkins was being called a "splitter" by the Left of the Labour Party, including Ian Mikardo, just after he "called for more moderate policies" to address the country's "grave economic conditions."[42] The Left wanted to move closer to state control of industry, following up on their 1973 manifesto, and moderates like Jenkins, Shirley Williams, and especially Harold Wilson knew such a move would cost many votes in the middle. This squabbling didn't derail Labour, though, as it narrowly won the next election.

BRIAN: " . . . Which are you again?"—It's a fun irony likely not missed by the Pythons and thoughtful others that government acronyms can sound very much like these terror group initials. In Ep. 15 of *Flying Circus*, a civil servant-type policy briefing begins with a barrage of acronyms, some legitimate, some silly: "Gentlemen, our MP saw the PM this AM and the PM wants more LSD from the PIB by tomorrow AM or PM at the latest. I told the PM's PPS that AM was NBG so tomorrow PM it is for the PM it is nem. con. Give us a fag or I'll go spare."[43] Through Bernard Donoughue's *Downing Street Diary* volumes, acronyms come hard and fast, including PM James Callaghan being referred to fittingly as "JC," and more than once Donoughue complains about the underhanded terror tactics of the dreaded "PLP," or Parliamentary Labour Party—his own political party.[44]

BRIAN: "May I join you?"—This may be Brian's Pauline moment, his conversion to the righteous cause. He was clearly struck earlier, as he saw Judith out at the sermon, and now he's wanting to be part of anything she's doing. His road to Damascus conversion is as much sexual attraction as political

commitment. In recent films like *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, and *Badlands*, it had been the interested woman who, attaching herself to an attractive man, was drawn into a journey of violence and destruction.

REG: "No. Piss off"—A milder version of the phrase Reg uttered moments before, and already heard from Mandy when she's seeing off the pesky Ex-leper. This may have been just one of several tried as they shot the scene, given their experience with ratings and on-set work on *Holy Grail*, where multiple versions of "swears" would be recorded.[45] This is the kind of language that the BBC was uncomfortable with during the first season of *Flying Circus*.

BRIAN *(referring to tray)*: "I don't want to sell this stuff you know . . . it's only a job"—In Ep. 45 of *Flying Circus*, the man at the door (also Chapman, dressed in Icelandic costume) doesn't want to be selling Icelandic honey, either: Mother (Idle): Well why do you come in here trying to flog the stuff?

> Man (Chapman): Listen Cowboy. I got a job to do. It's a stupid, pointless job but at least it keeps me away from Iceland, all right? The leg of a worker bee has . . .[46]

This "I'm only doing my job" line had been in the collective consciousness (and conscience) of Europe since the Nuremberg Trials. There, a long line of Nazi functionaries tried to defend themselves by saying they were merely following orders, saving their own lives, participating in the new "empire" without knowing the atrocities, *etc*.

BRIAN: "I hate the Romans as much as anybody"—In yet another distinction from Brian being simply a Python standin for Jesus, it's clear that Brian does have opinions about the Roman occupiers, that he is not "insulated" from the current political situation, as some representations of Jesus seemed to posit: "The Johannine presentation of Jesus sharply defines a problem that is implicit in the accounts of the Synoptic Gospels," Brandon writes. "It is constituted by the fact that these documents agree in representing Jesus as insulated from the political unrest which was so profoundly agitating contemporary Jewish society."[47] Brandon also points out that it simply defies belief that a potential Messiah and Son of God could or would allow or support (Ben-like) "an abiding challenge to Yahweh's sovereignty" like Roman taxation and "obligation."[48] The Yeshua of *The Passover Plot* (book and film) was more aware of the Zealots of his day, and even quietly aligned himself with them and their goals.

The REVOLUTIONARIES all look around anxiously to make sure no one has heard—(PSC) The revolutionaries in any oppressive society have to operate

this way, always expecting the KGB, NKVD, Stasi, (Hoover's) FBI, or Praetorian Guard loyal to the government at any turn. Herod was reported to have a network of spies in place in Jerusalem, ready to ferret out disloyalty among cabals like the PFJ, while Pilate is said to have forbidden gatherings of men, six or more.[49] In Poland in the 1970s, the secret police were the SB (Służba Bezpieczeństwa), and as the new pope's homecoming visit approached in 1979, eager Poles had to remember to be of two minds: Poles of this era had grown up in a society where life was split into two parallel realms, the public and the private, each with its own versions of language and history. As in so many other authoritative states, citizens . . . of Poland learned from early on to parrot their allegiance to official ideology in public while keeping their real opinions to themselves and their families. Communist rule depended on ensuring that people persisted in paying public tribute to the official version of truth, thus preventing them from seeing how many of them actually rejected it.[50]

Reg, Francis, Judith, and the PFJ also have their public and their private lives; they never talk about revolution in any mixed company, they meet furtively, and generally keep to themselves. There were characters in earlier drafts who were not members of the PFJ who were given interactions with the PFJ (two groupie girls, for example, and even Otto), but those characters were eventually written or edited out of the film, or those intersections were removed. (Otto is still part of the film, but he doesn't ever talk with Reg, as he did in earlier drafts.) Like many of the terror groups of the 1970s, the PFJ keep their own company.

REG: "Listen, if you wanted to join the P.F.J., you'd have to really hate the Romans"—This is the first mention of their little group as an acronym, an indication that contemporary audiences would have recognized the "acronymizing" phenomenon for terrorist groups immediately, as it had occupied headlines for at least a decade. Writing in 1977, Ovid Demaris discusses the relative importance of terrorism as a foundational concept for world change (to Guevara and Marighella, specifically, who disagree with one another), and easily resorts to the lexicon of the day: The idea is to show that the capitalist state depends for its continued existence upon the use of violence and its own terror. This is the conventional wisdom of a wide spectrum of terrorist groups—IRA, FLQ, ERP, RAF, ETA, URA, ALN, MIR, FAR, PLO, PFLP, PDFLP, ALF, ELF, TPLA—a veritable alphabet soup of terror, not to mention the separatist movements active all over the globe.[51]

A Rand Corporation report outlined what it saw as the future, given the fractiousness of the postcolonial world, "a world in which the acronyms of

various self-proclaimed revolutionary fronts may take their place in international forums alongside the names of countries."[52]

The IRA had recently brought the specter of terrorism right into the English streets, which might account for its significance in the film. The year 1974 witnessed attacks on a military coach (killing twenty-six), and bombs detonated at the Tower of London, and in pubs in Guildford and Birmingham.[53] One of the less deadly but more spectacular attacks had been directed at the very heart of British power, the Houses of Parliament, on 17 June 1974. An IRA bomb exploded that day, injuring eleven. The Pythons had brought this up earlier, when Launcelot reminds Arthur that they have the Holy Hand Grenade, and then they use it effectively.[54] By the time the Pythons are contemplating *Life of Brian*, the hatred of the IRA for everyone who disagreed with a united Ireland, free from Westminster and free for Roman Catholicism, had become despairingly evident. Everything violent that happens or is even talked about in *Life of Brian* —kidnappings, ransoming, torture, body mutilation, intimidation, and even an overwhelming military presence and response—had also been front-page news (and regularly erupting) in Northern Ireland and Britain.

REG: "Right, you're in"—Since Brian hates the Romans "a lot," he's welcomed into the secret society. Admission to the Essene society at Qumran was more difficult. Only "full members" could take part in communal meals, and then only after taking "tremendous oaths," and even then, the novitiate could only have the solid food for a year, and after two years the liquid.[55]

FRANCIS: "And the Judean Popular Peoples' Front"—Homegrown revolutionaries and terrorists, meaning those of Jewish origins, were as old as the oppression the Jews lived under. Jesus Bar Abbas (also "Barabbas") was one such figure, active during Christ's lifetime, who will be discussed later, when Pilate is considering his Passover gift to his people. In the Pythons' lifetime it was the Irgun Zvai Leumi,[56] an extreme rightwing "Revisionist National Military Organization" set on the creation of a Jewish state, by force. "Jewish paramilitary organizations were not new," Demaris writes. "There had been Jewish self-defense forces in Europe for years. In Russia the Hashomer . . . and in Poland the Betar had attempted to defend the people against the savage pogroms instituted there. . . . They were the forerunners of the Hagana[57] and the Irgun Zvai Leumi in Palestine."[58] Also according to Demaris, just a few years earlier, in the 1920s, revisionist Jews were reacting negatively to any suggestion of Arabs allowed anywhere near Palestine: Vladimir Jabotinsky[59] [rejected Chaim] Weizmann's gradualism and his acceptance of an Arab presence on the

east bank of the Jordan[;] the revisionists were maximalists who wanted not only all of Palestine but all territory that had been part of King David's kingdom at its height. And they were ready to use violence to gain their ends.[60]

During and after WWII the Stern Gang (also "Lehi"[61]) were actually Jewish terrorists trying to drive the British out of Palestine.[62] Even earlier, there were Special Night Squads formed by the Brits with Jewish (Hagana) help in 1938, put together to protect oil pipelines, power stations, and villages from Arab attacks. Their actions tended to be quite vicious, according to Demaris.

STAN: "And the Peoples' Front of Judea"—Everyone initially agrees here, caught up in the moment. Even in straight-ahead, registered political parties, *not* revolutionary groups, name confusion abounded in the tumultuous postwar period. By the mid-1970s there was a small Democratic People's Party in Hungary vying for votes, while in the Sudan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan, versions of a People's Democratic Party attempted to gain electoral traction. In Portugal in 1974 the situation approaching elections was recognizably confused. In a lengthy interview with Portuguese Minister of Foreign Affairs Mario Soares, a typical question and answer betrayed the Left's predicament: *Times*: Will the grouping of the parties of the left be forming a popular front to counter the danger of a rightwing reaction?

> Soares: No, for the time being strategy for the elections has not yet been made clear, but there is every reason to believe that parties will be standing as single units. So there will be a Socialist Party list [of candidates], a Communist list, a PPD (People's Democratic Party) list—the three parties in the government—and who knows what other groups?[63]

Soares concludes that when the election results are in, alliances will then be explored. (This could have benefited the PFJ and members of the CFG whom they struggle with beneath Pilate's palace.) A similar series of discussions took place after the 1974 General Election put Wilson back into No. 10, but with a slim majority. By 1977 that majority was failing, and both the Lib-Lab pact and agreements with the Unionist parties were collapsing, as well. The Liberal Party had agreed to "struggle together" with Labour and the smaller parties, but never felt sufficiently empowered. This ever-loosening concatenation of like-minded votes couldn't overcome the Tories' no-confidence vote in March 1979, forcing an election, which the Conservatives won.

The Pythons weren't the first pundits to lampoon the party name confusion, either. In May 1973, *Times* contributor Richard Harris reports on Asian elections (in Cambodia, Ceylon, India, etc.), noting that Western journalists need to better understand the fundamental differences between those contests and ones held in

France and Britain. The differences tended to include historic tribal structures, racial and religious divides, and the difficult transition in these Third World countries from colonialism, monarchism, or despotism to perhaps just a more democratic version of those three regime types, and not necessarily to democracy. Harris's summation of the fate of fringe parties in these "consensus" countries sounds like the PFJ's discussion: "No hope then for those dedicated hopefuls on the left in the People's Socialist Party or the Democratic Revolutionary Party, or the Revolutionary Socialists or the Democratic People's Party?"[64] Harris then directly connects the Western world, and specifically Britain, to these Third World parties, and he even seems to be talking about the (im)possibility of success for a group like the PFJ: The obvious reason why these opposition parties have little chance of power is not just that they were all born in the 1930s in the London School of Economics (or whatever centres of leftwing thought have succeeded that institution), but that they have never been reshaped by the reality of their own society. Their revolutionary passions are Western-made, their jargon comes off the assembly line, they are urban, theoretical, far too world conscious ever to win support from the slowly changing minds of their own peasants. Moreover, as parties that seek the overthrow of the exciting society they seem more like enemies of the consensus than advocates of a new one.[65]

Clearly, the PFJ has not "been reshaped by the reality of their own society." Trapped in the peak of the Roman Empire's power, their jargon is borrowed from other groups of the 1960s and 1970s, and they never do try and enlist the support of the enslaved Jews around them. This is why their version of "consensus" can justify surrendering Brian to the cross, labeling him a useful martyr, then going home to continue the quiet talk of action-free revolution.

Just three years after Harris's article in the *Times*, the paper produced an eight-page special section in its 12 August 1976 issue dedicated to Portugal. Two years earlier, Portugal had endured the "Carnation Coup," so-called for its lack of bloodshed and violence, in April 1974, where a democratic government replaced the fascist, authoritarian government. The news stories on the political page of this special section look closely at Portugal's hopes for a secure NATO link, and the fact that the fractured radical left in Portugal couldn't agree on enough basic principles to form any kind of lasting coalition. To illustrate this second story, the *Times* editors provided a semi-serious illustration laying out the political parties vying for ascendancy in Portugal, labeling it "The Party Game." The fourteen parties appearing on the 1976 Portuguese ballot were listed in the

bit of artwork, each with its accompanying logo, and a brief (and sometimes funny) descriptor. These included (name, descriptor, and acronym): Centre Social Democrats (Conservative): CDS

Left Socialist Movement (Marxist-Catholic intellectuals): MES

Communist Party of Portugal (Marxist-Leninist) (officially recognized Maoists):

PCP M-L

People's Socialist Front (ultra-left split from main Socialist party: FSP

Revolutionary Party of the Workers (Trotskyist schism): PRT

Movement for the Reorganization of the Proletariat Party (unofficial Maoist): MRPP

People's Monarchist Party (regal with bizarre anarchist shades): PPM

Popular Democrat Party (liberal: number two in national strength): PPD

Christian Democrat Party (failed Christian Democrats—do not count): PDC

Portuguese Communist Party (Stalinist inclined): PCP

Workers' and Peasants' Alliance (alleged ultra-left: suspected Socialist Party front): AOC

International Communist League (orthodox Trotskyists): LCI People's Democratic Union (ultra-left Stalinist): UDP

Socialist Party (officially Marxist and government: moving rightwards): PS[66]

The last, PS, became the leading power in the Socialist-pluralist government, headed by Mario Soares. In this same eight-page spread, Christopher Reed writes that "the confusing glut of party initials" (as many as fifty emerged in the weeks after the coup) might have only "encouraged many commentators to dismiss the ultra-left as the fanatical fringe." Even the major, centrist parties "provided enough initials to make a molecular biologist feel he had an easily explicable discipline compared with Portuguese politics."[67]

So it seems the joke about political (and revolutionary) party acronyms was making the rounds in 1976. The first real meeting with all the Pythons to discuss ideas for their biblical film took place just two weeks after these stories and illustration appeared.[68]

STAN: " . . . I thought we were the Popular Front"—Generally a catch-all term for an agglomeration of leftist groups who have banded together to increase

their chances of electoral success.[69] This is a term even used in Benn's voluminous diaries.[70] When laying out just a short list of those far-left groups participating in the loud and lengthy Grunwick Strike in June–July 1977, Sandbrook makes the obvious connection for us. "Active groups included the Communist Party of Great Britain, the Socialist Workers' Party, the Workers' Revolutionary Party, the Revolutionary Workers' Party (Trotskyist), the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist), the International Marxist Group, the International Communist Current, the Indian Workers' Movement/Caribbean Workers' Organization, and so on. No doubt the People's Front of Judaea [*sic*] were there too, if only in spirit."[71]

This naming challenge isn't limited to newspapers and terror groups of the 1970s. Even though Josephus spends a great deal of time and energy describing the agitating activities of group(s) outside the Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes, identifying and vilifying a fourth group, it's their name he withholds: "Even if he thus later admitted this connection with Pharisaism, Josephus still omits to give a name to the followers of Judas and Saddok in the *Antiquities*, as he had omitted to name those of Judas only in the *Jewish War*. The omission is very curious."[72]

It's possible the group was so scattered and shadowy that no name was settled on, and descriptors like "brigands" had to do. But if the group was large and influential enough to be called a fourth philosophical sect by Josephus, an actual name should have emerged over time, especially given the widespread spoliations attributed to them. It's fun to think of Jewish patriots like Judas, Saddok, and others (like initiate Brian-types) struggling with unrecognizability, splitters, and perhaps having to eat "rich imperialist titbits" as they fought their good fight.

REG: "Peoples' Front. Twit"—Peoples' Front parties (traditional political and reactionary) had been active in Java, Singapore, Yugoslavia, Japan, Italy, Finland, Chile, Hungary, and a score of other countries. The largest and most well known in the immediate postwar period were those in Hungary and Yugoslavia. There were of course many versions of this name, as well, including Peoples' Popular Front, People's Democratic Front, the *New* People's Democratic Front, and the People's Progressive Front.

FRANCIS: "Whatever happened to the Popular Front, Reg?"—Reg answers that "He's over there," and we are shown a lone man sitting below them. They shout "Splitter!" at him, and he turns to see what the fuss is about. At the 1975 Labour Party Conference in Blackpool, Bernard Donoughue noticed

another splitting of ideological factions, this within the ranks of the more liberal (and usually lock-armed) side of the party: “At lunch it was noticeable that the Left is split up. In the old days they all sat at one table. Now they are split up around the room. Michael Foot is very separate—the Tribune Group have dropped him from their recommended slate (in favour of Dennis Skinner!).”[73] The Labour Party and Wilson’s government worried a great deal about this fractiousness, especially as the strength of coalition votes (Irish and Scottish MPs) vacillated with every whiff of cordite in Belfast or devolution referenda in Edinburgh. Donoughue, Haines, and Wilson are talking about these splits as early as 1975, divides that lead to Callaghan’s tottering administration from 1976. By December 1976, the Left’s Tribune Group was hotly divided, many wanting to detonate the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s dismayingly moderate economic proposals. Foot tried in vain to keep them from fighting each other, while the Shadow Cabinet “decided to abstain on the procedural vote to adjourn the House, leaving the field open for Labour MPs to quarrel amongst themselves,” which they then did.[74] By 1979, the inability of the Labour Party to agree on enough points to fight a concerted general election battle saw the ascension of Thatcherism.

The answer to the obvious question, “Whatever happened to the Popular Front (for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf)?” is: “It’s over there” (in Oman and Bahrain). The Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG, formerly the Dhofar Liberation Front) were a small Maoist group fighting against the sultan in Oman. The sultan’s forces were trained and commanded by British officers.[75] In 1974 the group divided, becoming the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Bahrain. In early 1975, two British officers were even killed in battle in Oman. Even after Palestine, Aden, and Suez, the British military presence in the Middle East and Gulf continued.

REG: “He’s over there”—The man representing the Popular Front sits alone, watching the gladiator contest, and certainly not plotting the downfall of the empire. Newton notes that the IRA went through a fracturing, and with a similar result: In January 1970, political dissension in the IRA produced a rift in the organization, with “official” and “provisional” wings adopting different philosophies and tactics. Since that time, the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) has carried out the bulk of armed resistance to British rule in Northern Ireland, while the “official” wing has withered to a tiny, passive remnant.[76]

The “official” Popular Front doesn’t look “withered,” but he certainly looks disinterested.

GLADIATOR: “I think I’m going to have a cardiac arrest”—Some criminals or slaves not only accepted their gladiatorial sentence, but attempted to magnify their situation. Success in the arena offered a few combatants the chance to eventually buy their lives and even freedom, but there was even more, according to Wiedemann: “The criminal condemned *ad ludos* was a socially ‘dead man’ who had a chance of coming alive again.” Surviving could mean not only *surviving*, as in the body, but a social recuperation of sorts, where this lowest of the low could reenter Roman society and retire into mythdom. The Pythons’ version of this potential recuperation is typical—the gladiator dies ignominiously, and his prey celebrates.[77]

Structurally, the rampaging Legendary Beast in *Holy Grail* had only been stopped by fortune of the animator’s fatal heart attack, a simple, obvious narrative tie-off. In *Flying Circus*, the Pythons had followed the Goons’ example of such narrative trickery, as described by Peter Sellers: We wanted to express ourselves in a sort of surrealistic form. We thought in cartoons, we thought in blackouts, we thought in sketches. We thought of mad characters. *We thought of—take a situation and instead of letting it end normally, let it end the other way—twisted around*.[78]

These narrative side doors are used throughout *Flying Circus*, though nowhere more blatant than in Ep. 34, “The Bicycle Tour.” In that episode—unusual for the Pythons in that it is a self-contained, singular-narrative story of Mr. Pither’s (Palin) bicycle adventures—Jeremy Pither and Gulliver (Jones) find themselves in a predicament. They are about to be bayoneted by Soviet soldiers when a “SCENE MISSING” caption appears over a black screen. When that ends, our heroes are safe on a “*Cornish country lane*.”[79] In *Holy Grail*, the expense of additional postproduction animation work or additional pickup shots precluded the sweetening most films enjoy, so the “cartoon peril” can end self-consciously, aligning *Holy Grail* with both the art films of the period *and* the cartoons the Pythons had grown up watching: The intrusions of the modern world have already been blessed with believability in the Python’s Dark Ages, so a cartoony death (farcical, fast-motion) fits well. It’s also likely that the Pythons were drawing on their medieval sources yet again, since Chrétien de Troye’s masterful work Perceval also ends abruptly—in midsentence, even: “When the queen saw her she asked her what was the matter—”, and scholars assume the author died before finishing,[80] perhaps even as the sentence was being composed.[81]

The characters, settings, and situations are very often cartoony in *Life of Brian* (including a spaceship interval and the condemned singing and dancing on crosses), there are several blackout transitions (including one in a few moments that finds Brian approaching the palace wall), and the film is almost entirely composed of stitched-together sketches (The Sermon on the Mount, The Stoning, Harry the Haggler), just as *Holy Grail* had been. During the run of *Flying Circus*, characters could agree to stand up and leave an overly silly situation (Ep. 35), an authority figure could stop the film and transition the show into another scene (Ep. 15), or the camera and narrator could just meander away from uninteresting characters to something else entirely (Ep. 7). Ultimately, *Holy Grail* itself is brought to a close by a constable's hand covering the camera lens, causing, miraculously, the film to slip out of the gate and the projector to fall.

An animal version of the "heart attack" ending can be found in the actual history of the games. Mannix cites a report from one Christian martyr, Polycarp, of just such a spectacle in a *provincia* amphitheater.[82] In the period when Christians were regularly tortured and executed as part of the games, editors did allow for public recanting, and a prisoner could agree to acknowledge the Roman gods right there at the arena—where an altar was kept ready—thus saving his life: One man . . . held out until actually in the arena. Then he collapsed and begged to be allowed to sacrifice. The editor refused and demanded that the animals be released. The only animal was a lion who had been starved to make him savage. But the *bestiarius* had overdone it and when the lion was released, the poor brute just lay down and died. The martyr had to be burned at the stake.[83]

Severed limbs in the background—Behind the dying Gladiator a lower leg dangles from one of the nets strung between spears. For most arena spectacles, especially those closer to Rome, such messiness wouldn't have been tolerated. Between performances slaves would clean the bodies and body parts, human and animal, change scenery (desert rockscape, forest, even flooding the arena for a sea setting) and would then lay out fresh, clean sand to cover all the bloodstains.[84]

(draft) The ROMANS in the audience look at each other in disgust—This is modeled after the audience response to Ben-Hur's win in *Ben-Hur*, where many had clearly been betting against Sheik Iderim's horses (which Ben-Hur drives), and instead on the favored Roman, Messala.

Muttered comments in versions of the script include “pathetic,” “terrible,” and “appalling”; these Romans are clearly appalled not by the bloodshed and carnage, but the fact that their man lost, and lost in such a disappointing, nonviolent way.[85] Marcus Aurelius’s inurement to the depravity and gore—swollen by an unslakable “morbid taste” shared, evidently, by his people—is evident as he comments on these public spectacles: “I wouldn’t mind the games being brutal and degrading if only they weren’t so damned monotonous.”[86] The games were an ongoing attempt to distract both the lower class Romans from their difficult lives, and men of ambition from their ambitions—games often staged, successfully, simply to quell food riots or mutinous movements.[87] In 1970s Britain, this clear separation is identified by columnist Peter Jenkins as the “Two Nations” concept, where those ten millions living at or even near the “supplementary benefit level” (essentially the poverty level) found life a daily, unremitting challenge. Britain’s continuing decline simply deepened these people’s sufferings.[88]

But the violent, fantastical Roman Empire games also served as an escape from the boredom of a privileged life, just as sexual debauchery of every kind helped distract outside the arena. Also from Mannix: “As the mob gradually lost all interest in finding work, serving in the legions or taking any responsibility, the games became increasingly brutal and lewd. Finally they were simply excuses for sadistic debauches.”[89] This specter of damaging, caustic boredom has been broached by the Pythons in *Flying Circus*, there “expressing a Kierkegaardian complaint voiced in *Either/Or*—namely, that for the aesthete—whose life is devoted to the pursuit of pleasure and amusement—boredom is the single greatest corrosive.”[90] These games-goers fit this bill. Mandy is ready to leave the Sermon on the Mount so she can get to something a bit more exciting, a stoning. Later it’s Pilate who seems to be spending his time on interior decorating rather than running Judea, perhaps building another useless Babel, in Kierkegaard’s terms, and the prospect of a little violence is a pleasant distraction—it’s his version of Kierkegaard’s “crop rotation.” The members of the PFJ aren’t depicted doing anything apart from bloviating and circular planning, meaning they’re not unlike the other upper-middle-class revolutionaries of the 1970s, or even the disaffected have-not generations often depicted in postwar New Wave cinemas. In Bunuel’s *Los Olvidados* it’s Jaibo and the kid gang; in Pasolini’s *Accattone* it’s the layabout gang of pimps and scroungers with nothing to do but scavenge, eat, and swim; and in Godard’s *Breathless*, our “hero” drifts from larceny to murder before dying in the street.[91]

This Samaritan gives an “up yours” (or *bras d’honneur*) sign to the assembled Romans, who already think the day’s events have become “dreadful.” *An Encyclopedia of Swearing* gives credit for this gesture to the Italians, suggesting American and British servicemen brought it back with them after World War II.[92] The fact that our Samaritan is giving it right back to these Romans is quite fitting, though anachronistic. This is one of the few épater la bourgeoisie moments that goes unpunished in the world of the film, incidentally. The Roman spectators are appalled by the success of the Samaritan prey/victim, as opposed to the blood and gore scattered across the arena floor, but the crowd made up of the people of Judea clearly appreciate the fact that the slave managed to best the gladiator.

A fight like this is described in some detail in *Those about to Die*. Flamma, Mannix imagines, might have been a trained soldier whose unknown crime “sentenced him to the arena.”[93] Once there, Flamma was cast in the role of Secutor, giving him bulky armor and helmet, and pitting him against an unarmored gladiator, a more nimble Retiarus. Flamma was likely supposed to fight well but lose to the better-trained, faster, and more seasoned gladiator. As it turned out, Flamma found he had a knack for this gladiatorial fighting, tricking the better fighter into mistakes that allowed him to win. Mannix notes that the standard response to this unforeseen victory (actually a loss for the promoter or editor of the games) was the emperor’s signal to another Retiarus “to come out and finish him off.” The crowd—who had started out cheering against the mutinous ex-soldier—turned immediately and cheered for him, and, according to Mannix: “Very few emperors dared to ignore the will of the people in the circus.”[94] In the Pythons’ Colosseum, the non-Roman sections of the crowd cheer lustily for the surviving Samaritan, while the lounging Romans simply grumble and accept the will of the people. It’s possible (though not likely) that the wily Samaritan will be promoted to a gladiator school and spend the rest of his days performing for appreciative audiences, as Flamma did.

The non-Roman audience claps and cheers the triumphant Samaritan—This happiness and celebration will likely be short-lived. Depending on the *editor* of these paltry games, a second gladiator can be sent out to finish the kill, or the victim will be recaptured and held over for the next games. It’s unlikely that a slave or criminal or just captured foreigner (any of which this victim might be) would have benefited from the crowd’s appreciations, except to live one more day. Refusing to fight in the arena was also a mistake, as Cicero relates “in a letter of 43 BC about L. Cornelius Balbus, Caesar’s quartermaster, who was said

to have tried to force a Pompeian officer called Fadius to fight twice as a gladiator in Balbus's home town of Gades, and when he refused to have had him burnt alive in a gladiatorial school."[95] There are also many instances where Jews and, later, Christians thrown into the arena with wild animals refused to defend themselves, with grisly and predictable results.[96]

REG: ". . . bruvver!"—Reg seems to say "brother" as he cheers along with most of the crowd for the successful Samaritan, identifying another sibling, at least in spirit. Anyone who manages to best the Romans is family, it seems. Seneca spent energies attacking the crowds who attended these games, those cheering on the "ludicrous cruelties at midday"[97] with unattractive gusto: "Nothing is so morally degrading as the spectators at the games. As if armed combats are not bad enough, the midday intermission, when criminals have to fight without helmet or armour, are sheer murder," Seneca wrote. "Many spectators prefer this to the regular programme. In the morning they throw men to the lions, at midday they throw them to the spectators."[98]

"Bruvver" is a much-caricatured Cockney version of "brother," heard earlier on *Flying Circus* when Palin and Jones played the Vercotti brothers, shaking down the military.[99] This may also be a nod to the contemporary punk/skinhead trend in Britain, where "cropped hair, levis and braces, and Cherry Red boots" brought disaffected "siblings" together in the poorest white areas of Britain.[100] These "aggro" punks were lashing out at any semblance of authority in the 1970s, at immigrants and unemployment and—given the moribund economy of the later 1970s—perhaps just at the awful prospects of their lives.[101] The Pythons have provided versions of shorter-haired young "punks" (the PFJ) in the stands cheering against "the Man," and a long-haired hippie type (he's even "weedy") giving the up-yours to the Roman establishment—successive antiauthoritarian cultures from 1960s and 1970s Britain.

BRIAN: "Brian . . . er . . . Brian Cohen"—He knows by this time that he's not actually the son of "Mr. Cohen," whom we never meet, but the very Jewish name is likely a better calling card for introduction to an anti-Roman terror group than "Brian Maximus."

REG: "We may have a little job for you, Brian"—The "weedy Samaritan" has "defeated" the gladiator, upsetting the status quo in the Roman world, where the stratigraphic divisions in society were essential. Is it simply coincidental that at this moment Reg announces to Brian and the rest of the PFJ that there is a further antisocial activity in the offing? Or is this decision directly connected to the performance they just witnessed? Many found fault with these violent and

passionate games; moralists feared a deleterious effect on the audience-cum-mob. Plato, the Stoics and Epicureans, and many Roman writers agreed that these spectacles did not bring out the masses' most noble natures: "Nothing is so damaging to good character than the habit of wasting time at the Games; for then it is that vice steals secretly upon you through the avenue of pleasure. . . . I come home more greedy, more ambitious, more voluptuous, even more cruel and more inhumane, because I have been among human beings."[102] If the Samaritan had lost, would Reg have had "a job" for Brian, or would the reinforced social order have been settled comfortably, and the PFJ just gone home? We can't know. The gladiator dies, the crowd cheers the victorious Samaritan, and the PFJ sends off their pledge to make his bones.

And who was the Labour Party's go-to man for unattractive little jobs? During this period there was at least one man who was always ready to be the David taking on Goliath, or the Samaritan besting the Macedonian Baby-Crusher—Tony Benn.[103] This very-Left Labour minister and Cabinet member was ever the wild card, the most "out there" (meaning active and willing) member of the Cabinet during this decade; both a "leftwing prophet" and "bogeyman," Benn could be called upon to do the painful, unthanked, unpopular, and politically dangerous heavy-lifting of Labour's extreme Left.[104] Donoughue complained about him often because Benn seemed to push and pull and threaten from and toward the left, and when blocked he'd promise to resign and bring down the house. Wilson and Callaghan both could have taken him up on this promise, but then he'd back off, keep his Cabinet job, and quietly manipulate centrist Labour positions leftward, from within.[105] And even though Benn irritated those at No. 10 with his prickly, assumed, man-of-the-worker shtick, Donoughue at least, saw the potential usefulness of such a strong-willed (and *expendable*) foot soldier: I am deciding, slowly I realise, that Benn and Bennery could be useful in getting this country's manufacturing industry out of its mess. Not his ad hoc subsidies to any bunch of shop stewards. Not his marginal co-operatives. But the NEB[106] at the van[guard] of a proper policy of industrial regeneration. He would not be my chosen instrument—he is too fanatical. *But he is all we have, and if controlled might just pull it off.*[107]

Benn did spend much of his time trying to drag British industry into reorganization, into the hands of the workers, a Dennisean task of "anarchosyndicalism" that could never have achieved but seemed noble and worth fighting for. Along with Ian Mikardo he was generally the conscience of the Left (and, like Jiminy Cricket, often ignored).

This is Brian's *rite de passage* for his potential membership in this secret society, the PFJ.[108] And while many of the nineteenth-century revolutionary syndicalists[109] believed in the *reprise individuelle*, an "individual expropriation" of wealth or goods from the bourgeoisie, Brian and the PFJ don't "liberate" ill-gotten deposits from banks, nor do they rob the temple or moneychangers or rich men like Gregory, even though in first-century Jerusalem these latter targets would have been ripe for plucking.[110] What Brian is asked to enact instead is a sort of *proclamation individuelle*—he will adorn the palace walls with an anti-imperialist slogan. Russian scientist and activist Peter Kropotkin would have characterized this act as essential and epoch-changing: By actions which compel general attention, the new idea seeps into people's minds and wins converts. One such act may, in a few days, make more propaganda than thousands of pamphlets. Above all, it awakens the spirit of revolt; it breeds daring. . . . One courageous act has sufficed to upset in a few days the entire governmental machinery, to make the colossus tremble.[111]

An anarchist, essentially, Kropotkin would have had much in common with the more anarchic individualism[112] Brian espouses later, as he naively counsels people to not follow authority blindly and to think for themselves, and even later telling the crucifying centurion that he doesn't "have to follow orders." (The crowd parrots Brian's words back to him and the Centurion says he likes following orders, so the individualist argument is consistently mooted.) This "individual terror" is more at home, likely, in the modern world, where students and disaffected minorities declaim by voice, banner, and graffiti, using media of all kinds to rail against the oppressive system, institution, or state.[113] Brian and the PFJ haven't these means, so a man and a paint brush must suffice. When Brian succeeds—and Reg and Francis seem surprised that he does—he will be welcomed into their group, given the secret salute, and added to the commando raid on Pilate's palace, with predictable results.

Notes

1. Waugh, *FCY*, 5 March 1973. Walter Annenberg was an American publisher and philanthropist; Mrs. Annenberg was the former Leonore Cohn.
2. Juvenal's *Satire X* (Loeb Classical Library), 373.
3. See Farrell, *BRJ*, chapter 6.
4. Magness, *Stone and Dung*, 56.
5. *JVL*, "Jewish Food"; also, King and Stager, *LBI*, 105.
6. Horace, *Satires*, 2.8.85–93; from Fuchs, *Horace's Satires and Epistles*, 1977.
7. Fuchs, *Horace's Satires*, 45–46.
8. *ATW*, 2.37.207.
9. Petronius, *The Satyricon*, chaps. 5 and 6.
10. *LBI*, 64–69; also, Jeremias, *JTJ*, passim.
11. *JTJ*, 121, 131.
12. Caryl, *Strange Rebels*, 7–9.
13. Larsen, *MPFC: UC*, 2.47.
14. Marr, *HMB*, 82–83.
15. Marr does mention that the snoek purchases—"millions of tins"—ended up satisfying cat food producers, who bought most of it at a greatly reduced price (83).
16. Burleigh, *BRT*, 1.
17. Like Mrs. Conclusion (Chapman) in Ep. 27 of *Flying Circus* (*MPFC: UC* 2.15–16).
18. Peter Hazelhurst provided additional stories on Japan's terror groups for the 7 and 14 October editions of the *Times*.
19. "Japan's Terror Groups," *Times*, 22 October 1975: 16.
20. See Cook's "Envisioning Crucifixion," 276–78 for more on this insult.
21. The 1977 *Monty Python and the Holy Grail (Book)* had included on the back cover many names from the Nixon administration, and specifically those recently convicted in relation to the Watergate affair (*BAFHG*, 13).
22. 19 March 1976: 4. In an example of the cross-fertilization within the entertainment industry of Britain, Blake Edwards was also shooting at Shepperton during this period, finishing *The Pink Panther Strikes Again*, and was also obviously reading *Private Eye*. To this same issue he contributes a short letter, responding to an earlier "Grovel" column: "*Sir, About Grovel; BOLLOCKS . . . BLAKE EDWARDS*." On 1 May 1974, Bernard Donoughue diaried that Marcia Williams had attacked Harold Wilson for "mentioning *Private Eye* in the Commons"—an indication of the magazine's scope and influence in British culture (Donoughue, *DSD*, 1.111).
23. Larsen, *BAFHG*, 74–75. Buñuel's *The Milky Way* (1969), had actually attacked what the filmmaker saw as "Catholic heresies," perhaps rendering him less threatening to Christians like Whitehouse and NVLA. Again, Buñuel isn't attacking or even depicting the figure of Christ, which is likely why these films avoided attention.
24. See the " . . . as a blasphemer . . . " entry earlier in "The Stoning" scene for more on the poem, its publication, and the subsequent trial for blasphemy.
25. Likely one of the reasons a filmed version of *The Last Temptation of Christ*, originally published in 1955, had to wait for a later generation.
26. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 349–50.
27. Britain's shrinking empire is a consistent locus of comedy and self-deprecation for both the Goons and the Pythons. See the index of *MPFC: UC* and *BAFHG* under "British Empire."
28. 26 October 1954. As the country tried to rebuild after the war while still supporting the principles and fiscal realities of the Welfare State, Britain's international influence declined while domestic commitments rose.

29. Important Labour figures like Callaghan and Donoughue were identified as Gaitskellite (belief in personal liberty, etc.), while Bevan, Tony Benn, and Michael Foot were the "Bevanites," much further to the Left (where the public would own the means of production, etc.). PM and Party leader Wilson was seen as a moderate. See Sandbrook, Haines, and Donoughue for more.

30. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 134.

31. *BRT*, 152–53.

32. The acronyms stand for, in order (including establishment dates): the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (1969), the Palestinian Liberation Front (1961), the Palestine Liberation Organization (1964), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (1967), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—General Command (1968), the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front (1967), the Popular Revolutionary Front for the Liberation of Palestine (1972), the Symbionese Liberation Army, and the Sons of the Occupied Territory (both c. 1973) (Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 35, 150–58). This last group (SOT) hijacked a Japanese airliner out of Amsterdam in July 1973, landed in Benghazi, then blew up the plane after everyone (excluding one hijacker, already dead) had left the plane. This was the group's one and only operation. See entries in scene 16, "Hiding with the PFJ," later for more.

33. Black September is the terrorist group that stormed the Israeli athlete rooms at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games, killing eleven.

34. Dobson and Payne, *Carlos Complex*, 112; italics added.

35. *BAFHG*, 416.

36. "IRA Blame Police for Explosions," *Times*, 22 Apr. 1969: 10.

37. *DSD*, 1.265.

38. See Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, passim.

39. Dobson and Payne, *Carlos Complex*, 21. This explosion of activity was followed by an all-out assault by King Hussein of Jordan, in whose territory the Palestinians resided, and hundreds of terrorists and refugees were killed (21–22). This was the first "Black September." In this case Hussein acted more like the Romans depicted in *Brian*—hunting down and destroying the enemies of Rome.

40. Later, when Biggus Dickus is being laughed at, "wank" will be mentioned again.

41. *DSD*, 2.240.

42. "Labour's Left Raps 'Splitter Jenkins,'" *Sunday Times*, 28 July 1974: 1; also "Jenkins Sparks Fury on the Left," *Sunday Times*, 11 March 1973: 1. Jenkins was attempting during this period to bring Labour back from the furthest left, in the hope of fighting a more winnable election without resorting to austerity (lurching to the right) or out-and-out socialism (keeping left).

43. *ATW*, 1.196; *MPFC: UC*, 1.246–47.

44. *DSD*, 2.82.

45. *BAFHG*, 446.

46. *ATW*, 2.45.332.

47. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 17.

48. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 17.

49. Levine, *Jerusalem*, 173; the latter figure is whispered to a Centurion in *The Passover Plot*, and may be a Herodian leftover. In seething post-WWI India—where Home Rule was the native goal—the British Empire's representative, General Reginald Dyer, forbade assemblies of any kind, hoping to quash rebellion (Brendon, *DFBE*, 266). The April 1919 Amritsar Massacre followed, anyway.

50. Caryl, *Strange Rebels*, 200.

51. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 383–84.

52. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 385.

53. The presence of the Holy Hand Grenade in *Holy Grail* can be directly connected to the explosive events of 1974.

54. *BAFHG*, 452.

55. Magness, *Stone and Dung*, 80. The Essenes will be discussed later in relation to the ascetic hermit Simon.

56. Israeli PM David Ben-Gurion would call these types of men “Jewish Nazis,” suggesting a genesis for the Pythons’ Otto (*DFBE*, 477).

57. Military wing of the Zionist Congress. After the war and when it became clear that the British weren’t ready to support a sovereign Jewish homeland, Hagana and the Stern Gang worked more closely together in acts of sabotage and civil disobedience against the British (Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 81).

58. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 74.

59. Vladimir Ze’ev Jabotinsky was a Russian Jew who founded the Jewish Self-Defense Organization; Chaim Wiezmann was also a Russian Jew who would become Israel’s first president in 1949. For a survey see Demaris’s *Brothers in Blood*, 73–75; and *BRT*, chapter four.

60. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 74.

61. *Lohamei Herut Israel*—“Fighters for the Freedom of Israel.” See Brendon, 474–76, as well.

62. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 78–80.

63. “A Country Eager to Make Up for Lost Time,” *Times*, 3 December 1974: I, VI.

64. “Ne’er the Twain Shall Meet, Particularly in Politics,” *Times*, 4 May 1973: 18.

65. “Ne’er the Twain Shall Meet,” 18.

66. *Times*, 12 August 1976: iii.

67. “Ultra-Left May Yet Swamp Nation,” *Times*, 12 August 1976: III.

68. Palin, *Diaries*, 310–11. In the general elections of 1974 and 1979 in the UK, the three “major” parties were Conservative, Labour, and Liberal, but there were also the following parties to choose from: Scottish National, Ulster Unionist, Plaid Cymru, Social Democratic and Labour, Independent, Communist, Socialist Unity, Vanguard, Socialist Party of Great Britain, Democratic Unionist, Independent Labour, Marxist-Leninist, Independent Conservative, Workers’ Revolutionary, Independent Republican, and on.

69. As discussed earlier, the Labour Party in 1974 had to make agreements with the Liberals, and then the Unionist (Irish and Scottish) parties to ensure a working majority, creating a British version of a popular front. This popular front held together for almost four years.

70. Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun*, 36.

71. Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun*, 610.

72. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 38–39.

73. Left-leaning Labour politician and writer/editor Foot worked in the Wilson and Callaghan administrations. Donoughue mentions him often and warmly, especially in comparison to Tony Benn, whose conduct tended to alienate even fellow travelers. The Tribune Group was so-named because they circled around the democratic socialist magazine *Tribune*. Foot was editor of the magazine 1955–1960. Skinner was mentioned earlier as the “Beast of Bolsover.” *DSD*, 1.513.

74. “Foot Divides Tribune Group,” *Financial Times*, 21 December 1978: 1.

75. “Gulf Guerrillas ‘In Peking,’” *Financial Times*, 5 March 1970: 9; “British Officers ‘Killed in Oman Battle.’” *Times*, 13 January 1975: 5.

76. Newton, *Encyclopedia of Kidnappings*, 233.

77. Shakespeare killed off his enormously popular character Falstaff in the most uncharitable way possible, for a stage favorite—*off*-stage (Larsen, *MPSERD*, 164). The Pythons kill both Gawain and Robin’s minstrels this way in *Holy Grail*, as well. Gawain isn’t mentioned until he’s been killed, and the minstrels are happily eaten during voiceover narration (*BAFHG*, 226 and 309, respectively). Our gladiator dies well away from his milieu, the fight, a “dreadful” death indeed.

78. *MPFC: UC*, 1.20.

79. *ATW*, 2.34.163–64; *MPFC: UC* 2.101–9.

80. Similarly, Thucydides’s *History of the Peloponnesian War* ends midsentence, in 411 B.C. (Richard, *WWAR*, 169).

81. *BAFHG*, 466.

82. Polycarp (69–155) was one of the Apostolic Fathers and bishop of Smyrna. Generally, the best circus performances could be had in the major cities of the Empire, with Rome and the Colosseum or Circus

Maximus claiming to be elite, while further flung settings could feature less accomplished fighters and fewer, perhaps ill-trained animals.

83. *TAD*, 137.

84. See Mannix, *TAD*, passim.

85. There's no sign of the most popular games-related activity, gambling. A loss by the gladiator would have cost these men thousands of *sesterces*, perhaps prompting their muted outrage.

86. *TAD*, 117; also Grant, *Gladiators*, 75–76.

87. See *TAD*, passim. One magistrate complained about the escalating price of this onerous necessity: "It's cost me three inheritances to stop the mouth of the people" (131).

88. Jenkins, *Anatomy of Decline*, 101.

89. *TAD*, 133.

90. *MPFC: UC*, 2.177–78, 1.97.

91. *BAFHG*, xxi–xxv *passim*, xxxn56, xxxn62, and 3; and the entries for New Wave in the *BAFHG* index.

92. Hughes, *Encyclopedia of Swearing*, 259–60.

93. *TAD*, 21.

94. *TAD*, 21–22.

95. Quoted in Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 140; see also Grant, *Gladiators*, 32.

96. See Mannix's creative story about Carpophorus and his encounters with the old rabbi and captured Jews (*TAD*, 80–89).

97. See Cook, "Crucifixion as Spectacle," 76n26.

98. Quoted in Bauman, *Human Rights in Ancient Rome*, 124.

99. "Army Protection Racket," Ep. 8. There it's "fings" for "things," "bruvver" for "brother," and "dunnay" for "don't they."

100. From Meriel McCooey's article "Skinhead," *Sunday Times*, 28 September 1969: 53.

101. "Aggro" was a shortened version of "aggressive" seen often in newspapers of the day. The term doesn't appear until 1969, with the rising concern about youth "antisocial behavior."

102. Seneca, *Letters* 7.3; quoted in Wiedemann, 142–43.

103. Lightning rod Enoch Powell was his opposite number on the Tory side of the Commons divide, always willing to take the hard line when it came to the damaging potential of mass immigration, for instance.

104. "Act Like a Prime Minister," *Economist* 17 May 1975: 9–11.

105. See *DSD*, 1.575, but also the index there for the many, many references to Benn and his relationship with Wilson and Callaghan.

106. The National Enterprise Board, established in 1975.

107. *DSD*, 1.247; italics added.

108. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 23.

109. See the discussions of syndicalism in *BAFHG*. There, Dennis lectures Arthur on the value of the anarchosyndicalist worldview; Arthur eventually throttles him.

110. See *JTJ* for more on the financial systems of the city during Christ's lifetime.

111. Quoted in Iviansky, "Individual Terror," 45.

112. For a very contemporary take on the types and tints of both "Individualism" and "individualism" in Britain, see Shirley Letwin's "Can Individualists Be Compassionate?" in *Spectator*, 2 June 1978: 14. Brian may be speaking here for Chapman and the other Pythons as they see the approach of Thatcher's Britain at the expense of Labour, the Liberals, and England in general. More on this later, when Brian addresses the multitudes beneath his window.

113. See Iviansky's "Individual Terror" for more.

SCENE NINE

THE LATIN LESSON ***DARKENED STREETS. NIGHT TIME. FIGURES FLIT FROM SHADOW TO SHADOW***—PAINTING AT NIGHT ISN'T AT ALL UNUSUAL, AS IT TURNS OUT, EVEN IF THE TEXT AND MESSAGE WEREN'T ILLEGAL, EVEN TREASONOUS. COOK NOTES THAT "IN A GRAFFITO DISCUSSED BY JACOBELLI, THE *SCRIPTOR* DESCRIBES HIMSELF (*SCR*(*IPSIT*) / *AEMILIUS* / *CELER SING*(*ULUS*) / *AD LUNA*(*M*); AEMILIUS CELER PAINTED THIS BY HIMSELF, BY MOONLIGHT)."[1]

Most graffiti would need to be done under the cover of darkness, anyway, just to be safe. Mannix reports that under a painted advertisement (done in red paint, coincidentally) for an upcoming games edited by "the generous Flaccus, who is running for duumvirate," is a signature by the artist: "Marcus wrote this sign by the light of the moon. If you hire Marcus, he'll work day and night to do a good job."[2]

The first shot here is a low angle shot, set at the foot of the newly placed Pilate statue seen earlier. Behind is an elaborate portico on a staircase, and a handful of plinthed statues scattered around as set decoration. None of these plinths, statues or the portico were actually part of the extant city wall. They had built a covering for the lower wall so that they could add the plinths and portico, but

also paint on the set without damaging the underlying monastery wall. They had also constructed these kinds of temporary additions at the Colosseum set, giving the illusion of a Roman-influenced setting.

Statues—Some of these are identifiable. The second statue from the right is Sophocles, from Rome's Lateran Museum collection; the statue at the far left, just glimpsed, appears to be a version of the Caesar Augustus statue used in the opening credits; while the statue on the larger plinth at the left appears to be a beardless version of the Sophocles statue.

Pilate's Palace—Creating a monumental graffito on the walls housing a ruling power isn't recommended at any time. Brian's act is akin to a Russian painting "Communists Go Home" on the Kremlin in 1919, or a Chinese peasant scrawling "Mao Go Back to the Mountains" in Peking in 1949. The disposition of this particular Judean governor, Pontius Pilate, would likely have given even the most zealous of the Zealot bandits, or *sicarii*,[3] pause before the first brush stroke. Contemporary historian Philo had little good to say about this appointed prefect, the Hellenized Jew philosopher describing Pilate as mean, at best, for he was "a man of a very inflexible disposition, and very merciless as well as very obstinate . . . in respect of his corruption, and his acts of insolence, and his rapine, and his habit of insulting people, and his cruelty, and his continual murders of people untried and uncondemned, and his never ending, and gratuitous, and most grievous inhumanity. Therefore, being exceedingly angry, and being at all times a man of most ferocious passions."[4]

According to Smallwood, "[Pilate demonstrated] a disregard for his subjects' religious sensibilities, which could be described charitably as tactless or uncharitably as deliberately provocative."[5] A number of these descriptors will be underscored later—and some dismissed—as we are introduced to the Pythons' version of Pilate.[6]

It's fair to ask just how much of the hated Richard Nixon is part of the Pythons' version of Pilate's imperious, vengeful leader. The recently released transcripts of the Nixon White House tapes revealed a vain, profane, and conspiratorial man who punished his detractors and those who disagreed with his policies using the power of the state. Haynes Johnson of the *Washington Post* called the papers "candid beyond any papers ever made public by a President."[7] More WH tape revelations were to come as the Pythons wrote *Life of Brian*: The Watergate affair had returned to world headlines in May 1977 with the release of previously secret and then much-talked-about White House tapes, some featuring recordings of special counsel Colson and the president discussing the

need to “stonewall” investigations into the Watergate burglary. For the Pythons and many political pundits of the day, Nixon and his administration represented everything that could be wrong with the conservative right, a barbed comedic gift that kept on giving.[8]

Add to this the fact that Nixon had agreed to an essentially no-holds-barred televised interview series with David Frost that aired in the first week of May 1977 (in both the United States and Britain), and it would actually be a surprise if the Pythons *weren’t* influenced by Nixon and his paranoid regime. The interview opened “old wounds” and reignited the harsh criticism of the former president.[9] Palin also mentions that in August 1976 he was reading Woodward and Bernstein’s book *The Final Days*, their account of Nixon’s demise.[10] Pilate, however, isn’t immediately worried about secrecy, cautious candor, or old wounds in relation to his adversarial relationship with the Jews—for now he’s working with impunity as the Roman prefect.

Graffiti is another plot point where the influential *I’m All Right Jack* also pipped the Pythons to the post. Major Hitchcock is certain that if he hadn’t installed a suggestion box in the workers’ canteen (loaded with scribbled responses he calls “sheer porno”) “they’d be writing all over the walls.” Just a few minutes later in the film, outside Fred Kite’s house, a brick wall bit of graffiti advertises a union rally for 3pm the coming Sunday.

The 1970s were a time of graffiti and decay in England’s larger cities. The noxious combination of economic torpor and political malaise (at home; marches and rioting abroad) led to all sorts of sloganeering. Graffiti decried this or promoted that: “Squatters Rights” images (a scrawled house that peaks in a clenched fist), or “Every Where Offices—No Where Homes,” and “Peoples Power,” as well as the more general “Anarchy,” “Fight Back,” and finally the very specific “Stoke Newington Eight” graced walls and fences and hoardings everywhere.[11] During the trial of the homegrown terrorists the Angry Brigade (a.k.a. Stoke Newington Eight) in 1972, someone spray-painted “Whose Conspiracy?” along a wall of the Old Bailey, where the trial was being conducted.[12] (Compare these impactful examples to the 1978 Tory poster created by Saatchi & Saatchi, “Labour Isn’t Working,” and featuring an endless dole queue.[13] Many saw this as the most strikingly effective anti-incumbent arrow in Thatcher’s quiver.) Most of these scribblers had no fear of severe punishment, and likely most weren’t even apprehended. A letter to *Private Eye* detailed one man’s encounter with graffiti in northern Britain: Sir, [a] few (3½) months ago I was apprehended for daubing (the misspelt) slogan “Khymer Rouge

Assassins!”[14] in firm letters on the wall of Elvet Bridge, Durham City. This venture cost me £130.50p, of which £100 was for “costs of removal.” The slogan remains, continuing, in the words of the magistrate officiating at my trial, to stand as a “vicious insult to the citizens of Durham, which they will not tolerate.”[15]

The graffiti craze could be found in most developed (meaning nominally democratic) societies of the period. (Again, such demonstrations of political outrage were too dangerous in totalitarian states.) Nanterre offered spray-painted images of “REVOLUTION!”[16] In Frankfurt in January 1969 the budding Baader-Meinhof movement garnered support via graffiti. A possible strike by students at the Free University of Berlin led to leaflets and discussion about the predicted use of violence *by* students, and concerns about when and how the police might respond with force prompted this painted sign, chillingly reminding the older generation of their Nazi guilt: “Heute Relegation, Morgen Liquidation? Besser: Revolution.”[17]

But graffiti *could* happen in more repressive societies, like a first-century Roman Jerusalem. In September 1978, in a well-traveled area of downtown Beijing, a group of youngish radicals created and posted a row of *dazibao*, or “big-character posters,” on a long wall where thousands could read their “revolutionary” claims.[18] This became known as the “Xidan Democracy Wall,” and it would even boast “Romans Go Home”-type anti-Mao posters,[19] something unheard of just weeks earlier: “The importance of Democracy Wall was not limited to its role as a proving ground for new ideas. It also had eminently practical effects . . . criticism focused on those who had engineered the Cultural Revolution and still clung to the doctrine of Mao’s infallibility.”[20] Similarly, in late 1976 *Private Eye* offered a silly article looking at the British political waters in the wake of Wilson’s surprise retirement several months earlier. The article is posted by *Private Eye*’s “Chinese Correspondent,” and tells of the throngs of Chinese people who took to the streets of “Lon Don” to read “the latest wall posters denouncing the late Chairman Wis Lon.” The long-suffering Wis Lon had allegedly been “‘nagged to death by the so-called red-hot running bitch of Threadneedle Street capitalists,’ Mao Cha.” Wis Lon is of course former PM Wilson, and Mao Cha is his longtime secretary Marcia Williams, called a shrieking, abusive, “sharp-clawed tigress” in the article. Order should be restored, the correspondent hopefully concludes, now that “the moderate Kal Ah Han” (new PM Callaghan) is in charge.[21] On the actual streets of China, freedom

of expression would last only about a year, and by 1980 the right to post these kinds of opinions was rescinded.

***When he reaches the foot of the high wall he starts painting on it in pathetically small letters*—"Romanes Eunt Domus" . . .** —Graffiti was actually quite a common sight during this period, with advertisements (products and services), announcements (upcoming gladiatorial events and games, prostitutes), and political messages ("Vote for Bruttius: he'll keep the tax rates down"[22]) found on walls and arches and tombs throughout the Roman Empire.[23] There were also scrawled political attacks on famous people, including, obliquely, the emperor. Domitian was known to erect triumphal arches "to commemorate his slightest achievements"—one of them was finally defaced with an emphatic "That's enough!" Richard notes.[24] Most of the (surviving) examples aren't painted, of course, but scratched or etched into the limestone or tufa walls. There are also dozens of lavatorial and profane humor scrawls, many discovered in the excavation of Pompeii, the indelicate subjects of which wouldn't have surprised Mandy.

A very recent and headline-grabbing graffiti incident in Leeds can be connected to Brian's attempt here, as well the earlier-glimpsed PILATVS IVDAEOS REGET OK. Supporters of an imprisoned minicab driver, George Davis, had busied themselves in 1975 painting versions of "George Davis Is Innocent" on many buildings and hoardings in London. There was so much paint going up that Davis's wife asked publicly for supporters to "stop daubing walls" so that the public wouldn't turn against her family.[25] Vandals then upped the ante when they not only painted these same scrawls on the walls outside Headingley Cricket ground, but went inside and tore up the pitch, forcing the cancellation of a Test Match. Arrests followed, the official response (including no bail for those arrested) prompted yet another outcry.[26] Davis's case and especially the texts of various graffiti will be discussed later, in scene 20, "Brian Is Arrested, Again."

Monumental inscriptions like these were actually part of the Israelites' history and law: "The Bible attests that the Israelites were directed," King and Stager note, "after crossing over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, to set up large stones and cover them with plaster, and 'You shall write on them all the words of this law' (Deut. 27:3)."[27] The antagonism toward the Romans might not fit into the earlier directive, but perhaps Brian is simply and unconsciously enacting a cultural tradition. Though already being scrubbed away by the evening, the painted letters telling the Romans to go home are also semi-permanent, at least as testimony against Brian and the PFJ (and just as God has promised): "The sin

of Judah is written with an iron stylus; with an adamant point it is engraved on the tablet of their hearts."[28]

CENTURION (Cleese): "What's this then?"—Cleese has assumed the authoritarian role of policeman here, as seen many times in *Flying Circus*, including the "Naughty Chemist" sketch of Ep. 17: This ["What's all this then?"] is a reflexive moment, wherein the fiction of the show refers to itself, another fiction. The Chemist character (Palin) here notes that this catchphrase has become synonymous in [*Flying Circus*] with police officials (including constables, detectives, inspectors) as they enter a room. See Eps. 5, 7, and 11 for earlier PC entrances. Python often quotes itself, accessing its own history.[29]

So the possibility of an avuncular *Dixon of Dock Green*–type character is posited here, one that Python audiences would have recognized immediately. They also immediately *undercut* expectations, as this version of the helpful authority figure will promise to emasculate Brian if he doesn't finish his community service by dawn. The only "human" Roman character offered by the Pythons will be Nisus Wettus, a Centurion genuinely troubled by the violence of his people.

CENTURION: "'*Romanes Eunt Domus*'? People called Romanes, they go the house?"—The Centurion has learned his Latin fairly well, it appears. Most specifically, the "hysterically wrong"[30] phrase could be rendered as, "People called Romanes, they go, the house"—perhaps understandable to the embittered people of Jerusalem, but certainly without the emphatic tone Brian intended. As will be discussed in a moment, the Centurion will also slip up in his proper Latin, meriting his own "write it a hundred times" lesson. A more contemporary but similarly challenged bit of graffiti collected in the 1960s is reported by Reisner: "U.S. is the more ignorant nation on earth."[31]

Additionally, it becomes clear that this is one of the Python sketches that relies on the verbal and not the visual, like the "Tall Tower" scene in *Holy Grail*, or the "Dead Parrot" scene in *Flying Circus*. These sketches are directly related to *The Goon Show* and the music hall stage traditions. The Pythons wrote sketches for the hearer only, often, producing a number of very popular record albums.[32]

BRIAN: "It says "Romans Go Home"—There are myriad examples of such scrawled anti-imperialist slogans across history, with an increase in the colonial and postcolonial era, when students were taking to the streets armed with aerosol spray paint, not bucket and brush. Versions of "Yankee Go Home" were seen on walls in Tehran in the 1950s, in Greece and Turkey in 1964,[33] in Indonesia in 1965,[34] also Japan, Thailand, and South Korea in the 1970s. As the British slowly pulled out of Palestine in 1948, versions of "Tommy Go Home" could be

seen on Jerusalem walls.[35] In an article carried in the *Daily Mail* in May 1967, someone even beat the Pythons to the punch on this specific bit of silliness. Writing about graffiti and Norman Mailer, of all subjects, Jeffrey Blyth notes: "Whether Caesar's legions, when they invaded Britain, were greeted with signs that read 'Romans go Home,' hasn't been recorded."[36] A decade later the Pythons have Brian paint this very same slogan, but in clumsy Latin. Blyth goes on to mention the recently discovered scribbles in Pompeii, as well as the Reisner booklet *Graffiti—Selected Scrawls from Bathroom Walls*, first published in 1967. This useful book mentions a "Yankee Go Home" sign near the Buenos Aires airport where, underneath, some clever dick added "Via Pan American"; a similar sign in this same area reads "Yankee go home—and take me with you."[37] This last sentiment sounds very PFJ-ish, if you will, since the revolutionaries will be certain that the Romans have to go, but the stuff they've brought and built is pretty wonderful ("the sanitation, the medicine, education, wine").

The British and empire were also on the receiving end of this anti-imperialist sloganeering. In Cyprus in 1950, the anti-British scrawl "Greeks, liberty is won with blood" was "typical";[38] in Edinburgh in 1959 there was a reported "English Go Home!!" painted across walls;[39] and in 1964 it was reported that a large hospital in Aden had its "corridor walls . . . smeared with slogans demanding 'Go Home British.'"[40] The more frightening, violent strain of this graffiti culture could be found across Northern Ireland, where versions of "Go Home British" covered hoardings and walls, and "No Pope Here" and "Up the IRA" slogans in contested Belfast neighborhoods.[41] These demands were backed up by bullets and bombs, altogether more destructive than the PFJ. And, in a less deadly vein, the respected French magazine *New Economist* in 1976 published "a four-page attack accusing Britain of blocking progress in European affairs," an attack the *Mail* characterized as a "British go home" (from the Common Market).[42] As a failing, falling imperial power, the British were confronted with this graffiti often.[43]

Finally, it could simply be that the Pythons are acknowledging the fluctuation of Latin across the centuries, as, for example, Petrarch's "classical Latin, as exemplified by Cicero," would eventually win out "over the less elegant, scholastic Latin that had developed during the Middle Ages."[44]

CENTURION: "No it doesn't"—The intense study of *unverständliche Kritzeleien*, or "indecipherable scrawl," has become a sub-emphasis in Roman studies over the centuries, perhaps first enacted here by the Centurion.[45] There are hundreds of surviving paintings and etchings in Roman cities large and

small, and many have sparked disagreements as to what the author intended to say, precisely. The vagaries of not only Latin, but the command of proper Latin by ancient scribblers come into play as these texts are approached.[46] When Apollinaris, one of Titus's own doctors, visited Herculaneum he left the following note, allegedly: "APOLLINARIS. MEDICUS. TITI IMP. HIC. CACAVIT. BENE." Koloski-Ostrow translates this as "Apollinaris, doctor of the emperor Titus, crapped well here." Some scholars have accepted "the text at face value," a simple statement of fact, while others, like Koloski-Ostrow, believe it was meant as a joke.[47] In the latter interpretation, a respected, highly placed man of Rome is brought down to the level of every man, rich and poor, base or noble—we all excrete.[48] These juxtapositions are common in the marginalia of Gothic manuscripts, where learned, respected, or even feared figures—of the Church, of the nobility—are ridiculed by their associations with bodily functions, perverse sexuality, animal metaphors, and myriad *obscaena*.[49] Koloski-Ostrow also notes that Roman citizens and slaves weren't above this kind of excremental humor, describing an Ostian latrine that featured paintings of dignified, robed Greek philosophers lecturing on the best ways to achieve a satisfactory bowel movement. Each is also holding a cleaning stick (a sponge on a stick) used to wipe oneself, as a kind of lecture baton. Smaller images at the bottom of the panel offer similar discussions from everyday Romans, but "in a more coarse manner."[50]

Misinterpretation of a bit of perhaps *unverständliche* graffiti, then, is clearly possible, even when the scholars of the ages are involved. Wiedemann demonstrates the fluidity of Latin "intentions," when discussing the Roman belief in man's domination over animals as moral justification for games-related slaughters of especially the "cruel" lion and bear: Such animals are as "cruel" as the death they inflict on humans, and their killing is hardly a moral problem: the inscription commemorating games given at Minturnae in AD 249 does not celebrate sadism by boasting that ten bears were killed "cruelly" (reading *crudel[iter]* with Hopkins, "Murderous Games" p. 26), but rather that the world was rid of ten cruel bears (*ursos crudel[es]*): savage bears deserve to be killed.[51] Whether the beasts were cruel or not, or whether the games could be morally justified isn't the point for our purposes; rather, we look at the various translations of the author's use of "cruel," interpretations that can change the meaning of the assertion significantly (and keep classics scholars employed). Brian finds himself in this same dilemma, and his Latin tutor has a sword and the power of the Roman Empire behind him.

One scrawl in a Vesuvian city leaves a message that can be translated in more than one way, with significantly different results. The graffito *cacator cave malu(m)* can be rendered, according to Koloski-Ostrow: "'Crapper, beware of the danger (the evil eye?) [from not crapping well? Or from crapping in this spot?].'"[52] The first is concerned with the gastrointestinal health of the occupant, while the latter is a warning about the location itself. Many tombs have been found to have such threats scrawled on them, warning potential pissers, crappers, and even fornicators to find another tomb for their cursed activity.

And among the *Jewish* population of the empire, the availability of education would likely have affected any attempted graffiti: In the ancient world the Jew was generally not envied for his wealth but despised for his poverty, and the Jewish beggar is a familiar figure in Roman literature. The poor material, crude workmanship and eccentric spelling and syntax of many of the epitaphs in the Jewish catacombs point to a lack of both education and money in those who set them up. About three-quarters of them are in Greek and only about a quarter in Latin, with a negligible number in Hebrew or Aramaic.[53]

So, there are reasons that Brian's command of Latin might differ from the Centurion's.

CENTURION: "What's Latin for Romans?"—The genesis for this set piece can be tracked along two routes. We can go directly back to the young Pythons' school days, and their often rigid, authoritarian prefects and headmasters. There are many such figures in *Flying Circus*, mumbling through restaurants (Ep. 3), marshaling a stilted production of *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (Ep. 18), giving school prizes while under Chinese Communist assault (Ep. 19), and haranguing boys for a rogue unit-trust scheme in Ep. 28. By *Meaning of Life*, the headmaster figure is teaching sex education (with his good wife) to a very bored roomful of pupils. The headmaster-type in *Holy Grail*, styled "The Famous Historian," is cut down in mid-lecture for his headmasterly temerity.[54]

The second route takes us back, as well, but not nearly as far. In April 1976 the Pythons brought their live show to Broadway. There they performed a medley of favorites from *Flying Circus* ("Llamas," "World Forum," "The Lumberjack Song") and were generally well received.[55] Audiences dressed up as favorite characters, and critics including the venerable Clive Barnes of the *New York Times* found the Pythons "vulgar, sophomoric, self-satisfied, literate, illiterate, charmless, crass, subtle and absolutely terrific."[56] But not everyone was thrilled. The *New York Daily News* critic responded negatively, and was characterized recognizably, for our purposes, by Iain Johnstone,[57] *Sunday Times* arts critic for

New York, seeing that amid the raucous Americans "there were some who forbore to cheer." Johnstone continued: "The critic of the *New York Daily News*, under the headline 'Anglos with Dirty Minds' ticked them off in a finger-wagging review, somewhat in the manner of a headmaster who has discovered some graffiti in the lavatories."[58] The Centurion's demonstrative voice can be heard here. The Pythons did regularly see and read their reviews, so this dressing down from a major New York critic wouldn't have escaped their notice. Johnstone was certain that the Pythons would have actually relished the bad review from a stuffy establishment critic, pushing the Roman-Emperor-and-gladiator theme even further: "I suspect this might have given more pleasure to the cast (who, like a pop group, have undergone the change from quasi-rebels to cult figures) than the life-giving thumbs-up from Emperor Barnes in the *New York Times*. As with the Beatles, most of the tickets had been sold anyway."[59] The PFJ are still quasi-rebels as the film ends, with Brian alone making the unhappy transition to cult(us) figure as a sacrifice on the cross.

During the run of the New York show, the Pythons had also discussed and agreed upon a Holy Land-themed feature film as their next project.[60] Just five months after this series of performances the Pythons are regularly gathering to write what will become *Life of Brian*.

CENTURION *(drawing his sword and holding it to Brian's throat)*: "Dative!"—The sword the Centurion is using to help improve Brian's Latin looks to be a typical Roman double-edged short sword known as a *gladius*, a pedagogical tool many frustrated teachers wished for.

BRIAN: "Er . . . accusative . . . er . . . domum . . . ad domum . . . the locative . . . "—It's "domus" and the locative where the Centurion actually falters, according to a helpful colleague, Dr. Roger Macfarlane: The noun DOMUS, it is true, is in a particular class of nouns that manifest the locative for expressing "place where"—proper names of cities, towns, small islands, plus *domus*, *humus*, and *rus*. To express "place to which" with these nouns, Classical Latin uses only the noun in the accusative case omitting the preposition—i.e., "home(ward)" is not '*ad domum*' but rather '*domum*.' Thus the Centurion coaxes Brian to the grammatically correct *Romani, ite domum*. But DOMUM is not in the locative.[61]

Macfarlane calls the error "quite minor," but still "technically wrong." It's the kind of wrong that sparks disasters in the Python world, causing knights to be flung into the depths, for example.

CENTURION: "So we have . . . *Romani, ite domum* . . . now write it out a hundred times"—A well-worn school assignment, often as a punishment, or as a rote memorization tool, or both, this solidifies the public school nature of this lesson for Brian. The Goons had gotten here first, in the episode "The Fireball of Milton Street." There, Neddie tasks the audience to write "I must not try and guess the end of *Goon Show* gags" one hundred times.[62]

CENTURION: "I'll cut your balls off"—The emperor Domitian (51–96) was known to "scorch" the genitals of suspected traitors as he tried to gather names of accomplices.[63] Castration would render Brian a eunuch, yet another figure meriting judgment in Jewish culture during this period. Eunuchs were in the same "gravely blemished" class as bastards, so a double mark against Brian: "To sum up, it must be said that bastards and eunuchs were included among those Israelites with grave racial blemish," Jeremias writes. "Rabbinic legislation, appealing to Deuteronomy 23: 2–3,[64] was ever watchful to keep the community, and the clergy in particular, apart from these elements by marking them as a caste outside the law."[65] One of the lists of approved marriage categories places eunuchs, those of "deformed sex," and hermaphrodites below even bastards, slaves, and proselytes.[66] Brian is of uncertain parentage and he is later threatened with castration; and Stan wants to become Loretta, even though he doesn't have a womb. The PFJ have as members some of the potential outcasts from acceptable Jewish life. On the other hand, the eunuch in Roman culture could be held in much higher esteem, with many serving in governments and households at the highest levels, and being trusted with the secrets of bedchambers across the empire.[67]

This turnabout, where the friendly policeman has become aggressive and threatening, has been heard on *The Goon Show*, not surprisingly. In "Dishonoured Again," Neddie is out in the cold on Christmas Eve, sleeping rough, when a constable approaches: Constable (Sellers): Er, you two men, what you doing 'ere? Move along now. That bench is for royalty of no fixed abode.

> Seagoon (Secombe): Constable, have pity, 'tis Christmas, the time of goodwill.
>
> Constable: 'Strewth, so it is. Well, a Merry Christmas on ya, mate.
>
> Seagoon: And the same to you!
>
> Constable: Now move along there before I belt you![68]

BRIAN: "Hail Caesar, sir . . . "—Historically, as a Jew living in an area controlled by Rome, men like Brian would have, according to Smallwood, "enjoyed the privileges of religious liberty guaranteed for the Diaspora by Julius

Caesar and Augustus." Smallwood continues: "The right to practise Judaism carried with it automatically the privilege of exemption from participation in the imperial cult."[69] This would seem to extend to hailing Caesar. The more restive Judea grew in the latter half of the first century, the more elusive these freedoms became, certainly, so Brian may have felt compelled to return the salute, just to get home safely.

If, however, Brian were truly a Zealot, meaning he was fighting in the first place because there was only one God to whom he could give obeisance, then he never would have said "Hail Caesar," nor anything like it, according to Josephus, no matter the consequences: And indeed six hundred of them were caught immediately . . . and brought back, whose courage, or whether we ought to call it madness, or hardiness in their opinions, everybody was amazed at. For when all sorts of torments and vexations of their bodies that could be devised were made use of to them, they could not get any one of them to comply so far as to confess, or seem to confess, that Caesar was their lord; but they preserved their own opinion, in spite of all the distress they were brought to, as if they received these torments and the fire itself with bodies insensible of pain, and with a soul that in a manner rejoiced under them. But what was most of all astonishing to the beholders was the courage of the children; for not one of these children was so far overcome by these torments, as to name Caesar for their lord. So far does the strength of the courage [of the soul] prevail over the weakness of the body.[70]

Brian is threatened with castration, and he confesses Caesar as his lord, essentially, and escapes with his life. Castration for Brian, of course, would have rendered his reason for being in the PFJ in the first place (the lovely Judith) perhaps moot, so his choice is more understandable.

Since Brian feels he has to do this, it also might be the equivalent of Herod's semi-regular "declaration of loyalty" demanded of his subjects. Levine notes that in about the seventeenth year of his reign, Herod "imposed an oath of allegiance to himself and to the emperor" as a way to ensure stability.[71] The text of the oath does not survive.

ROMAN SOLDIER STIG (McKeown): "Right. Now don't do it again"—This is one of the many character names only appearing in the printed script and credits, and not voiced anywhere in the film. Characters named Stig have already appeared in *Flying Circus*, including episodes 5, 14, and 23, and those characters also are not named except in the printed script.[72]

It’s likely this is a reference to impresario Robert Stigwood. He had produced *Hair* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and managed both Cream and the Bee Gees. Idle was connected to the music industry during this period, and may have contributed the nickname. The real connection to the Pythons likely came from Stigwood’s on-again, off-again relationship with EMI, who’d helped distribute *Holy Grail* (after passing on funding the film), and then were on board early in the pursuit of *Life of Brian* participation, before being scared off by the “blasphemous” content, allowing George Harrison and HandMade Films into the picture. Palin never mentions EMI in his *Diaries* without a bit of a shudder.[73]

The walls are covered with graffiti; Brian climbs down from the ladder—This shot and the following chase sequence are not part of the printed version of the script. The chase transition is more effective dramatically, likely why it was added during production. In this shot the Pythons have created a palace wall for painting purposes, one which will be used later for Pilate’s Passover address. There are six statues visible, five along a diagonal wall portion and one in the square, as well as a large Corinthian portico leading into Pilate’s palace. When the camera pulls back completely, we are presented with another process shot, where the upper portion of the extant walls have been covered with Brian’s painting after-the-fact, during postproduction.

Notes

1. Cook, “Crucifixion as Spectacle,” 74.
2. Mannix, *TAD*, 26.
3. Actual terror groups nearly contemporary with Reg and the PFJ, including the Zealots (c. 67–68) and sicarii (c. 50–59)—active in the “Jewish freedom movement”—will be discussed later. The differences between the groups have been the focus of much critical writing over the decades. See the pertinent works of Richard Horsley, Morton Smith, Mary Smallwood, and S. G. F. Brandon, for example. Writing in an article published the same year as *Life of Brian* appeared, Horsley says the sicarii can be best understood as “terrorists,” which will be discussed in a later entry. The term “zealot” appeared often in 1970s British political commentary, referring, for instance, to men surrounding new party leader Thatcher’s “throne,” including Keith Joseph and Ian Gilmour (Jenkins, *Anatomy of Decline*, 71).
4. Philo, *Embassy to Gaius*, 38.301–3.
5. Originally from Philo’s *Embassy to Gaius*, this version edited by E. M. Smallwood in 1961 and 1970. See also Smallwood, *JURR*, 160–61.
6. Pilate is both laughable and vicious here. Alternately, by about the beginning of the third century the Carthaginian Christian writer Tertullian was claiming “that Pilate was already a Christian in his conscience” (quoted in Maier’s “The Fate of Pontius Pilate,” 362). This may be as much an anti-Jewish sentiment as a rehabilitation of Pilate, of course.
7. *Washington Post*, 1 May 1974.
8. Larsen, *BAFHG*, 13.
9. “Mr Nixon’s Television Interview Opens Old Wounds . . . ,” *Times*, 6 May 1977: 10.
10. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 336.
11. See the documentary film *The Angry Brigade*, directed by Gordon Carr, 1973.
12. Carr, *The Angry Brigade* (book, 1975): photo opposite page 32.
13. See Sandbrook’s discussion of the poster and its immediate, immense impact on the electorate in *Seasons in the Sun*, 665–66.
14. Between 1975 and 1979, Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge are responsible for the deaths of as many as two million Cambodian citizens. Mr. Walker’s crime was only mild, indirect political vandalism in the safety of northeast England, and the punishment, unlike Brian’s, was not lethal. Like Brian at Pilate’s wall, imagine if a Cambodian had attempted such a daring act in Phnom Penh? The Pythons are clearly not using the Khmer Rouge as their revolutionary model—the PFJ are much more like the “reasonably violent” men of the Crimson Permanent Assurance.
15. *Private Eye*, 3 September 1976: 7.
16. Image from Carr’s documentary *The Angry Brigade*, 1973.
17. “Today Relegation, Tomorrow Liquidation? Better: Revolution.”
18. Caryl, *Strange Rebels*, 126–27.
19. Mao had died two years earlier, in September 1976. Rather than telling Mao to leave China, the posters tended to point up the failings of the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, and the current, backwards-looking administration led by Hua Guofeng (see Caryl, *Strange Rebels*).
20. Caryl, *Strange Rebels*, 126–27.
21. “Wis Lon ‘Nagged to Death’ by Secretary,” *Private Eye*, 29 October 1976: 10.
22. Richard, *WWAR*, 28.
23. See Cook’s “Crucifixion as Spectacle” for more; also, a more contemporary batch of graffiti collected by Robert Reisner in *Graffiti*, 1967.
24. *WWAR*, 24. An image of an arch like this is used in the opening credits, the Arch of Constantine, finished in 315 to celebrate the emperor’s military victories.
25. She was worried that the canceled cricket matches would turn the tide against her husband. (Rain would have “stopped play” anyway, officials said.) See “Calm It Down Plea by Davis’s Wife,” *Telegraph*,

28 August 1975: 1. George Davis would be rearrested in September 1977 for another robbery. See the entries "*columned doorway/window*" and "wun for our money" later for the ironic ending(s) to this story, one that parallels Brian's.

26. "Yard Inquiry into Conviction of Minicab Driver," *Times*, 20 August 1975: 1; also, "G. Davis, a New Name in Wisden," *Telegraph*, 20 August 1975: 1.

27. King and Stager, *LBI*, 304.

28. *LBI*, 305; Jeremiah 17:1.

29. Larsen, *MPFC: UC*, 1.277.

30. Dr. Roger Macfarlane, e-mail communication to the author (26 April 2017).

31. Reisner, *Graffiti*, 27.

32. *BAFHG*, 377.

33. See respectively "American Fleet Puts Off Visit to Greece," *Times*, 5 March 1964: 11, and "Ankara Attack on Greek Embassy," *Times*, 29 August 1964: 6.

34. "Indonesians Stone U.S. Consulate," *Times*, 31 July 1965: 6.

35. Brendon, *DFBE*, 485. This slogan appeared on West German walls, as well, in 1950.

36. "The Writing on the Wall Turns into a Best Seller," *Daily Mail*, 29 May 1967: 6.

37. Reisner, *Graffiti*, 28.

38. *DFBE*, 621. This was the same year "the Greek" Makarios III, discussed earlier, was elected archbishop of Cyprus.

39. From Ramsay Lane, photographed by Al Lorentzen.

40. "Resignation Threats by Aden Ministers," *Times*, 27 June 1967: 4. The Radfan's National Liberation Front (NLF) had been very active in anticolonial strikes since the early 1960s (*DFBE*, 511). Also, "NLF Promises a Safe Aden," *Daily Mail*, 11 November 1967: 2.

41. "The Storming of Stormont," *Sunday Times*, 1 December 1968: 7.

42. "'British Go Home' Attack by French," *Daily Mail*, 4 December 1976: 4.

43. On a much happier note, there was also a travel agency in central London, Jetback, whose vacation advertisements took advantage of the oft-heard phrase and advertised "Yankee, Go Home!" in summer 1976, offering flights to New York from £108.

44. *WWAR*, 121.

45. Cook, "Crucifixion as Spectacle," 70n8.

46. It's also possible that Brian's grasp of Latin simply isn't up to snuff. The Pharisees were very concerned that Jewish children be taught to read, but that likely meant their own language, and not Latin or even Greek (Kotker, *HLTJ*, 39). Jews of the Diaspora, like those slaves and manumitted slaves in Rome, may have had lower literacy rates. And, as Smallwood reminds us, Dispersed Jews often spoke Greek as opposed to Hebrew or Aramaic: "This is not necessarily evidence that the Jews in Rome remained a predominantly Greek-speaking community for centuries. They may have retained Greek solely for epitaphs, as the language of their former home, and traditionally appropriate for the purpose. The authors of the countless Latin epitaphs in our churches did not talk Latin in everyday life" (*JURR*, 133).

47. Koloski-Ostrow, *ASRI*, 112.

48. It's not clear whether Apollinaris would have been so bold as to create this himself, as proud of his bowel movement as he may have been. More likely one of the doctor's put-upon retinue or a cheeky local created the graffito, after the fact.

49. See *BAFHG* entries in the index under "arse trumpeters" for more on this monkish merriment.

50. *ASRI*, 115–16.

51. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 63.

52. *ASRI*, 112.

53. *JURR*, 133.

54. For a discussion of the significance of the "Famous Historian," see *BAFHG*, 299–306.

55. The show ran from 14 April through 2 May 1976. A live recording was made for an album release, *Monty Python Live!*

56. Barnes called the show “pure, unadulterated madness” (*New York Times*, 16 April 1976: 11).

57. Johnstone would later cowrite the film *Fierce Creatures* with Cleese.

58. “Python in New York,” *Times*, 23 April 1976: 23; italics added.

59. *Times*, 23 April 1976: 23.

60. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 310–11.

61. E-mail correspondence, 6 May 2017.

62. *Goon Show*, 22 February 1955.

63. *WWAR*, 24. Earlier, the brash Roman satirist Persius (34–62) condemned his own generation of uninteresting poets as having “been born without balls” (208); later, Apuleius’s character Lucius, after being turned into a jackass, is threatened with, among other things, emasculation, and is himself owned by “a band of Syrian eunuchs” (220).

64. 1 A man with crushed or severed genitals may not enter the assembly of the LORD.

64. 2 A person of illegitimate birth may not enter the assembly of the LORD; TO THE TENTH GENERATION NO ONE RELATED TO HIM MAY DO SO.

64. 3 An Ammonite or Moabite may not enter the assembly of the LORD; TO THE TENTH GENERATION NONE OF THEIR DESCENDANTS SHALL EVER DO SO. (Deuteronomy 23:1–3) 65. Jeremias, *JTJ*, 344.

66. *JTJ*, 272; also 272n4–5.

67. There were types of “genitally different” men, including those born without testicles, those whose testicles had been tied off or crushed, boys who were castrated to become catamites, or those whose sex was indeterminate due to a congenital defect. In many instances, being a eunuch actually improved job and life prospects in the empire. See Stevenson, “The Rise of the Eunuchs in Greco-Roman Antiquity.”

68. *Goon Show*, 26 January 1959.

69. *JURR*, 147.

70. Josephus, *WJ*, 7.10.1 (Whiston, 407).

71. Levine, *Jerusalem*, 173–74.

72. *MPFC: UC*, 1.89, and 357–58.

73. See the index in Palin’s *Diaries 1969–1979* for those entries.

SCENE TEN
THE PFJ PLAN THEIR RAID

. . . a group of six other eager revolutionaries—This conflation of terror forces and Rome isn't out of the blue, or even from Zealot accounts, but off the front pages of 1970s newspapers. In one of the silly-but-true sections of *Private Eye* the often absurd but equally often deadly political scenes around the world were highlighted, including "Letter from Jerusalem" (cited later), "Letter from Malta," *etc.* In the July 1977 issue, "Letter from Rome" rehearsed an almost unbelievable list of violent events plaguing Italy:

> Since 1972, there have been 7,500 explosions, 70 successful and 500 unsuccessful assassination attempts . . . [and b]ombs and murders in trains and banks. . . . This year [1977] alone there has been at least one kidnapping a week not to mention bank robberies and innumerable explosions. Extra-parliamentary groups with "red" connections[1] spring up like mushrooms. They have access to a great deal of money . . . some of the money comes from so-called "political" kidnappings.[2]

Depicting one failed kidnapping and one successful graffiti protest, the Pythons are severely understating the contemporary threat to the Italian people and government, where "kneecappings," assassination attempts, and explosions were daily events. The article goes on to lay out reasons for the crisis and warns that Italy is slipping toward a Middle East-level of ungovernability:

> Open chaos, fear, a new and worrying regime where the Communists become accomplices of the old institutions: terrorism—often financed from abroad; a deep economic crisis—over 20% inflation despite the fact that shops are full and all expensive, luxury goods find a buyer; the government, threatened by crisis, dismantling industry in the south. Italy could soon become Lebanon.[3]

The violence and ungovernability in Lebanon had found its way to Italy; the violence and ungovernability in the Pythons' first-century Jerusalem is a mirror of conditions in Britain, West Germany, and Japan.

The interior of MATTHIAS'S HOUSE—This is described as a "conspiratorial," "cellar-like room," though, later, Brian will go to the window to hide, and the window is revealed to be on at least the second story of the dwelling. The fact that this is a house at all, and not a cave or outbuilding, means the Pythons are thinking of more contemporary terror groups as well as their first-century predecessors. The Zealots had found that living in a city like

Jerusalem was inadvisable, given the proximity to the Roman garrisons and the Jewish authorities, forcing them out of doors:

> The strongholds of such resistance groups were undoubtedly in the desert areas of Palestine: indeed the caves discovered recently [1960–1961] in Nahal Hever, near En Gedi, which had been occupied by the forces of Bar Kochba during the revolt of A.D. 132–5, attest the type of refuge and mode of life of those who fought for Israel's freedom a generation or two before. The records of Josephus contain abundant evidence of this Zealot connection to the desert.[4]

The PFJ seem to have one connection to the desert—their trip to hear Jesus speak at the Sermon on the Mount. Earlier drafts of the script placed them back out at the mount (owned by Mr. Papadopoulis) for Brian's paid sermons, as well. Otherwise, the PFJ is an urban terror group, like the Baader-Meinhof Gang, the SLA, and the Japanese Red Army of the 1970s.

In a May 1968 speech,[5] rightist Tory MP Enoch Powell describes this kind of backroom cabal, though he places them in the past (right where we encounter the PFJ, coincidentally):

> We live in an age of conspiracies. They are far more successful and well-managed conspiracies than the conspiracies of history. Perhaps the improvement in efficiency is one of the benefits which we owe to the technological revolution. At any rate, the age of the old-fashioned conspirator is no more. He no longer gathers with his fellows in tiny groups, admitted by password to huddle round a dark lantern in a dingy garret. Today the conspirators sit in the seats of the mighty.[6]

Powell is describing the Pythons' version of the classic conspirators' bolthole, though both the group's privacy (security) and effectiveness are placed in question as the film moves on. Theirs is the conspiracy born of conviction.[7]

FRANCIS, dressed in commando gear . . . is standing by a plan on the wall

—"They had delusions of grandeur," said Helmut Schmidt, former West German Chancellor. "They thought they were the messiahs of the revolution."[8] He was describing the revolutionary Baader-Meinhof or 2 June Movement groups, and members of the radical cadre wouldn't have disagreed: "Our idea was to destroy the system, to strike at its heart," remembers Margrit Schiller, a Baader-Meinhof member.[9]

Francis lays out the plan, starting the presentation with a map hanging on the wall. The map appears to be based on typical plans produced of Roman villas in Rome and Pompeii.[10] The map does feature readable labels. The lower labels are "FORUM" and "HYPOCAUST," and the upper one appears to be "BASILICA." This is clearly not meant to be a map of Pilate's (Herod's) palace in Jerusalem, as there was no forum or basilica. This map is likely an amalgam of an existing plot plan for a Roman or Pompeian villa, as well as perhaps the layout of the

Cloaca Maxima, Rome's Grand Sewer, which passed by (or under) at least two basilicae and five fora. According to Burleigh, the Algerian authorities would employ diagrams known as "organograms"—based on informant information—to help map out their FLN opponents' organizational structures and bases of operation.[11]

This scene is important because it is the first indication of the PFJ's real talent: planning. In this scene they will plan the downfall of Pilate and the Romans in Judea; they will later plan the Roman Empire's fall and the PFJ's attainment of "world supremacy"; finally, they will plan for a life of perpetual, noble resistance after Brian's "glorious martyrdom." They can plan, discuss, and observe parliamentary procedure to an admirable degree. For the Britain of the Pythons' youth, "planning" was one of the two so-called "magic words" according to Vernon Bogdanor. After the devastations of the interwar strikes, the Great Depression, and World War II, it was planning that would be "putting things right," for it was planning that had rebuilt the powerful French economy, for example, and pushed the industrial output of France, Germany, and Italy (and Japan) well ahead of Britain in the 1950s–1960s.[12] Comprehensive planning was supported by "all sensible-minded people" in Britain in the 1960s—it sparked the creation of the National Economic Development Council (NEDC), where "representatives of government, management and the unions" got together to "plan the economy," as well as the National Incomes Commission (NIC), where, yes, all incomes and wages could be planned and controlled.[13] Harold Wilson would come to No. 10 in 1964 to apply the "white heat of technology" to these well-intended plans, and even Ted Heath's Conservative government couldn't claw back what seemed to be working for and popular to most voting Britons. The wheels wouldn't really begin to come off until 1972–1974, when coal miners had had enough of wage restraint and the Arab oil embargo sent shudders through Britain's fragile economy. Planning then gave way to simple survival, which the PFJ will come to understand, as well.[14]

. . . eight MASKED COMMANDOS—These commandos are likely garbed to remind viewers of the haunting images seen during the hostage crisis of the 1972 Munich Olympics, where Black September terrorists killed Israeli hostages. The grainy, telephoto images of a balaclava-wearing terrorist leaning over a balcony, as well as a negotiator in a white hat pulled low, were likely still fresh in 1979. There were also images of IRA marches in Northern Ireland where men and women all wore dark hoods or masks, and ETA (Basque separatists) members often wore white masks. These "commandos" are something like the briefly

popular “Situationists”—an artistic-cum-political movement interested in fomenting change (in art, then in life) via demonstration and spectacle—whose movement peaked with the May 1968 riots in France. The PFJ is clearly trying to make a spectacular showing as they attempt to kidnap the wife of their oppressor and hold her to ransom, but there’s a fork in the path of revolutionary sentiment and action. The artistic genesis of the movement feels like the PFJ in that Situationists didn’t generally recruit for new membership (Brian had to be willing to audition), they only wanted like-minded “geniuses for the avant-garde task” they’d set (like them, Brian “really hates the Romans”), they rejected “compromise” or “conformism” (“No blackmail!”), and “they immediately exclude those of their number who fail in practice to maintain any of the strict positions of the group.”[15] Brian actually *does* something, he’s a “doer,” which impresses Reg but is obviously a strike against him, as it leap-frogs the PFJ’s strict practice of “immediate discussion.” Brian is rejected in the sense that he is left on the cross to die for the cause; he has become the spectacle that the PFJ think they need in their continuing struggle against the oppressor. And also like the PFJ, exclusivity and rigor kept the Situationist movement small and easily fractured. The Situationists officially disbanded in 1972. By summer 1989, all that was left of the movement was an art showing at the Institute of Contemporary Arts on The Mall;[16] the Situationists, like Brian, were left hanging for all to see.

As mentioned earlier, these “commandos” are also clean-shaven, those we can see, which sets them apart. It’s likely they are shaven to indicate their youth and vigor (in the world of the film), traits of those who would consider revolt against the ways of their fathers:[17]

> In the ancient world, older men equated beards with sagacity, but as the fashion for shaving grew more widespread, younger men began to ridicule the sight of a man with a full beard. In the first century AD, Lucian of Samosata, a Greek satirist and writer, famously commented, “If you think that to grow a beard is to acquire wisdom, a goat with a fine beard is at once a complete Plato.”[18]

Most Jewish men wore beards, anciently, and the only regulations had to do with how to trim (or not trim) the beard. Thus, clean-shaven men stood out: “Of the other nations coming in contact with Israel, the Hittites and the Elamitic nations shaved the Beard completely, as the earliest Babylonians had done.”[19] Josephus, describing the beginnings of the revolt that would end Jerusalem, blames Judas, Saddok, and their followers, who “filled the lands with troubles and planted the roots of the evils that flourished there later.” Josephus concludes very specifically that the “youth” had “caused the ruin of our land.”[20]

REG: "Tell us about the raid on Pilate's palace . . ."—A royal palace had been raided before, but with slightly different motives. Josephus reports that the brigand Judas, son of Ezekias, targeted a Herodian palace:

> This Judas, having gotten together a multitude of men of a profligate character about Sepphoris in Galilee, made an assault upon the palace [there,] and seized upon all the weapons that were laid up in it, and with them armed every one of those that were with him, and carried away what money was left there; and he became terrible to all men, by tearing and rending those that came near him; and all this in order to raise himself, and out of an ambitious desire of the royal dignity; and he hoped to obtain that as the reward not of his virtuous skill in war, but of his extravagance in doing injuries.[21]

This assault seems similar to the one depicted by the Pythons, especially in the eruption of violence, the "tearing and rending" that eventually left Brian standing alone. Judas and friends were looking for weapons and money, both likely to be used to fight the Roman occupancy, while the PFJ (and CFG) looked for leverage, essentially. The end results were the same, however. This and other insurrection activities led to significant Roman reprisals, and, as in *Life of Brian*, the crucifixion of the rebels (about two thousand in all).[22]

FRANCIS: "We get in through the underground heating system here . . . "—An example of the Pythons doing their homework. During the 1960s and 1970s there were many Roman finds (villas, baths) in Britain, with excavations revealing and describing in detail the hypocausts at Woodchester, Bath, Fishbourne, Guernsey, York, Cirencester, and St. Alban's, among others. A number of these hypocaust sections were up to three feet high, meaning an army could crawl through them, if needed. In Jerusalem, Herod had built what Roller calls "a Roman town house," not as large or elaborate as his palace at Herodeion, though the fortifications around the Jerusalem house were formidable.[23] Archaeological finds were regular news coming out of Jerusalem, as well, as the Israelis had set about nation building by demonstrating the significance of the past, and especially the place of Jews and Jerusalem in the life of the Holy Land.

FRANCIS: ". . . Pilate's Wife . . . "—There isn't much known about Pilate either well before or long after his decade as Judean prefect. One mythology attaches the partly royal girl Procula[24] (or Procla) to young Pilate as the wife he leaves (on their wedding night) to take up the Judean post offered by Tiberius. These personal details about Pilate and his life—his marriage, if he had children, his service or death after being recalled to Rome—are actually unknown to historians.[25] Whatever she was in history, Pilate's wife isn't a pretty young girl here. The Pythons cast the towering John Case to play her, and then cut all his/her scenes out of the finished film. (In the scenes in her bedroom and

adjoining hallway, she physically overwhelms the PFJ, throwing each out, before hitting Brian on the head,[26] ending the raid.) In a real world parallel, Burleigh reports that one Red Brigades kidnappee, Pietro Costa, was not only very large (he joked that they should have tried for one of his smaller siblings), he also had a very big appetite—they had trouble hiding and feeding him. He was soon able to talk his kidnappers' demands down to an affordable level, and he was freed unharmed.[27]

And why would Pilate's wife be fair game to these revolutionaries? She likely had little or no direct influence on Pilate's decision-making process, his administration, or on the continuing subjugation of Jews in Judea,[28] and thus wouldn't likely be a target for political assassination or violence, at least anciently. This is one of the moments in the film where the influence of the modern world can be glimpsed. Nineteenth-century Russian revolutionaries, for example, would have targeted the likes of Pilate's wife and household as a justifiable "blow at the centre."[29] For these revolutionaries the tsar and his family existed as practicable, obvious targets, the so-called "weakest link in the existing order, its Achilles heel" at the heart of the government.[30] "Those to be judged and destroyed are not public figures or rulers," Iviansky writes in 1977, "but the social order in its entirety, the economic establishment, the absolute or foreign rule." Iviansky continues:

> Therefore, "individual terror" maybe defined as a system of modern revolutionary violence aimed at leading personalities in the government or the Establishment (or any other human targets). . . . The motivation is not necessarily personal but rather ideological or strategic. . . against the foreign conqueror, the social order, or the Establishment embodied in the individuals.[31]

For the more contemporary Red Brigades, she could simply be seen as a "demiurge of bourgeois power," as she clearly supported and benefited from her position as an oppressor.[32] The PFJ see Pilate's wife as this weak link, the bargaining chip they need to leverage the government. This is the modern terrorism of "national liberation," using Iviansky's terms.[33]

If this were the ancient Jewish *sicarii* choosing a target, it would have been a precisely "discriminate" target, "chosen . . . with a maximum of political or religious symbolic value . . . symbols of 'the normative structures and relationships that constitute the supporting framework of society.'"[34] Horsley reminds us that the sicarii were not only "highly discriminate," but, unlike the PFJ, they made their attacks against "fellow Jews, not against Roman soldiers or citizens."[35] The sicarii will attack Jews assisting the occupying force, like their first target, the High Priest Jonathan, assassinated for "collaboration with the

alien Roman rulers and its exploitation of the people."[36] The "innocent" wife of the most powerful man in the colonizing, imperialist force, then, would likely have *not* been a sicarii target—such an attack would have demanded a full retaliation by Pilate and the Roman garrison, something sicarii wished to avoid.

Most revolutionaries from the eighteenth-century and onward, however, would have argued that any means of support—military, political, economic, or even familial—for the colonizer, anything that fueled the imperialist machine, existed and could be justified as a potential target for violence. One of the Anarchist movement's most strident voices, German-born Johann Most, identified the need to focus on *individuals* even as it was the system ultimately being targeted, according to Laqueur:

> There were no social systems which were not represented and, indeed, made to work, by persons. The system was defended by the forces of "law and order"; to kill them was not murder, for policemen and spies were not human. The enemies were pigs, dogs, bestial monsters, devils in human shape, reptiles, parasites, scum, the dregs of society, *canaille*, hellhounds.[37]

As they prepared for this raid, Reg had given his list of grievances against the empire, reminding the PFJ that, vampire-or parasite-like, Rome had "bled . . . white" the Jews. He calls them "bastards," a damning, dislocative charge in these times, as discussed earlier, and they are "Bloody Romans" to Judith, the PFJ, and the Jewish populace. Lastly, Reg charges the Romans with thievery, Rome having "taken everything from" not only the current generation, but from their ancestors. Dehumanizing Pilate, his wife, and the Romans renders them easy and even obvious targets for these revolutionaries. And as far as the specter of potential collateral damage, most modern terrorists believed "it was not [the innocent's] business to be in places where a bomb was likely to explode."[38] The PFJ seems ready to cut her up, violating the body of the government as they do so, because retributive violence was the only recourse left to them. By the 1970s, terror groups were justifying their attacks on so-called innocent victims similarly. The IRA began planting bombs in England for these very reasons; and the URA and PFLP considered any passenger on an El-Al jet, traveling through an Israeli airport, or flying to or from Israel for *any* reason a potential, justifiable target in their pursuit of the destruction of Israel and Zionism.

FRANCIS: ". . . having grabbed his wife . . . "—This plan will read like a chapter from the very popular 1969 underground terror treatise, *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla*, by Carlos Marighella:[39]

> Kidnapping is capturing and holding in a secret place a spy, political personality or a notorious and dangerous enemy of the revolutionary movement. Kidnapping is used to exchange or liberate

> imprisoned revolutionaries or to force the suspension of torture in jail by the military dictatorship. The kidnapping of personalities who are well-known artists, sports figures or who are outstanding in some other field, but who have evidenced no political interest, can be a useful form of propaganda for the guerrillas, provided it occurs under special circumstances, and is handled so the public understands and sympathizes with it. The kidnappings of foreigners or visitors constitutes a form of protest against the penetration and domination of imperialism in our country.[40]

The manual became internationally known very quickly, and by October 1970 it was already being mentioned in slightly mirthful ways, as when a member of the Quebec government based in London asked publisher *Agitprop* for two copies of the manual, even including payment. The requester, counsellor André Laurion, was simply keen to understand the motives of the revolutionary and violence-prone Quebec Liberation Front, to "find out what sort of people my government is up against," he said. (The FLQ had very recently kidnapped two highly placed government economic and trade officials, one a Brit and the other from Quebec.) *The Times Diary* saw the kind of Pythonesque absurdity of the situation, especially as it unfolded per the attempted purchase—a classic "unsuccessful transaction":[41]

> Laurion will not, however, receive his manuals although he sent nine shillings to pay for them. Agitprop has replied that as "the Canadian Government, of whom you are an agency, is at present in confrontation with the FLQ, a group organised to struggle for the control of Quebec to be placed in the hands of the people of Quebec . . . we have decided that it would be in the best interests of the people of your state to send two copies of the manual to the FLQ." Nor will Laurion get his money back. Agitprop say they are instructing the FLQ to deduct the nine shillings from their ransom demand if they find the manuals to be of use.[42]

This bit of humor, admittedly dark, took on a much darker tone just three days later, when the Canadian hostage, Pierre Laporte, was found dead, perhaps "accidentally" murdered by his nervous kidnappers. Two days after that, on 19 October, the *Times* printed a somber, stern condemnation of the kidnapping and murder.[43] The next time the *Minimanual* was mentioned in the often silly *The Times Diary* section, then in relation to Argentinian revolutionaries, there was *no* remnant of lightheartedness.[44]

The IRA even considered kidnapping royal scion Prince Charles in 1976, following a deadly season of bombings and shootings that seemed to be turning public opinion against the organization, rather than toward its political goals.[45]

FRANCIS: ". . . she is in our custody and forthwith issue our demands"—This is an example of what came to be called "organized violence in the form of highly politicized terrorism" by the late 1960s.[46] Tiny, unknown fringe groups with any political axe to grind—generally waving the flags of anticapitalism, anticolonialism, or antifascism—could take hostages, issue demands, and count

on sensational media coverage. The infamous Patty Hearst kidnapping is a prime example, one played out in the years leading up to *Life of Brian*.[47] The PFJ could have been reading from the SLA's guerrilla handbook, the way the FBI describes the kidnapping: "Why'd they snatch Hearst? To get the country's attention, primarily. Hearst was from a wealthy, powerful family; her grandfather was the newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst. The SLA's plan worked and worked well: the kidnapping stunned the country and made front-page national news."[48] The PFJ would have liked to "stun" Judea and make "front-page news" with their situational action, even if just to show that those who had been bled white were "not to be trifled with." The Hearst affair will be discussed in more detail later.

Much earlier, sicarii had set the table for the SLA, JRA, RAF, and PDFLP as they resorted to kidnapping as a "typical terrorist tactic," according to Horsley, generally to get attention and bargain for the release of "some of their own number who had been taken prisoner by the authorities."[49] From Josephus: "This was the beginning of greater troubles; for the brigands contrived by one means or another to kidnap some of Ananias' staff and would hold them in continuous confinement and refuse to release them until they had received in exchange some of the sicarii."[50] As mentioned above, Brazilian terrorists kidnapped an American ambassador in 1969, and followed this same scheme. One of the first discussed acts of revolution from the Japanese Red Army was the planned kidnapping of PM Sato Eisaku in late 1969. The PM was set to travel to America to meet with President Nixon in regard to Okinawa's return to Japanese sovereignty; the hostage-taking would have forced the ongoing and unpopular security agreements between the United States and Japan into more public discussion, the JRA hoped. A police raid at the inn where they were training for this kidnapping ended the operation, and twenty-seven members spent time in prison.[51]

There were dozens of politically motivated kidnappings in the 1970s, meaning the Pythons had plenty of real-world events on which to model the exploits of their PFJ. The *modus operandi* was very similar, event to event (they'd all read the same source material, as mentioned earlier), and typically as laid out by Francis above: take a significant political prisoner, threaten harm, make demands, collect ransom. An incomplete but representative survey of the decade's notable hostage-and-ransom events and news follows.

In March 1970, a left-wing guerrilla was released by the Guatemalan government in exchange for the release of US diplomat Sean Holly; more

kidnappings were promised if police continued their battles against Guatemalan guerrilla groups.[52] Also in March, *Punch* provided a wanly comedic take on the recent spate of violence, printing a "Can you keep alive till the end of this Quiz?" story, which tested readers' readiness for political kidnappings and bombings.[53] This playfulness would disappear in a few years, after scores of deaths abroad and in Northern Ireland. In October 1970, Quebec separatist kidnappings ("FLQ Oui!") led to what became known as the "October Crisis" and to the employment of the War Measures Act, culminating in many arrests, troops in streets, *etc.* The year 1970 was a busy one for terror, with dozens of kidnapping events (most involving demands for and eventual release of political prisoners) occurring in Northern Ireland, and up and down Central and South America. Westerners and Israelis tended to be the prime targets in many of these international kidnappings.

The year 1972 signaled the end of the imploding United Red Army (most died in the mountainous massacre, winter 1972), and the beginning of the Japanese Red Army's international terror activities, both discussed later. The year also witnessed the start of "The Disappeared," a spate of kidnappings by (primarily) the IRA. Some bodies have been found over the years, and some have not. There are at least seventeen names on the list. The following year saw the Provisional IRA abduct Grundig factory manager Thomas Niedermayer in December in Belfast. A "Provos" splinter planned to trade him for the Price sisters, who were being held on bombing charges by the British.[54] Niedermayer tried to escape, was hit with the butt of a gun, and died. He was dumped in a rubbish tip, his remains only discovered in 1980.[55]

In 1973 a Getty heir was kidnapped; this will be discussed later, in relation to the PFJ's bona fides. In March 1974 there was an odd, isolated attempt to kidnap Princess Anne by a slightly deranged man, Ian Ball. His goal was to ransom her for a £2 million payment in £5 notes from the Queen. The police tried to find an IRA connection, but the man assured them he'd worked it out all on his own. The Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) was also quite active in 1974, kidnapping several foreigners to draw attention to their struggle for freedom from Ethiopia.[56]

The most famous political kidnapping, perhaps of the decade, had happened just the month before in California. Newspaper heiress Patricia "Patty" Hearst was kidnapped by the SLA in February, and the group's first demands fit right into the weird mood of the day. Rather than funds for their own use, the kidnappers demanded that Hearst's father, Randolph Hearst, donate millions of dollars to feed needy people in California. They had actually asked for a

donation of $70 of food “be given to every needy Californian,” and those handouts began almost immediately, funded by the Hearst family.[57] The SLA also demanded that two of their imprisoned colleagues be allowed to hold a broadcast press conference. After the food donations had run their course, as demanded, the SLA ceased communicating with authorities, and the next event was the spectacular Hibernia Bank robbery. From that point on, the ill-gotten funds were used to finance their own activities.

In 1975, the RAF-affiliated 2nd of June Movement kidnapped CDU[58] chairman Peter Lorenz in February, then successfully demanded the release of six RAF colleagues. Lorenz was released unharmed.[59] Ulrike Meinhof and the RAF had also plotted to kidnap German Chancellor Willy Brandt, and issue demands, but the plan didn’t pan out.[60] The RAF continued to be active even as its leadership languished in specially built German prison cells—with their courtroom attached—and even after several had taken their own lives.[61] A domestic British flight (Manchester to London) was hijacked on 7 February 1975, with the Iranian hijacker demanding first a flight to Paris, then just £100,000 and a parachute. He would later settle for a flight to Stansted, where he was arrested.[62] (He seems to have bargained like our Ex-leper.)

In September 1977 German industrialist Hans-Martin Schleyer was kidnapped by the RAF (also made possible by “the praxis of the Tupamaros in Uruguay”[63]), with demands including another prisoner release; those prisoners died, so Schleyer was killed by his kidnappers in October 1977. Schleyer had been targeted only after another kidnap attempt went wrong, and the victim was killed.[64] The ripple effects of these kidnappings and attempted kidnappings were very real—British PM Callaghan decided to put off a scheduled September 1977 trip to Bonn because of the Schleyer kidnapping.[65]

And finally in 1978, Italian Christian Democrat Aldo Moro was kidnapped and killed by the Red Brigades. The kidnappers wanted prisoners released for Moro’s life. The Red Brigades’ manifesto called for a “concentrated strike against the heart of the State, because the state is an imperialist collection of multinational corporations.”[66] The Red Brigades kidnapped for political reasons (right-wing figures) and for ransoms (industrialists), but also set fires, explosions, employed sabotage, and shot journalists, lawyers, judges, and politicians.

The spirit of the times obviously encouraged other profiteers to try their hand at the kidnap-and-ransom game. A Vermeer painting (*The Guitar Player*) was “kidnapped” in February 1974 and held for ransom; thieves threatened to burn it

if the ransom was not paid.[67] One ransom call demanded £500,000 of food be flown to Grenada.[68] The caller also said that more paintings would be stolen and destroyed if the food demands were not met. Other ransom callers also demanded that the Price sisters be immediately released from prison and returned to Ireland.[69] The proposed reasons for such a theft should read familiar:

> There are two possible explanations for the theft of priceless and unsalable paintings like the Vermeer. The first is that they have been taken by a crank for political reasons. In September 1971, "The Love Letter" by Vermeer was stolen from an exhibition in Brussels in that way. It was later returned damaged. Goya's portrait of the Duke of Wellington was similarly stolen and returned to the National Gallery five years ago. After the incident the Treasury provided more money to tighten security there. The second possibility is that the picture was taken with the hope of negotiating a ransom for its return with the insurance company.[70]

The ransom possibility seemed to have been the real motivating factor. The painting was recovered in May 1974.

COMMANDO XERXES—(PSC) Xerxes was a Persian emperor, ruling in the fifth century BC. The name was likely just pulled from history, but Xerxes is mentioned in *The Goon Show* episode "The History of Communication." In this setting, it's not any more odd than a "Stan," "Loretta," or "Reg."

REG: "We're giving Pilate two days . . . "—Here, Reg is allowing Pilate just forty-eight hours to "dismantle" an enormous (and functioning) bureaucracy in Judea, one that's been building some ninety years by this time. Later, as Brian is carrying his cross to the crucifixion hill, and the PFJ are meeting, yet again, Francis points out that their five-year plan to "attain world supremacy" is likely "optimistic," unless they manage to overthrow the entire Roman Empire in just one year. This level of optimism and confidence isn't unique to the PFJ, but has a home in revolutionary groups, political parties, and committed special interest groups.

With much of the heavy lifting done across preceding decades, in early June 1947 the British tasked themselves with ending the Raj, slated just seventy-three days later—this after a buildup encompassing two hundred years.[71] Andrew Marr notes that just a few years later the committed, directed pressure of relatively few people, applied at opportune moments, brought about enormous social changes at home in Britain of the 1950s and 1960s. When Home Secretary Jenkins[72] set out to modernize Britain, he counted on grassroots organizations already marching against capital punishment, against the continuing criminalization of homosexuality, against arts censorship and age-old divorce laws. He found celebrities and politicians and everyday people—"apparently marginal people"—ready to take up the cause for change.[73] The general public

and the major political parties weren't banging the drum for such sweeping changes, so the "eggheads and experts" and the always-the-bridesmaid Liberal Party stoked the fires.[74] If social change was made possible by those outside the established system, then why not economic or political change? Why couldn't a PFJ-type group shift the mountain of the Roman Empire? Because, as Francis admits later, "as far as empires go, this is the big one."

In his lecture "The Character of the Postwar Period," Vernon Bogdanor notes that such overestimations could be found across the challenging postwar decades. In a speech at Mansion House in 1942, then-PM Winston Churchill saw in the dark days of the war a bright future for Britain and her international interests: "We mean to hold our own. I have not become the King's First Minister in order to preside over liquidation of the British Empire."[75] Bogdanor drops the other shoe, acknowledging the history that followed: "Of course, the British Empire was liquidated fairly soon after he made that speech."[76] Bogdanor also quotes the 1945 Labour Party manifesto and then the Labour Party leader, Clement Attlee, both brimming with righteous optimism that the future held no hope for capitalism, and that the emerging "Social Commonwealth of Great Britain" would destroy the "outworks" of the oppressive capitalist system.[77] Aside from sounding positively Dennisean,[78] Labour expected far too much. History would again blunt the point of this idealism, as by the time *Brian* is being filmed, Britain's ability to support its socialist commitments had atrophied thanks to a constricting economy. Attlee's phraseology sounds like Francis and Reg, revolutionary terminology meant for revolutionary victories: "The outstanding thing is not so much the growth in the strength of the forces which attack the citadel of capitalism, as in the loss of the outworks, the crumbling of the foundations, and the loss of morale of the garrison."[79] Reg and friends seek to attack the citadel of Roman occupation, beginning in its outworks of Judea; the foundations don't crumble, of course, nor do the garrisons lose any morale ("I like taking orders!" says one eager Centurion, in fact, as his underlings fix Brian to the cross). Here the PFJ echoes the handwringing sentiments of Labour and Conservative mandarins in the 1960s and 1970s. The optimistic but impatient parties struggled with the country's moribund economic growth—especially when compared to Western European or Japanese improvements.[80] Positive change couldn't come fast enough, nor could the economy grow large enough to suit either party. Twelve months or five years can be political lifetimes. Time is a commodity the seated government simply didn't have,

leading to impatience, frustration, and short-term, politically expedient solutions, according to Bogdanor:

> The rate of growth in the 1960s was lower than the 1950s, and economists did not know how to secure it. . . . All they can say . . is that the *policies that are likely to improve growth are very long-term*. For example, one way to improve growth at the time might have been better management education and better technical education, but the effects of that would not be seen in the lifetime of one Government—they would be *seen over a long period*. Another example—of which we are perhaps seeing the benefits today [2012]—would be to achieve a more flexible labour market through reform of the trade unions. That was done by Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s, and it took time for its benefits to be seen. I think it is reasonable to say that we can see them now, that the recession has not led to such a high level of unemployment because of a more flexible labour market. However, it is also fair to say that productivity has not increased as much as it might have done, but the benefits of a flexible labour market *took some years to have their effect*. So, all that we do know about economic growth is that *it is a long-term matter, but of course politicians did not and do not want to hear that*. They are considering the next few years of the election, so that is a serious problem.[81]

Neither Wilson's nor Heath's governments had the time for such long-term percolation, and Callaghan in 1976 was really stuck with the stultifying effects of every stop-go measure both parties had laid on over the previous decade. The PFJ aims to end the Roman Empire in either as little as two days (by Roman submission) or as many as twelve months (by the PFJ's attacks) now appear equally ludicrous, given the lessons of history and time.

REG: ". . . dismantle the entire apparatus of the Roman imperial state . . . "—This would have included not only the small, local garrison that remained in Jerusalem, but the garrisons nearby that protected roads and waterways, the courts and municipal administration that kept the cities running smoothly and relatively crime-free, the transportation infrastructure for food and goods from across the empire that Jerusalem had come to depend on, and perhaps most importantly the protection of the Jews to perform their unique temple cult rites and live their lives as a conscientious, religious people. Many of these had been guaranteed as part of the Roman occupancy. An immediate dismantling would have thrown all that into chaos, a chaos that would appear leading up to and after the fall of Jerusalem in 70.

As crazy as this sounds, it should be remembered that, as Josephus points out, certain of the sicarii believed firmly that, given Rome's corruptness (and even *after* the Roman sacking of Jerusalem), a Jewish "victory over the Romans was possible."[82] It did not happen, but the point is there were those who were certain that it *could* happen. This "cleared field" policy—where a new future can be built from nothing but sheer will—is an echo from the Pythons' youth, when the so-called Beveridge Report emerged in 1942, and was embraced after the

conclusion of the war, at the birth of the Welfare State: “Now, when the war is abolishing landmarks of every kind,” William Beveridge wrote, “is the opportunity for using experience in a clear field. A revolutionary moment in the world’s history is a time for revolutions, not patching.”[83] This plan and its implementation were often credited with leading Britain to a possible “New Jerusalem,” incidentally, that panaceatic phrase appearing in dozens of newspaper stories from September 1942 and beyond. The PFJ aren’t looking for representation by the Romans, coexistence with their oppressors, or crumbs from the colonialist’s table—they want everything, and fast. There is even a topical wartime cartoon that appeared in the *Daily Mirror* showing two men—Churchill and Beveridge—laying dynamite deep underground, ready to blow up the “Anti-Social Interests” overlay.[84] At that point both men seemed ready to totally redo the economy and social security after the war. The PFJ will attempt their overthrow in a similar manner, from beneath.

In contemporary jargon, this is a “rejectionist” argument, one employed by the more radical splinter group of the PLO, the Arab Rejection Front—created in 1974 in the wake of the epic failure of the 1973 Yom Kippur War—when PLO leader Yassir Arafat had adopted a more moderate stance toward the continuing existence of an Israeli state.[85] The rejectionists’ “goal,” according to Demaris in *Brothers in Blood*, “is nothing less than the total dismantling of Israel.”[86] Reg and friends don’t want to live with the Romans, they want their rule ended, though they may settle for just the freeing of Judea, and not the entire empire.

Even earlier than the 1970s, though, the Jewish terror group Irgun had made similar demands, including impossible-to-meet, even ridiculous deadlines. As the Allies fought the Axis at the outbreak of the war, this group (as well as Lehi) fought the Allies—specifically the British—trying to force them out of the Mandate. In January 1944, the group issued a statement ending their self-imposed truce (enacted earlier in the war), demanding the “immediate transfer of power” over the Mandate from Great Britain to “a Provisional Hebrew Government.”[87] This “immediate transfer” did not happen, of course, and the struggle for control of Palestine continued after the war.

The 1970s were a coup-rich period, across Asia, Africa, and Central and South America, the sentiment and appeal of throwing off the yoke of imperialism were everywhere. A mad dictator led to slaughter in Equatorial Guinea in the late 1960s, following independence from Spain, and a smallish, PFJ-type coup was attempted. The plotters never made it past the Canary Islands, where they were arrested. The Forsyth novel *The Dogs of War* is a nearly identical depiction of

this failed coup undertaking, except in the book the mercenaries are successful. “Thus art imitated life,” Wheen writes of this mirroring, “and, as so often in the Seventies, life returned the compliment by devising narratives that even a thriller writer might have thought too extravagantly fanciful.”[88] The Pythons present a heady band of revolutionaries trying to overthrow an empire; those very boasts and actions are happening in the world outside the film.

The Pythons had explored the phenomenon of international terrorism earlier in *Flying Circus*. In the first instance, the hijacker demands that the plane be diverted to not Cuba but Luton;[89] in Ep. 35, a passenger on an international flight asks for ransom or he’ll blow up the plane. Both the JRA and the PFLP had made similar threats, and even followed through:

> Skyjackings began in earnest in about 1961, with a number of domestic American flights being rerouted to Cuba. Skyjacking was seen as a significant political tool for smaller, leftist terrorist cells such as the . . . PFLP, which began skyjacking planes in 1968, the first an international El Al flight from Rome to Tel Aviv. The phenomena had become so prevalent during the late 1960s that *Time* magazine devoted its 21 September 1970 cover to these “Pirates in the Sky.”[90]

The Pythons’ bomber in Ep. 16, of course, isn’t so canny, asking to be tossed out over Basingstoke; he boards an equally convenient waiting bus, which is then immediately hijacked to Cuba.[91]

REG: “. . . we execute her”—If the PFJ managed to not only kidnap Pilate’s wife but also kill her—no one here ever says “kill” or “murder,” the jargon is more clinical—then as murderers they would be liable by Roman law for not only crucifixion but death by fire or wild beast: “Martial talks of the penalty *ad bestias* as applying to a slave who has cut his master’s throat with a sword, has been mad enough to rob a temple of the gold deposited there, or has set Rome on fire with destructive torches,” Wiedemann writes. “Public law therefore prescribed particular punishments for those whose crimes had set them outside the pale of civilized society: murderers and arsonists.”[92] And given the fact that the PFJ’s target was Pilate’s wife, a different kind of gold in a different kind of sanctuary, and that they intended to torture and murder her, their punishments likely could have included all of these grisly tortures, and more.

MATTHIAS: “Cut her head off?”—Given that the PFJ’s first bit of anti-imperialist action was essentially “guerrilla theater”—a harmless act meant to embarrass or annoy the oppressor—the chances that they would then torture or kill are slim, especially via something as gruesome as a beheading. From graffiti to murder in one go would have been a stretch for most terror groups. The Angry Brigade targeted *symbolically*, injuring only one bystander in two dozen

bombings, while the Red Army Faction in West Germany initially just robbed banks and blew up US military targets, police stations, and newspapers not sympathetic to student causes. The Pythons had even set up a likely mode of action in Ep. 15, “The Spanish Inquisition.” When the three snarling Inquisitors have their victim securely tied to a comfy chair, they begin to torture her with demands for a confession, followed by the threat of more shouting, soft cushions, and “only a cup of tea at eleven” before lunch.[93] She never does confess.

In the time of the Roman occupancy, death by beheading was generally reserved for political crimes and foes, while stoning was the punishment for a “capital charge against the religious law.”[94] Politically dangerous enemies like John the Baptist were killed by the sword, while religious enemies like Stephen, and James, the brother of Jesus, suffered death by stoning.[95] Pilate’s wife is obviously seen here as a political target, and therefore subject to death by sword. Earlier, the blasphemer Matthias was set to be stoned for his religious transgression.

In more modern times, execution was an approved method of attacking the imperialist state for many terror groups, though not all. For many, murder was a last resort. Often, the kidnapped victim was quite valuable—a large ransom could be demanded, or political leverage against the terror group’s enemies gained. Britain’s own Angry Brigade engaged in bombings to damage property, not necessarily people, hoping that the spectacle created by the explosions would energize the populace into a higher consciousness and, eventually, revolution.[96] In their first communique to the press and people of Britain in 1970, the Angry Brigade admitted their role in the “machine-gunning” of the Spanish embassy in London in August of that year, and also admitted to precision aiming: “We were careful not to hit the pigs guarding the building.”[97] In their fifth communique, they reminded the public that after a handful of bombings no one had been hurt: “We are no mercenaries. We attack property not people. Carr, Rawlinson, Waldron, would all be dead if we had wished.”[98] Body mutilation, including decapitation, carries such a stigmatic horror that it is often an ultimate threat. The PFJ realize that a penultimate threat might be needed, however, so they also discuss cutting “all her bits off” and sending them back to Pilate to prove their grit. The Getty kidnappers followed this plan, beginning with a piece of their captive’s ear.[99] During the Hanafi Siege in Washington, D.C., in 1977, kidnappers threatened to behead hostages if demands were not met.[100]

The Pythons themselves depicted beheadings and mutilations by the score in *Flying Circus* and *Holy Grail*, many animated, some live-action. In *Flying Circus*, someone is beheaded in a bit of violent French film footage[101] (Ep. 23), a woman is decapitated by a piano keyboard (Ep. 33), and a boxer loses his head entirely in a bout (Ep. 43).[102] Gilliam's animations take apart and sometimes monstrously refashion the human body throughout the series. In Ep. 15, Reg's head is sawn off by BBC workers (he's promised "expenses"[103]) and dropped into an animated setting where

> his right iris is eventually "borrowed". . . for use as a cannonball. Gilliam's animations are often built on borrowing—on the dismembering and remembering of the human figure, specifically. Recognizable faces from the world of politics (Nabarro, Heath), sport or entertainment (W. G. Grace,[104] Greer Garson) are given new, often grotesque bodies and/or abilities in Gilliam's world, and normal, unknown folk from traditional family photos also appear. The wholeness of the human body is the expectation, and Gilliam takes every opportunity he can to dismember and make strange and monstrous that formerly sanctified figure. This "body horror" phenomenon isn't new to Gilliam or the Pythons, having crept into feature films (Hammer horror, bloody Peckinpah Westerns, George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, etc.) and on the nightly news as the color images from the day's fighting in Vietnam was reported.[105]

The body "bits" removed from their normal context and then displayed in the Python world include the foot, shoulder, "naughty bits," navel, elbow, kneecap, ear, and big toe (Ep. 22), as well as myriad arms and legs, breasts, faces, eyes, hands, and heads. The violence continues in *Holy Grail*, where the Three-Headed Knight threatens to cut off Sir Robin's head, and Bors loses his head to the Killer Rabbit. The Black Knight loses all his limbs, the alleged witch is set to be immolated, a servant is squashed flat by a Wooden Rabbit, knights are mauled to death by a Killer Rabbit, Brother Maynard is eaten by the Legendary Beast, and men are thrown to their deaths from the Bridge of Death. The threats of the PFJ aren't beyond what the Pythons have already committed on and to their characters earlier, which may explain why Matthias would discount crucifixion as a "doddle," unnerving the Centurion, and with good reason.

Most revolutionary groups were aware that the public could be swayed to empathy with carefully staged kidnappings, ransom demands, and even bombings that targeted government, military, or industrial sites. The "Pilate's wife"–types of the world could be justified as targets, the ransom demands targeted the obscenely wealthy, and bombing sites tended to be faceless, featureless government or military installations. The outright murder of public servants, industrialists, and eventually police forces and ordinary citizens hardened public feelings, leading to calls for crackdowns and the

reestablishment of law and order.[106] Marighella lays out which suggested targets for lethal attacks were acceptable, including foreign spies, agents of the sitting dictatorship, any "dictatorial personality in the government involved in crimes and persecutions against patriots," and *anyone* who works with the authorities against the guerrilla movement.[107] Though we don't know her in the finished film, Pilate's wife can likely be finessed into one or more of these categories, making her a natural target. These same justifications were applied by the Provisional IRA when they targeted Prince Philip's uncle Lord Mountbatten in August 1979: "The IRA claim responsibility for the execution of Lord Louis Mountbatten. This operation is one of the discriminate ways we can bring to the attention of the English people the continuing occupation of our country."[108] Two teens—one Mountbatten's grandson—were also killed, while four other family members were critically injured in this "discriminate" explosion. Just hours later, the IRA also killed eighteen soldiers near Warrenpoint with two more explosions. The *Guardian* would call Mountbatten "the IRA's most illustrious victim," a Pilate's wife-like appellation.[109]

FRANCIS: "Cut all her bits off . . . "—Cutting up the Roman prefect's wife (or cutting off whatever "all her bits" might mean) was one thing, and dangerous enough. If this had been a holy man, instead, the ramifications were more shaded. Under Jewish law[110] a mutilated body rendered the holy man unfit for the priesthood, and Josephus tells us that Hyrcanus's nephew Antigonus purposely cut "bits off" his uncle: "Being afraid that Hyrcanus, who was under the guard of the Parthians, might have his kingdom restored to him by the multitude, he cut off his ears, and thereby took care that the high priesthood should never come to him any more, because he was maimed, while the law required that this dignity should belong to none but such as had all their members entire."[111] Other versions translate into the grisly "bit his ears off," but the end result is the same. This edict would mean the lepers, seen earlier, were also blemished and not physically worthy of the priesthood. During Titus's lengthy siege of Jerusalem in 70, rather than killing Jerusalemite soldiers who escaped the city, the Roman forces would cut one hand off the deserter, then send the man back into the city. Titus's reasoning was sound: the maimed man could no longer wield a sword, but he still had to be fed, meaning the city's stores would disappear all the faster, hastening a surrender.[112]

But this gruesome threat wasn't reserved for ancient times. John Paul Getty III—grandson of oil billionaire J. Paul Getty—was kidnapped in Rome in July 1973. The ransom demand was received along with a portion of the boy's right

ear, and a lock of his hair. The ransom note promised more violence against the boy if demands were not met:

> In their message, the kidnappers gave a warning that unless the newspaper published the photographs [of the boy's severed ear], the family would receive "another piece of Paul's flesh." The letter added: "It does not bother us—we like cutting up your son bit by bit and sending him to you. It is not we who are the sadists."[113]

Initially, J. Paul refused his son's request to help pay the ransom for his grandson, not wanting to encourage others to target his family. A ransom was eventually paid ($2.9 million), the boy was released, and most of the kidnappers were arrested. This sounds familiar, as well, as the kidnappers put the blame for any harm on the shoulders of those who refuse to cooperate—Reg will remind the PFJ in a moment that the Romans "bear full responsibility" for anything that happens to Pilate's wife. (In February 1974, just a few months after the Getty scion was kidnapped, the Vermeer painting *The Guitar Player*, mentioned earlier, was treated similarly, when a small piece of the painting was sent to the *Times*.[114])

Certainly the committed PFJ can be compared to the followers of one Judas from Galilee, as detailed by Smallwood:

> Josephus describes Judas' followers as forming a religious sect, the Jewish "fourth philosophy," parallel to the sects of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes, and their doctrines as an extreme form of Pharisaism, mainly characterized by an overpowering passion for freedom and a refusal to call any man master. To them the only lawful ruler of the Jews was God, and they were prepared to kill or be killed and to suffer any hardship for the sake of their principles and would countenance no compromise with Rome such as the main body of the Pharisees was ready to make provided that they were allowed to practice their religion in peace.[115]

The above description sounds very much as if Francis dictated it. And the sicarii also have something in common with the Peoples' Front of Judea:

> They were not a rural phenomenon, but urban. They operated in the heart of the holy city of Jerusalem, even in the Temple. They did not commit armed robbery at all, but murder, assassination. In contrast to bandits, who made attacks and then fled to their hideaways because their identity was already known only too well, the Sicarii, although operating in broad daylight and in public places, assassinated their victims surreptitiously. Because of this clandestine manner of operation, no one knew who the assassins were, and they could continue to lead normal public lives in the city.[116]

The actual willingness or ability of the PFJ to make good on their threats of violence and murder is only certain until they and the CFG fight each other to the death beneath Pilate's bedroom.

The Japanese Red Army was the most cutthroat of these 1970s terror groups, ready to kill or die virtually anywhere, as long their aims of "fomenting

worldwide revolution" were in play. In the Lod Airport massacre in 1972,[117] the three gunmen simply opened fire with submachine guns on queuing travelers. One gunman survived, and was quoted in his trial confession: "War involves killing and destruction. We cannot limit warfare to the destruction of buildings. We believe that the killing of humans is inevitable."[118] IRA apologist Gerry Adams would echo this, describing the killing of Mountbatten in August 1979 as "unfortunate" but necessary, that the career of Mountbatten symbolized the continuing oppression of the Irish people, and that the IRA "achieved its objective," which was to draw attention to the Irish situation.[119]

FRANCIS: ". . . we're not to be trifled with"—An odd terror story from the period can be related here. In 1974 director Otto Preminger was in France filming the Peter O'Toole film *Rosebud*. Even though the film told the story of a *successful* Palestinian raid on a yacht, Palestinian groups felt the film was pro-Zionist (perhaps because the director and screenwriter were Jewish), and the filming site in southern France was subjected to a bombing attempt, according to *Private Eye*. The messy script included media-driven terrorists and an over-the-top English bad guy (played by Richard Attenborough[120]). When the shoot relocated to Paris, another bomb threat was received, this time targeting star (and Irishman) O'Toole for "betraying revolutionaries throughout the world."[121] This second threat was determined to be a hoax, likely perpetrated by critic Kenneth Tynan, whom O'Toole would later rough up as payback.[122]

***(draft)* REG: ". . . a ten-foot mahogany statue of the Emperor Julius Caesar with his cock hanging out . . ."**—This is one of the demands that Reg and the PFJ suggest in an early draft of the script. There were an abundance of priapic statues, friezes, and paintings across the Roman Empire. Images of fertility could be found in homes and public spaces. Several surviving examples of these works—terracotta wall plaques and a large wall painting, all from Pompeii—were part of the *Pompeii AD79* exhibition mentioned earlier.[123] Why Reg has chosen Julius Caesar for his statue of ridicule, and not the current emperor, Tiberius, is puzzling. Julius Caesar had died some 77 years prior to the events of the film. In the earlier Colosseum scene, the banners on display had been dedicated to Caesar Augustus, even though he had also been dead for a number of years prior to the events depicted in *Brian*. Absolute historical accuracy has not been a hallmark of the Pythons, though they clearly pride themselves on their university educations and access to knowledge both empyrean and arcane.

Mahogany is a tropical hardwood not generally associated with the Middle East, since it is indigenous to the Americas. It would be the seventeenth century before mahogany found its way out of the Americas and into the homes of the wealthy in the Old World.[124]

A statue designed to enrage the Romans is an echo of a similar statue that had inflamed the Jews in the latter part of Gaius's reign. In about 40 the increasingly unstable emperor Gaius (Caligula) ordered an enormous statue of himself as Jupiter to be created and subsequently installed *inside* the walls of the temple in Jerusalem.[125] Given the Jews' abhorrence of effigies intended for worship—and especially Roman effigies and Roman cultus worship in any proximity to the temple—the emperor's order could not have been more inflammatory. Realizing that such a move would lead to a bloodbath, the Syrian leader Petronius stalled and even attempted to dissuade Gaius from his course. Only Gaius's untimely death put a halt to the potential desecration.[126]

***(draft)* REG: "That's just a bargaining counter"**—Terrorists like members of the JRA, the RAF, and even Carlos often made demands that couldn't be met by responding governments, with an initial list being winnowed down to accomplishable goals, often including cash ransoms, transportation to a friendly country, and release of some or all of the group's imprisoned compatriots. Since most terror groups were asking for wholesale changes in nominally democratic countries, the first level of demands tended to be pie-in-the-sky, essentially unachievable, and were likely more of a means of identifying the groups' political stance. Demands made by Carlos and his group as they held hostages in Vienna included the cessation of American involvement in Arab oil production and distribution, and the withdrawal of Western influence from the Middle East.[127] The SLA had also demanded that the Hearst family feed *every* poor person in the Bay Area. None of these demands were met, nor were they even logistically possible except over many years. Many demands were accomplishable, however, given a certain political will, including the oft-heard demand for the release of terror colleagues, to which the Japanese government, for example, regularly agreed. This is a tactic the PFJ never attempts, one that could have benefited Brian.

This resort to force and violence to accomplish a political goal is understandable, especially considering not only the intransigent occupation by the Romans in first-century Judea, but the mindset of twentieth-century terrorists fighting entrenched colonialism and Western power in general. In life, however, Cleese, for example, participated in a number of nonviolent demonstrations,

conveniently rubbing elbows with political figures, entertainers, and policy makers. Donoughue notes that Cleese was in attendance at a gathering of the Fabian Society—a Labour-friendly organization promoting the peaceful implementation of Communism in democratic countries—in November 1976, and earlier, in October 1970, Cleese had been a signatory on a call for the Heath government to support antiapartheid efforts in South Africa.[128] It's not clear whether these incidents define Cleese's liberal Left credentials, or show that he simply ran in a number of politically varied circles. It's not likely that signing broadsheet pledges or attending dinners would "shift one Roman soldier," though, as Reg acknowledges, and perhaps Cleese's actual liberal bent is less bendy than assumed, given his opinion of Left icon Tony Benn: "In a later conversation recorded by Michael Palin in his *Diaries*, Terry Jones is said to have opined for a Benn-led Labour government, after which Cleese was seen to 'twitch uncontrollably.'"[129] Reg will, after all, leave Brian on the cross and vow to fight on, likely in a less physically committed way.

REG: "And of course, let me point out . . . "—Reg is the gifted public speaker here, the leader of the Peoples' Front declaring the movement's grievances, principles, and intent. In this he is like his namesake, Reg Birch. Speaking during a round of negotiations with the Heath government in 1973, AEUW leader Birch laid out his union's position: "We regard any formula which places restraint on wages as a freeze," Birch said. "The Phase 2 formula of a £1 plus 4 per cent norm is a freeze, and any other formula that holds down wages will be a freeze since there will be no power to negotiate."[130] And here Reg and Reg sound very similar in their soaring rhetoric, confident in their abilities to both inspire their members to action and influence the governments they oppose:

> We say that there must be total opposition to what is a direct interference in the functions of the unions. This movement must have no truck with this Government. We should not join with them in this artificial debate. Under no circumstances should we confuse the minds of our members. There must be no conference about a wage freeze or any more attempts to restrict our freedom.[131]

In early February 1974—just weeks before Heath's unseating and during some of the most historically disruptive trade union activities—*Times* columnist PHS, writing in "The *Times* Diary" space, set about to list just what kinds of (and how many) "Reds" there might be under the bed. He cobbled together a list of the most visible and active Communist-and Socialist-influenced parties, and how they were responding to the crises of the go-slows, the three-day work week, and the yawning energy crisis. The third party listed is Reg Birch's Communist Party

of Britain (Marxist-Leninist), and PHS's slightly mocking description of the group and its goals should sound very familiar, as if the *modus operandi* for the PFJ were born right here:

> **Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)**
> Leading member: Reg Birch of the AUEW is chairman.
> Run by: A central committee elected by a congress of members, and a secretariat chosen from the central committee. No paid officials.
> Aim: The overthrow of capitalism by revolution and the recognition that the force to accomplish this is the working class with Marxist-Leninist ideological developments.
> Paid-up members: Secret.
> View of the crisis: No general strike: "This is a protracted struggle, requiring guerrilla tactics at all levels, with some taking strike action, others overtime bans, and others other form of industrial action."[132]

Two weeks later, PHS followed up on this strain, apologizing that in his earlier list of Reds under the bed he'd forgotten to include "the Communist Party of England (Marxist-Leninist) . . . on no account to be confused with the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist), Reg Birch's outfit."[133] The Peoples' Front and the Popular Front, of Judea, again.

To put a topper on Birch's time in the public eye, in March 1978 it was announced that he had been included in the latest edition of *Who's Who*, while in April of that same year, Birch was instrumental in leading a work stoppage at the *Times* itself, which was covered in detail in the *Spectator* and other Fleet Street publications.[134]

REG: ". . . they bear full responsibility. . . we shall <u>not</u> submit to blackmail"—First, the demands that will follow are quite different from the "original" Judean terror group, the Zealots. Reg's opposite in the Zealots, Judas, was likely an educated, religiously trained man capable of teaching others from the Torah that paying tribute to Rome was an affront "to the absolute sovereignty of Yahweh."[135] Reg and the PFJ never do argue from a religious point of view—they're not even labeled as Jews, textually—they are a political group seeking the "absolute sovereignty" of, first, the PFJ, and then maybe Jerusalem and Judea.

This revolutionary jargon is very much from the manifestoes and terrorist ransom demands of the 1970s. Specifically, the continuing actions of the imperialist aggressors are given as the direct cause of the bombings and kidnappings—if imperialism would stop its march, violence would stop, as well, went the argument. As hostage negotiations took place, for example, in September 1977 with JRA hijackers on JLA flight 470, as the night dragged on

the hijackers communicated that if their demands[136] weren't met, hostages would begin to be killed, the Japanese government being "directly responsible" for those deaths.[137] Four years earlier, the unknown "Sons of the Occupied Territory" group had hijacked a Japan Air Lines jet, then blown it up in Benghazi as a punishment to Japan for payment of victim compensation after the Lod airport massacre (carried out by Japanese terrorists) in 1972.[138] This new group promised more attacks if the Japanese continued to reimburse those affected by its own terrorists.

Baader-Meinhof member Horst Mahler would give an interview (from prison) for Alexander Kluge's *Germany in Autumn*, a docudrama released in 1978. Mahler had been the group's cofounder, and in the interview he tries to explain the Left's move from peaceful action to violence and how such thinking—justifying violence against potentially innocent targets—comes into being. Seven years into his prison sentence, he clearly sees it as a failed movement—his words describing well both the PFJ's conundrum and the zeitgeist of the late 1960s and early 1970s, where left-wing radicals itched to act on their principles:

> Of course, it was all more or less abstract, removed from the existing social context, and in particular, removed from the mentality of the people, who were not in any way ready to wage war against the state or to support a war against that state. At the time, we weren't aware of this; otherwise we would never have put this policy . . . into effect on a practical level. The development that came about leading up to the Schleyer kidnapping, and this is really the crux of the problem, leading up to Mogadishu. . . .[139] That created the conditions to bring the crisis . . . I see it as a crisis of the Left, of our left-wing thinking . . . it finally came to attention as a crisis, as a weakness of ours, an object of our critique. I think you can't imagine it as a more radical culmination than this opposition that we initiated with our protest that we began with our uprising against imperialism. . . . The fact that we took to the streets because of My Lai, for example, a massacre against the Vietnamese people. And now we have to watch as one group of this movement, in order to free prisoners, with which the general population does not in any way identify, takes innocent and defenseless civilians—women, children, old people—takes them hostage, and threatens their lives, threatens to massacre them apparently without ever having asked the question: "Does this in any way have anything to do with left-wing politics?" The question is how can a person like Ulrike Meinhof kill another person, or find his death acceptable? A criminal murderer removes himself from the system of moral values; a revolutionary carries himself too far. This means that the moral rigor of the revolutionary which can spiral into a subjectively presumptuous arrogance is at the same time the prerequisite for overcoming the scruples that one has as a left-winger, when it comes to killing a person. You see the moral corruption of the capitalist system, you see the people in the system acting in a corrupt way, and you judge them morally, you condemn them. And based on that moral judgment, you consider them the embodiment of evil. Thus you have the idea that personal guilt plays a role, and that it is necessary and just, for the sake of liberation, to eradicate this evil, including where it is personified. This means eradicating people. This is why there's so much talk about sympathy for terrorists. There exists a common starting point, and that is the moral indignation about the current state of society.[140]

Mahler identifies the problems facing a group like the PFJ and later the Red Army Faction: the masses (especially in a democratic state) aren't ready to be liberated or assist in an overthrow, the revolutionary "goes too far" and simply becomes a murderer of the same people he or she has sworn to free, and the moral quandary can impair both revolutionary and public sentiment toward the rebels. With the dozens of hijackings (jumbo jets, ships, trains) over the previous decade, the hundreds of bombs at military sites and in crowded markets, and the scores of kidnappings for principle and then just for money and terror, it's no wonder that Mahler and many others saw the end of any potential sympathy for such political causes, and just when the Pythons are creating their spectacularly unsuccessful PFJ.

REG: "They've bled us white . . . "—In Britain's own empire, these same cries had been heard, and most often ignored. In late nineteenth-century India, nationalist voices decried the "'constant drain of wealth' from the subcontinent to the United Kingdom, plausibly asserting that 'India is bleeding to death.'"[141] In Australia, the most strident voices began to be heard after the Anzac troop fiasco at Gallipoli—the "British Vampire" was sucking the life from the Antipodes.[142] In Ireland, the "centuries of ruthless tyranny" of Britain charged in the Irish Declaration of Independence in 1919 were followed by incredible "progress" in education, railway building, "health and welfare services," housing, and an improved economy.[143] And in Africa, attorney-cum-freedom-fighter Nelson Mandela would be "radicalized by the thousand quotidian systemic slights that . . . White mastery entailed."[144] But across the British Empire, being "bled white" was always an argument that could be countered by what colonialism ostensibly provided, at least in practical terms.

In December 1976 representatives of Britain's wine industry sent three half-empty bottles to Chancellor Healey, one cleverly labeled "Bled Dry White." The Wine and Spirits Association attached labels to all three bottles: "Produce of Hard Work, Taxed and Taxed Again by HM Treasury." According to the Association, the British tax man was positively Roman, with taxes on wine inflating "table wine prices by 100 [percent], and sherry by more than 70 [percent]."[145] Many industries during this period of higher taxation (to cover the expanding costs of the Welfare State) claimed to be "bled white." For example, the bread industry blamed price controls and governmental "interference"; in the financial world, unit trust groups reported a depressing decade (including the Slater[146] fiasco); and regional organizations for many villages were concerned that thanks to a floundering economy, "depression, unemployment and poverty"

were bleeding whole rural areas white.[147] And on a *60 Minutes* broadcast in November 1976, economist Milton Friedman seriously asked if England was going the way of Chile—from communist dictatorship to military coup, its middle class "bled white by high taxes and 20 and 30 per cent inflation."[148] When the National Enterprise Board (Tony Benn's baby) was created in February 1975, the fear from the right was that Benn and his "Soviet" friends would intervene in British industry to a point that collapse was inevitable: "They are like the medieval apothecary who bled his patient white," said Opposition spokesman Eldon Griffiths, "and then wondered why he was anemic."[149] Taxation seemed to bring the "bled white" phrase out of the woodwork during the 1970s.

Historically, the phrase also appears in the first pages of the popular book on the life of a gladiator, *Those about to Die*. There, Nero's appalling leadership and administration had led to continuous rioting, the peoples of Rome starving and strained to the breaking point thanks to a staggering economy. The mammoth expense of maintaining Rome's military machine of empire had led to fighting in the streets, according to Mannix, "bleeding the nation white."[150]

In the UK, supporters of Scottish nationalism in 1974 voiced the refrain "Scotland has been bled white by the English."[151] The labyrinthine process of Scottish "devolution" was well underway by 1977, with the Labour party very set on pushing it through the House. Callaghan adviser Donoughue even saw the political future of the party at stake, since Labour had come to depend on votes from Scottish members and many promises had been made to support devolution.[152] Perhaps this image—a smaller, "invaded" country trying to shrug off a colonial master—influenced the Pythons as they thought of secondary situations for their "Life of Christ" story. In this sense the situations in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, to varying degrees, mirrored what the PFJ (and the CFG) experienced in first-century Jerusalem.

What Reg is getting to is the idea that state violence must lead understandably, inevitably, to a peoples' revolutionary violence, and this is the oppressed, bled-white peoples' justification for action. Frantz Fanon, an Algerian doctor-cum-revolutionary, nurtured, according to Dobson and Payne, "a blazing hatred for colonialism and racial oppression," and in his fiery writings "elevated violence into mystique."[153] Fanon was a fundamental influence on terror groups of the 1960s: "Violence alone," Fanon wrote in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), "violence committed by the people, violence organised and educated by its leaders, makes it possible for the masses to understand social truths and gives

them the key."[154] In the introduction to *Wretched of the Earth*, Jean-Paul Sartre echoes and supports Fanon (and the big-talking PFJ), that "no gentleness can efface the marks of violence; only violence itself can destroy" those colonizers and their violent ways.[155] The PFJ must, then, resort to kidnap at least, and perhaps even torture and murder to throw off the bonds of their oppressor, their colonial masters, the Romans. Dobson and Payne continue, outlining the importance of violence for the oppressed, and underscoring why groups like the PFJ, the CFG, and the real-life PFLP and Red Army could have embraced such views when faced with a seemingly unbeatable foe:

> Fanon preached that violence was not simply a means of ending colonial rule, but also an improving element in itself. "Violence is a cleansing force," he wrote (a sentiment to be echoed by Gaddafi, among others). "It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect."[156]

Writing of the fragmented and volatile student movements in the late 1960s Japan, Farrell describes their obvious shortcomings, their likely Achilles' Heel of the near future:

> The birth of numerous factions within the radical movement indicated that. . . objectives were many and diverse. This fragmentation was further compounded by different methods available for achieving any stated goal. *Many called for the removal of "evil," while having no plan for implementing the "good."*[157] *There was little vision of the positive, only dissatisfaction with the status quo*. The only answer seemed to be rebellion, not reconstruction.[158]

Dobson and Payne concur, describing the odd mélange of multiple successful "robberies and kidnappings" by the Red Army and the members' fractiousness prior to the formation of the United Red Army: "There was, however, no consistency in the membership or loyalties of the group in Japan. It formed and reformed in a number of minute factions, all dedicated to the destruction of rival groups."[159] Reg and the PFJ will decry the rapacity of the Romans, but it doesn't take long for them to remind themselves of some of the very positive, even life-giving benefits of the status quo—roads, medicine, wine, infrastructure, and so on—eventually rendering their revolution patently absurd, and, like most revolutions, doomed to fail.

REG: "They've taken everything we had, not just from us, but from our fathers . . ."—Here also is the PFJ's *ultima ratio rebellium*, their excuse for action and violence, as they are "free men facing intolerable persecution," at least by their own measure.[160] They don't seem to be what Dr. Johnson would have called scoundrel types taking their "last refuge" in patriotism, though they do cite their heritage and they are fighting for a free Judea.[161] In his book

Terrorism, Walter Laqueur points out that over the centuries both noble and ignoble causes have raised this same banner, from horse thieves in South America to the Red Army Faction in postwar West Germany.[162] Frantz Fanon saw it similarly, "everything" taken, including the necessities for life: "When we revolt it's not for a particular culture. We revolt simply because, for many reasons, we can no longer breathe."[163] The colonizer bleeds white the colonized, as Reg has already said. Laqueur goes on to discuss the "frustration-aggression concept" as it related to terrorism from the 1960s and beyond, the idea that to some "aggression is *always* a consequence of frustration," a clear case of haves and have-nots:

> [This] concept was widely accepted for a while by students of conflict who regarded protest and violence as the result of discontent caused by frustration. And they saw social discontent as the discrepancy between demand and fulfillment. Or, in more scientific language, the higher the social-want formation and the lower the social-want satisfaction, the greater the systematic frustration. Violence . . . is the result of socialization patterns which either encourage or discourage aggression and of cultural traditions sanctioning collective responses to various kinds of deprivation.[164]

Short answer: The Romans have "taken everything," and the victims have turned to violence,[165] not unlike German radical democrat Karl Heinzen, who was ready to justify the blowing up of "half a continent" and the pouring out of "a sea of blood" for his cause; 1960s radicals were prepared to kidnap, torture, and kill in the name of their versions of freedom. The PFJ's justifications might be a tad less noble, their commitment a mite less complete.[166]

This particular cri de coeur is generally read in the manifestoes and graffiti of oppressed minorities[167]—political speech designed to justify insurrectionary behavior, for example, and even persuade the unaffiliated to join the cause. It begins this way here, too, but is undercut by the helpful reminders given to Reg in regard to the Roman Empire's contributions to the quality of life in Judea —*Tristram Shandy*–like (and Pythonesque) digressions that put a human face on the dictatorial colonizer and render Reg's anti-Roman splenetic almost moot. If it helps, the Romans did this to their own, as well. A version of this cry is heard from Sallust (c. 86–35 BC), a Roman historian and politician. In *The Jugurthine War* Sallust decries the rapacious nature of the luxury-seeking, post-Carthage Roman aristocrats who had succeeded their more frugal, more noble ancestors: "When they conquered a foe, they took nothing from him save his power to harm. But their base successors stuck at no crime to rob subject people of all that those brave conquerors had left them, as though oppression were the only possible method of ruling an empire."[168] This is a lower-born Roman castigating

wealthy Romans for "taking everything," to paraphrase Reg, yes, but Carl Richard points out an irony: Sallust had himself been a provincial governor (not unlike Pilate) in North Africa, and had enriched himself and his family greatly, and at the expense of the people of his province.[169] Richard goes on to mention that this narrative—earlier Romans were "province looters" who needed to be tarred as such—"had apparently grown so popular as to be employed by all factions," no matter its degree of accuracy. Reg calls his occupying Romans province-looters, having "taken everything" from Judea. Another Roman historian, Tacitus (56–120), will use similarly larcenous language, cursing the "savage and hostile" emperor Domitian (b. 51): "Rome of old explored the utmost limits of freedom; we have plumbed the depths of slavery, robbed as we are by the informers even of the right to exchange ideas in conversation. . . . Fifteen whole years . . . taken from us . . . so many of our best years have been taken from us."[170] The unpopular Domitian would be assassinated in the year 96. But Reg gets second-guessed by his own colleagues, and immediately; Sallust and others read back across history for their useful if not always completely accurate narrative, and second-guessing waits well into the future.

This cry was also heard loud and long in two specific political arenas of postwar Britain, *viz.*, the rising cost of maintaining the Welfare State, and potential British membership in the European Economic Community. In the first, Anthony Crosland's[171] rosy visions of just what Britain could be—given the proper application of socialist principles—began to collapse as Britain's economy sputtered in the late 1960s and into the 1970s. The increasing influence of organized labor after about 1957[172] meant that every government—Labour, Conservative, or coalition—had to bow to the Trades Union Congress, encouraging reduced competition, protectionism, restrictive practices,[173] and the fever dream of "full employment." British industry fell behind the often more austere but forward-thrusting economies of France, Germany, and Japan. Funding universal health care and social security could be accomplished in times of a robust and *continually* growing economy;[174] an overheated or stagnant economy meant existing commitments to funding still had to be serviced even as the economy slowed and contracted. The money had to come from somewhere, and this somewhere was the undiscovered country of the income tax:

> This in itself represented a change scarcely less profound than that brought about by the Welfare State which had ensured universal access to medical care and social security. The working classes were not used to paying income tax. Now the great mass had for the first time become taxpayers. In the lowest income bracket the rate they paid was the highest in the world, according to Denis Healey in his 1976 Budget speech. The Welfare State had made us into a nation of taxpayers.[175]

The Pythons had been born into an England recovering from the effects of the Great Depression and then World War II, and in their formative years endured the privations of postwar scarcity as the rest of Western Europe rebuilt across the Channel. The economy's contractions bashing headlong into expanding obligations of this later period was the proverbial turnip trying to give blood it didn't have. Secondly, in the lead-up to Britain's applications and then entry into the Common Market in the 1960s and 1970s, those *against* this foray into the EEC saw the continental agreements as nothing short of a surrender of British sovereignty to anti-Anglo *fauves* in France and market-savvy *Technokrats* in West Germany, and a transfer of sovereign power from Westminster to Brussels.[176] Journalist Peter Jenkins, though not an alarmist, put it bluntly: "There is no denying that a consequence of Britain's accession to the European Community is the loss of some national power."[177] Parliamentary power was being undermined as Britain agreed to "accept the existing rules and regulations of the Community but also agreed to be bound by its future rules and regulations."[178] Existing laws in conflict with EEC laws would have to change, and no future law could be enacted that flouted the EEC. So future British generations of Euroskeptics could echo Stan about everything being taken from "our fathers," but could also add, "and from our children." Jenkins continued, trying to remind voters in the month leading up to the referendum in 1975 that power once given wasn't easily reclaimed: "Power lost in this way cannot simply be said to have been transferred or delegated, or, as some like to argue, pooled."[179] The Romans exercised this kind of "negative power" from far-off Rome, able to make decisions for Judea that could not be counteracted by any legal means, upsetting "Romaskeptics" like the PFJ. Jenkins continues:

> The power of veto within the Council of Ministers [of the EEC, in Brussels], for example, is a negative power, which can be used to prevent decisions against our national interest, but there is no equivalent power for obtaining decisions in favour of our national interest within areas which are the subject of Community decisions and hence no longer within the power of national decision.[180]

It's easy to see how the anti-Europe or even the pro-British voter in Britain might feel completely powerless and dismayed when faced with this apparent arrogation of sovereign power. Even Parliament's powers of taxation took a hit in this agreement, as EEC tax policies rose to the top, by law. (Meaning the tax draw could still bleed Britons white, but those decisions were being made in Brussels, not Westminster.) Many Britons felt afterward they were being ruled by a foreign cabal, and that Britain's best interests were no longer at the forefront of either foreign or domestic policy: "Ever since, many of those among

the 8.5 million who voted against, and younger people who share their view, have suggested that Heath and Jenkins and the rest lied to the country, at least by omission," Marr writes. "Had it been properly explained that Europe's law and institutions would sit above the ancient Westminster Parliament, it is said, they would never have agreed."[181] The following forty years has seen an on-again-off-again struggle to claw back some of these powers, culminating in the success of the Brexit Referendum in 2016.[182] Rome never had to worry about soft-peddling or sugar-coating—Roman occupancy was what it was.

A loud voice from the Left against EEC membership was Tony Benn, who, in an open letter to his constituency in January 1975, characterized "continuing membership" as "the end of Britain as a completely self-governing nation and the end of our democratically elected parliament as the supreme law-making body in the United Kingdom." Benn lays out five basic rights the British voter enjoys in their relationship with Parliament, and sees EEC membership as compromising all five, concluding, gloomily:

> In short, the power of the electors of Britain, through their direct representatives in Parliament to make laws, levy taxes, change laws which the courts must uphold, and control the conduct of public affairs has been substantially ceded to the European Community whose Council of Ministers and Commission are neither collectively elected, nor collectively dismissed by the British people nor even by the peoples of all the Community countries put together.[183]

Benn's views on EEC membership were expected, given his position at the extreme left of the Labour Party, where state ownership and/or syndicalism in industry were the high-water marks.[184] Jenkins notes that voices like Benn, Mikardo, Foot, and others *couldn't* have been happy, simply because "the [EEC] is inimical to their brand of socialism," though, Jenkins continues, "their brand of socialism would find itself in conflict not only with the European Economic Community but also with the international trading order of the non-Communist world."[185] The PFJ's brand of freedom is also inimical to both the Roman Empire's and Jewish religious authority's allowances for behavior and unproscribed activity in first-century Jerusalem.[186]

Closer to the hearts of the Pythons (especially Welshman Jones), Welsh rugby football captain Phil Bennett was able to make such a "they've taken everything" declarative as he addressed his team in the run-up to their 1977 match against England, and both the now-fabled text and subtext referenced much more than just sport:

> Look what these bastards have done to Wales. They've taken our coal, our water, our steel. They buy our homes and live in them for a fortnight every year. What have they given us? Absolutely nothing.

> We've been exploited, raped, controlled and punished by the English—and that's who you are playing this afternoon. The English.[187]

Reg will very nearly quote this speech in the film not many months later. It's fun to imagine what Bennett's response might have been if some player *had* raised his hand and piped in, like Xerxes does to Reg, perhaps asking what England's rugby team had to do with Britain's coal, steel, or housing policy, or to remind Bennett of any one of the benefits Wales enjoyed as a member of the United Kingdom. History and folklore give us nothing beyond Bennett's memorable exhortation, sadly. The following year, however, provides an eerily familiar example of one such awkward moment, also in rugby, and also involving Bennett and teammates, as related in the *Independent*:

> The story dates from [February] 1978, and is counted among the classics. Bill Beaumont, up there alongside Martin Johnson as the most venerated of England captains, was delivering his final dressing-room exhortation before a Five Nations Championship game with Wales at Twickenham. "Right," he fumed, steam billowing from his nostrils. "This Welsh team has had it. The Pontypool front row? Past it. Allan Martin and Geoff Wheel? No good. Terry Cobner? Too slow."
>
> At which point a nervous voice emerged from some dark corner of the inner sanctum. "Yeah, but what about Gareth Edwards, Phil Bennett, Gerald Davies and JPR Williams?" Profoundly flummoxed, Beaumont wracked his second-rower's brain for a suitable response. "For Christ's sake," he said eventually. "Even we're good enough to beat four men."[188]

Beaumont may as well have just barked "Shut up!" as Reg does. In a perfectly Pythonesque ending, Wales wins the match, defeating England (three penalty goals to two), perhaps giving groups like the PFJ false hope in their quest for victory over the oppressor.

STAN: "And our fathers' fathers' fathers' fathers. . . ."—Stan/Loretta is laboring the point, yes, but he's in good company. Taking us back to the football pitch, in one pregame speech Welsh rugby coach Clive Rowlands urged his players to play for more than just their "fathers' fathers' fathers"—he demanded his team "perform 'not just for yourself but for your father, your mother, your long-lost aunt, the miners, the steelworkers, the teachers, the schoolchildren."[189] The list begins to read more like a Python thesaurus sketch than a pep talk, reminding us of the Tourist's rant in *Flying Circus* Ep. 31, or more precisely the Narrator in *Holy Grail* as he introduces Scene 24, and gets sidetracked by bird references. The "list" generally found in a thesaurus sketch in the Python world follows immediately here, as the PFJ remind Reg just how much the Romans *have* actually contributed.

This listing of fathers and grandfathers was also part of Heath's immigration agenda upon taking No. 10 in 1970. "Anti-immigration" had been a key point of

contention throughout the recent election, having come to a frothy head after Powell's infamous "Rivers of Blood" speech in 1968.[190] Asian and African immigration had been swelling since the 1950s, with many neighborhoods in cities from Brixton to Bradford to Birmingham experiencing rapid demographical changes. Heath's proposed legislation became known as the Immigration Act, and "removed any right to immigrate to Britain from anyone who did not have a parent or grandparent born in the country."[191] So if potential immigrants could identify British-born fathers or father's fathers, and so on, the new Act welcomed them into Britain. This left thousands of the so-called "detritus of empire"—like thousands of African Asians—in immigration limbo. Opponents made much hay of this restrictive, even racialist language.[192]

Not much later, Sir Keith Joseph's book *Monetarism Is Not Enough* (1976) castigated the postwar consensus governments' (Labour *and* Conservative) attachments to full employment no matter the cost. In the introductory pages Joseph—Margaret Thatcher's mentor, essentially—reels off his own list of Britain's ills under socialist economic policies: "We are over-governed, over-spent, over-taxed, over-borrowed, and over-manned."[193] But Joseph is simply reacting to a list proffered by the Beveridge Report more than thirty years earlier, wherein the hoped-for postwar Welfare State could tick off and then administer the cradle-to-grave needs for all Britons. Beveridge and Bevin were set to guarantee a list of three "pre-suppositions" that would undergird the government's ability to manage the country's needs, including full employment, family allowances[194] (not means-tested), and a vibrant NHS, all funded by taxation. With these pre-suppositions in place, according to Bogdanor, all the remaining social security problems could be dealt with by national insurance, and in return for a single weekly contribution, you would receive a pension, sickness benefit, and unemployment benefit when you were unemployed, and that would apply to everyone—all wage earners, all the self-employed, and their families. So, it was a new unified system, which would cover everyone in the country, in place of the piecemeal patchwork. That this was to be financed not out of taxation but out of contributions was fundamental for Beveridge because he said that was a mark of citizenship.[195]

What the "Great Socialist Commonwealth" was prepared to give to the people of Britain—*while* bleeding them white through, first, taxation and then what Beveridge benignly called "contributions"—was absolute peace of mind: near-guarantees of a job, household allowances, and "free" medical care, as well as lifelong insurance, a pension, and "disaster" benefits in case of illness or

unemployment. No aqueducts, but unprecedented largesse, to be sure, and all administered by the so-called "nanny state." Taxes and forcible tribute to Rome helped pay for the administration of the empire, which in turn offered services and protection to her subjects, willing and not.[196] Bogdanor notes that Beveridge's offer to the British people of the former empire wasn't at all voluntary, either. If Britain was to combat "want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness," then everyone would have to participate: "[Beveridge] said that anyone who was not prepared to work should be sent to a compulsory re-training camp, and he said that young people who were not working should be given no benefit at all; that they should get trained and get a job."[197] The Britain where the young Pythons came of age (through at least the 1950s) very nearly achieved the dream of a more equal, more safe, and more healthy society, a place where the ingratitude represented in the "And what have they ever given us in return?" phraseology could actually be defensibly argued down. When this socialist Utopia ran up against changing economies brought on by postwar rebuilding, industrial and demographic upheaval, empire-reduction, and the age of technology, however, a collapse was inevitable.

REG: "All right Stan don't labour the point"—Specifically, Rome had only been *directly* involved in Judea for about ninety-six years, given the beginning of Roman rule in Syria in 63 BC. If a "generation" is about twenty to twenty-five years, then Stan's phrasing isn't "labouring" the point, it's actually underscoring how many generations these Jews have endured Roman rule.

REG: "And what have they ever given us in return?"—Meant as an unanswered bit of impassioned rhetoric, what begins here instead is a recitation of the significant contributions of the Roman occupiers to the infrastructure, especially, but also the quality of daily life for the people of Jerusalem. These are the "apparatus" of the "Roman imperial state" mentioned earlier by Francis. The answer to Reg could simply have been "*Pax Romana*"—the monumental, perhaps ironic, perhaps surprising peace brought by Rome's empire-building acumen. "Roman rule," Brandon writes, "despite its ruthless enforcement and its often vicious officials, was not intolerable; and, after the sufferings of the initial period of conquest, most peoples settled down and prospered under the *Pax Romana*."[198] "Most peoples," but not the Jews, who would never accept a non-Jewish ruler or worship more than one god. But that's not as funny as a laundry list of the demonstrable benefits of Roman oversight in Jerusalem, followed by Reg's defensive, dismissive "shut up."[199]

In more contemporary terms, the continuing and, to many, humiliating[200] "little brother" relationship—Andrew Marr calling Britain a "junior partner"[201]—with the former colony United States can be discussed here. It wasn't bad enough that there had been for some time popular beliefs that the United States had "saved" Britain during World War II, and that the Marshall Plan after the war *seemed* to favor the defeated as opposed to the allies.[202] (Germany, Japan, and Italy rebuilt and improved while Britain continued wartime rationing, e.g.) In September 1976—when the Pythons were preparing for a November *Life of Brian* writing session and just two months after the official bicentennial celebrations in the United States—the Sterling Crisis came to a head. Inflation and unemployment were rising and seemingly beyond normal controls. Callaghan's Labour government and Chancellor Healy agreed to approach the International Monetary Fund (IMF), based in and greatly influenced by the United States, for a loan. "The purpose of this request," Healey would write in December 1976, "is to support the policies that have been adopted by the government to strengthen the balance of payments and create the conditions in which it will be possible to get both unemployment and domestic inflation down from their present unacceptable levels and keep them down."[203] Healey was asking for an unprecedented £2.3 billion, and only received it by agreeing to £2.5 billion in forced expenditure cuts and the selling of British Petroleum shares. The IMF demanded cuts and accepted no compromises, according to Donoughue, who saw the Americans as willfully, gleefully gouging Labour, forcing them to adopt essentially Tory monetary policies to save the country's economic bacon.[204] Callaghan had been adamant that British lives would not be run by "foreign bankers," an echo of Reg's tirade.[205] By the end of 1976 and on into 1977, there was no room for such high-minded quibbling, and the Callaghan government danced to the tune called by the IMF.[206]

These narrative digressions had become hallmarks of the Python writing style, appearing throughout *Flying Circus* and *Holy Grail*. In Ep. 7 the camera moves away from Mr. and Mrs. Brainsample simply because they don't seem as interesting as Mr. Potter, and the science fiction story can continue.[207] In Ep. 27 the narrative trajectory of *Njorl's Saga* is sidetracked again and again, and in Ep. 37 Dennis Moore's attempted robbery becomes a "botany lesson."[208] In *Holy Grail*, bird-fixated castle guards, Dennis, and The Knights Who Say Ni manage to sidetrack Arthur and his companions throughout the film.

Granted, the Romans as an occupying force would have endeavored to fix things up a bit given their residency status—meaning some/many of these

changes would have been necessarily self-serving—but the public works programs alone demonstrate the improving quality brought about by membership (even unwillingly) in the Roman Empire.[209] Reg is trying to make a point about a foreign, authoritarian influence making life miserable for a formerly free and happy people, but the facts of life are going to get in the way. Herod's ambitious building program improved many aspects of life in Judea, improvements the members of the PFJ can't truly appreciate—they're too young. Roman garrisons kept familiar wolves from Jewish doors, something Reg, Francis, and Stan seem to have forgotten.[210] The Augustan Age poet Ovid[211] (43 BC–AD 17) suffered from similar selective memory, according to Richard: "Because he was too young to remember the civil wars, he was also too young to be grateful for the Augustan peace."[212] This is the same time of peace the PFJ's would-be revolutionaries enjoyed.

In postwar Uruguay, a fascinatingly similar "revolution" took place, with entirely unintended consequences. The Tupamaros group went from a political organization to a terror group in the 1960s, fighting against political, economic, and social inequities in a strict but *democratic* government atmosphere. The point here is that they were fighting against an *elected* government, unlike most typical insurrections, especially in Latin America. These young "idealists" remembered their misgivings about their government, but forgot about their rather special place: living in a country that could boast "an unbroken democratic tradition of many decades."[213] The effects of their move to assassinations and kidnappings (including the kidnapping of British ambassador Geoffrey Jackson in 1971) forced the sitting government's hand, according to Laqueur:

> The Tupamaros' campaign resulted in the emergence of a right-wing military dictatorship; in destroying the democratic system, they also destroyed their own movement. By the 1970s they and their sympathizers were reduced to bitter protests in exile against the crimes of a repressive regime which, but for their own action, would not have come into existence. The gravediggers of liberal Uruguay, as Regis Debray later wrote, also dug their own grave.[214]

Reg and the PFJ aren't living in a democratic paradise, of course, but they can't even remember "what the city used to be like" before their oppressors, the Romans, arrived and cleaned it all up. Their disturbing of the hornet's nest simply provided what many such terror groups discovered across the ages, concludes Laqueur: "Terrorism from below produced massive and infinitely more effective terror from above."[215] What the PFJ will get for their anti-establishment and anticolonial efforts, eventually, is a much smaller (thanks to

“martyr” deaths) and likely less politically agitated group that can live a quiet, domestic exile protected by the unshifting “bloody Romans” and their own parliamentary procedure.

This same “What have they ever given us in return?” complaint could be heard from disappointed supporters of both Conservative and Labour governments, and Northern Ireland when Westminster ruled; from Scots dead set on devolution, frustrated Liberal voters, and union members angry at their Party or their representation. The excitement and promises of the 1960s faded in the 1970s as two superpowers moved forward—neither of them Britain. Even the great postwar recovery in West Germany couldn’t elicit party feeling from imprisoned revolutionary Ulrike Meinhof, who wrote a letter to fellow RAF member Hanna Krabbe from prison. Meinhof ticks off her version of what’s wrong with the rebuilt Germany: “Given the environment in which we are struggling—the postfascist state, consumer culture, metropolitan chauvinism, media manipulation of the masses, psychological warfare, and social democracy—and faced with the repression that confronts us here, indignation is not a weapon. It is pointless and empty.”[216] This is the great question likely asked in every British colony as it began to lean toward home rule, and by every revolutionary group remaking words into action.

XERXES: “The aqueduct?”—First, this is a typically Pythonesque moment where something certain or axiomatic is challenged. In *Holy Grail* it was Arthur’s identity, kingship, and mission that were second-guessed, and often; later in this film it will be Brian’s certainty that what he’s painted says “Romans go home”; here it’s the assertion that the Roman occupation has provided nothing of value to the Jews. There is an interesting historical version of this, with roles a bit reversed. Suetonius records that the men condemned to fight to the death on Fucine Lake for Claudius’s amusement called out “Hail, emperor, greetings from men about to die!” The emperor, Suetonius relates, “spoilt the effect by calling back ‘Or not!’”:

> This example of fatuous humour caused a momentary hitch, since the men thereupon refused to fight, insisting that his words had excused them and amounted to an imperial pardon. “Claudius grew so angry that he was on the point of sending troops to massacre them all, or burning them in their ships. However, he changed his mind, jumped from his throne and, hobbling ridiculously down to the lakeside, threatened and coaxed the gladiators into battle.”[217]

Xerxes’s riposte isn’t fatuous but factual, the “hitch” being a narrative hiccup, cured when Reg has listed all the benefits of Roman occupation while still maintaining that such an occupation is intolerable. And Xerxes is right, since

water is the lifeblood of these desert regions, and no human settlement would be possible without engineering or simply accessing a consistent water supply.[218] Josephus recalls Pilate's designs for the bringing of "a current of water to Jerusalem," which seems both necessary and practical, but that he accessed "sacred money" for the expensive undertaking, which outraged many in Jerusalem. Jeremias, discussing the industries of Jerusalem, describes the situation: "Next, as a building in the grand manner, the aqueduct built by Pontius Pilate deserves mention," says Jeremias. "Because he financed the project from the Temple treasury, his action provoked a public uproar, and the furious crowd had to be quietened by soldiers with cudgels."[219] The opening of this engineering marvel was one of the special occasions that brought Pilate (and likely his household) to Jerusalem.[220] Josephus is more colorful in his description of this cudgeling, his version arming Roman soldiers (dressed down as local people) with "daggers"; Pilate then signals his men to attack those "boldly casting reproaches upon him," resulting in "a great number of them slain. . . and thus an end was put to this sedition."[221] Jeremias elsewhere points out that this bloody to-do may not have been the Romans' fault, completely. The temple treasury was actually *supposed* to be paying out for maintenance of works like any "water-channel":

> The passage can also refer to the aqueduct mentioned above, p. 14 [in *JTJ*]. If this is true, Pilate, when drawing upon the Temple treasury to finance the project, did no more than punish a neglect on the part of Jerusalem's municipality, the Sanhedrin, by assuming, however illegitimately, the latter's duty. His action would have meant that the Temple money was spent for the purpose for which it was intended.[222]

These water projects brought water for drinking and cooking, for bathing and the cleaning of streets and latrines, and for storage during times of drought or even siege, into cisterns beneath the city.

This ancient construction had been rediscovered and even refurbished during the 1860s, thanks to the ongoing efforts of the Palestine Exploration Fund, whose work continued through the 1870s. These types of finds—long-lost aqueducts, feeder tunnels, cisterns, and even Roman bath houses—were in the news again in the mid-1950s as Masada was explored. By the mid-1960s these kinds of archaeological finds were being used to sell package tours to the Holy Land.[223] (A piece of Pilate's aqueduct itself was brought back to England in 1938 by a Rev. Gentle-Cackett of the Bible Lands Mission Aid Society.[224]) And as recently as 1971, finds like the aqueduct leading from the royal gardens to the Pool of Shiloam were being touted in international newspapers.[225]

Xerxes's question is a reminder that many in the Roman Empire were well aware of the benefits that Roman occupation had forced on subdued peoples, the aqueduct being one that Romans like Frontinus (c. 35–103) held up as the peak of Man's *useful* achievements: "With such an array of indispensable structures carrying so many waters, compare, if you will, the idle Pyramids or the useless, though famous, works of the Greeks."[226] Frontinus, who wrote an entire treatise on Rome's aqueduct system, gives his version of Reg's plaintive phrase: "What have the Egyptians (or Greeks) ever given us?" The answer? Not an aqueduct.

Finally, there is an intriguingly familiar tone to a news article coming from Jerusalem in August 1918. In the course of fighting World War I the British Expeditionary Force had captured Jerusalem from Turkish control in late 1917, and also controlled the Levant by October of 1918. Public works improvements began before the surrounding region was even fully in hand, with an adequate water system the first order of business. In August of 1918 the British press is already trumpeting the overhaul of Jerusalem's water supply and storage capabilities as "a triumph for the Royal Engineers." But what's fascinating is the language used by correspondent W. T. Massey, sounding as if he's a Roman news correspondent covering Pilate's public works programs in faraway Jerusalem: "It is doubtful whether the population of any city within the zones of war has profited so much at the hands of the conqueror as that of Jerusalem. In a little more than half a year a wondrous change has been effected in the condition of the people."[227] He's probably right about the benefits of a clean water supply, though the oft-conquered people of Jerusalem and Palestine may have asked almost immediately, in regard to losing their freedom yet again: "What have the British ever given us in return?" The British would administer Palestine for the next thirty years.

MASKED COMMANDO: "And the sanitation"—In a scene from the very popular 1976 BBC 2 series *I, Claudius*, Derek Jacobi addresses the audience while seated on a toilet, placing Romans and sanitation into the same scene just as the Pythons were writing *Life of Brian*. This first broadcast of the award-winning series appears when the Pythons are deciding, finally, to settle on a Cleese-suggested "Monty Python and the Life of Christ" story, Palin writes, and they are in the midst of a two-month long writing binge as a group.[228] The series would be rebroadcast in June 1978—when the Pythons were going through the entire script for the first time.[229]

Even after the Roman occupation, the disposal of waste in a city like Jerusalem would have been a challenge. There wasn't enough consistent running water to

carry away waste, if that had been desired; what little water was available was reserved for agriculture and livestock, human ingestion, and ritual purification. Chamber pots were in use in homes, and then emptied into the streets, often.[230] There were no "Roman luxury latrines" available in Jerusalem, where constant running water would have carried away waste.[231] Toilet seats have been discovered in Jerusalem excavations, according to Koloski-Ostrow, one even found still atop its cesspit at the back of a home.[232] These cesspits would have to have been emptied manually, and the contents taken into the street, then carted outside the city walls and dumped. It's also likely that public urination and defecation in "filthy alleyways" would have been rampant given the lack of public latrines.[233] There would have been a smell, certainly, to a city like Jerusalem.

Recent work has uncovered Jerusalem's first-century sanitation system, information that at least partially belies the PFJ's complaint. An impressive landfill on the slopes of the Kidron Valley, just outside the city walls of Roman-occupied Jerusalem, was the subject of an archaeological dig in 2013–2014:

> It isn't that the people of ancient Jerusalem organized to collectively and obediently throw their dross over the city walls. "It looks like there was a mechanism in place that cleared the streets, cleared the houses, using donkeys to collect and throw away the garbage," [Yuval] Gadot speculates. The system may have developed out of a combination of Roman administrative knowhow and a growing observance among Jews of religious purity norms, researchers theorize. Jews in early Roman Jerusalem were obsessed with purity and impurity, as shown by the proliferation of *mikvehs* (ritual baths), the frequent use of stone vessels (which were believed to be impervious to impurity) and the near absence of imported pottery. "It could be that it became a norm in Jerusalem that you have to take out the garbage, because it's impure and has to be brought outside the city," Gadot suggests. "It's not the municipality saying so: God says so, and that makes it easier."[234]

The landfill is noteworthy for its carefully layered design, with regular coverings of soil to keep odor under control. Garbage day pickup would have been a smelly affair, of course, with piles of garbage and human waste left in the streets, waiting for collection and transportation.[235] What this suggests is that the city streets may have been even cleaner than Rome's.

But an efficient waste removal system and the presence and even use of public baths wouldn't have helped in other areas of "public health," a term Reg will mention in his summation. In recent studies of Roman-era fecal matter (coprolites), the indication is that Roman practices actually magnified health problems. The incidence and travel of parasitic worms (roundworms, whipworms) and dysentery across the empire is blamed on the Roman penchant for warm baths and the exportation of often uncooked epicurean delicacies, like

fish sauce.[236] Higher standards of cleanliness in other areas (like the idea of regular bathing) didn't keep these infection rates from climbing. If the Jews kept to their own foods and their own systems of preparation and purification,[237] they would likely have avoided many of the gastrointestinal issues that many others in the empire had to endure.

STAN: "Remember what the city used to be like"—Likely inaccurate for *all* of ancient civilization, but it's funnier than the facts. It's been noted in many studies that since the ancient Hebrews were religiously concerned about cleanliness, they were likely more clean and healthy than "most":

> The ancient Hebrews were among the earliest peoples to incorporate cleanliness and hygiene into their religious observance and everyday life. Some attribute Moses' upbringing in an Egyptian royal household for his emphasis on the purifying aspects of water. Washing, bathing and cleanliness played a prominent role in the religious rotes of the Jews, and indirectly afforded the people a greater measure of health than enjoyed by most ancient societies.[238]

Sanitary laws, likely Mosaic in origin, had accompanied the Israelites for centuries, and Hasmonean-ruled Jerusalem (the long period before Roman occupancy began) could boast engineered water sources, latrines, and sewer works. The appropriately named "Dung Gate" was the understood exit for the waste of the city, for example, and had been for many years. But Magness reminds us that "the Roman world was a filthy, malodorous, and unhealthy place," and "human waste fouled the streets and sidewalks of even the most advanced Roman cities."[239]

Putting a finer point on it, however, Stan isn't actually old enough to remember "what the city used to be like." Pompey had besieged Jerusalem sixty years or so before Stan or any of the PFJ were born,[240] and Herod is named "King of the Jews" some twenty years after that, signaling the start of his ambitious building and rebuilding of the war-torn city. So many of the Roman improvements to Jerusalem would have been in place or at least underway before Stan was born. Additionally, Ben-Sasson comments that things might have been unusually quiet in the Jerusalem of the PFJ's youth: "But after the first agitation (which occurred in the wake of the first Roman census) had faded out, we no longer hear of bloodshed in Judea until the days of Pilate."[241] The PFJ's collective memories seem to ironically picture a filthy, disorderly, unsafe Jerusalem,[242] but also an understanding that the Romans actually made things better.

This collective, selective memory could be found in the British general public after the war, as well. The privations of the war and the need for united, unselfish action to accomplish victory, at the fronts of battle and home, primed

the pump for Attlee's great socialist advancement, the Welfare State. "At that time," Bogdanor says, "socialism was thought to be the wave of the future, and in particular people thought that it was given a great push by the war."[243] From the ashes of the war, and through the careful but complete nationalization of "production, distribution, and exchange," and via the promises of universal health care and social security, capitalist principles would naturally give way to a kind of Socialist Utopia, many thought, and all Britons could live in peace and relative prosperity.[244] A society erected on the "highest instincts of mankind" and "the principles of fellowship" (as opposed to "profit and incentives") falters when the populace feels "bled white," when the restrictions of that society—whether economic or simply anti-individualist—cast the remarkable benefits in a bad light.[245] Again, it would be the realities of the world and specifically Britain's changing status from "empire" to what Bogdanor calls a "second-ranking power" (behind, at least, the United States, USSR, France, and Germany, and soon Japan and China) that would call the tune. Having everything they might need or want couldn't keep need and want—of varying types—at bay, according to Bogdanor:

> The Labour Party has also clearly abandoned its commitment to socialism, at least in the form in which Attlee put it forward. It faced a great problem, which . . . derived from the success of the Attlee Government. A measure of this success is that if you had said to people in the 1920s and 30s that Britain would soon become a society in which there was full employment, as there was in the 1950s, that it would have a National Health Service which was free and open to everyone and universal, that it would have the Welfare State, guaranteeing to everyone a social security minimum . . . they would not have believed you. . . . When it did come about in the 1950s and '60s, people did not think it was utopia, and they wanted different sorts of things, and so the socialist ideal gradually came under criticism.[246]

The success of the Roman occupation meant more comfortable lives for most everyone in Jerusalem; even the perhaps chronically disaffected youth (of the PFJ) found silver linings on every horizon. The sort of utopian society the Romans have offered makes for better living, certainly, but the "different sort of things" the PFJ want—including freedom from oppression—means the Roman rule must also "gradually [come] under criticism." The world wherein the Pythons came of age had bitten the (socialist) hand that fed it, and it's no surprise to see characters in their films doing the same.

REG: ". . . are two things the Romans have given us. . . "—In the mid-1970s the actions of trade unions raised hackles across political lines. With the pound under such pressure, the country having to go to the IMF for a shoring-up, and inflation ticking upward, the major and minor unions continued to press

their case for larger increases, wanting to get theirs before a clampdown could be implemented. Voices on the left and right bombarded the newspapers and news shows with opinions about the unions' actions and culpability, so much so that *Private Eye*'s Claud Cockburn dedicated a column to the cacophony. Essentially, Cockburn gives a how-to for criticizing the unions without truly ruffling feathers —organized labor was too powerful to be totally denounced, and politicians and pundits knew it.[247] Cockburn could be describing the stop-go PFJ, as well, their trade union–like revolutionary intentions breaking against the seawall of the Roman occupation:

> Always work both sides of the street. *E.g.* describe [Trade Union] leaders as Dictators (or Barons) driving their massed dupes into vile actions. But do not hesitate to accuse them also of palsied incompetence: accuse them of being powerless to control the actions of their mass membership. Again, this helps keep the consensus in good fighting order.
>
> In the same way, make it clear that the [Trade Union] leadership is run by sinisterly cunning doctrinaires Marx-drunk and ruthless in pursuit of evil long-term objectives, and also under the control of bumbling old fogies, ignorant of the simplest facts of modern economic life.[248]

The PFJ leadership is offered to us as both motivated and mealy-mouthed, their minions duped into going on a suicide mission while Reg, for example, stays home nursing a bad back. Reg and Francis do seem to be somewhat Marx-drunk and want to overthrow the empire in months; they are also clearly "ignorant" of the Roman way of life around them, from the benefits of the aqueduct to improved public health. Their rank-and-file remind them, helpfully, of these "simplest facts," and Reg can only answer with a "Shut up!"

The semantic elements of this argument could also very easily be adjusted, and it becomes an attempted diatribe against the postwar and contemporary New Jerusalem in Britain—the Welfare State. By the time the Pythons were in their early adolescence, 1951, "about twenty percent of the British economy was under public ownership," according to Caryl, touching on most of what Reg is allowing the Romans to have contributed.[249] Public health, in the form of a single-payer system (the NHS), access to education for all was increased dramatically, and public works of all kinds were taken fully into government management and control in the late 1940s and into the 1950s. And, Caryl mentions: "It all proved enormously popular."[250] This meant that free market Conservative types like Margaret Thatcher, or middle-of-the-road party men like Labour's Harold Wilson and Jim Callaghan, and even Tory Ted Heath couldn't stop the "consensus" express. When Reg admits to a list of the benefits of Roman occupation—"the sanitation, the medicine, education, wine, public order, irrigation, roads, the freshwater system, and public health,"—he's actually very

close to ticking off the existing and hoped-for "freedom-from-want" Attlee-world of the welfare state in Britain.[251] And if the government didn't directly control all of these areas, it was the Labour government's influence (and dependence) on the trade unions to pick up the slack that kept Britain's New Jerusalem chugging forward—frankly right up to 1978–1979, when changes in the world's economy shunted Britain onto a side track, and the great postwar consensus came to a halt.[252]

MATTHIAS: "And the roads"—The Pythons might have had a more firsthand understanding of this example of Roman beneficence. Roman roads in Britain were critical to the invader and, eventually, the invaded: "London first became an important city not only because it was the first convenient crossing place of the Thames, but also because it was the chief modal point of the Roman road system in England."[253] That being said, the Pythons made no attempt to show any Roman-era structure or remains as they made *Holy Grail*. Arthur and Patsy's walk/ride would have been smoother on a paved Roman road, which are still visible in parts of Britain.[254]

In Judea, the King's Highway and Via Maris (or The Great Trunk Road) were major Roman roads during this period, and there were many minor roads, including at least two (one east-west, one north-south) running right through Jerusalem. Travel to and from Rome was made much easier thanks to these roads, as were troop movements between cities in the empire.

REG: ". . . obviously the roads, the roads go without saying"—Now we've heard the three things that, for many, indicate a thriving civilization: running water, controlled sewers, and maintained roads.[255] An admirer of Cloaca Maxima, "Dionysius of Halicarnassus, writing at the time of Augustus in the late first century B.C., mentions Rome's sewers as one of the most magnificent constructions of Tarquinius Priscus," writes Koloski-Ostrow. "In fact, he measures the greatness of the Roman Empire of his day by the sewers, along with Rome's aqueducts and paved roads."[256] The Greek geographer Strabo shared these views, celebrating the Romans (in favor of the Greeks) for "paving roads, laying out aqueducts, and constructing sewers to wash away filth."[257] James Joyce would see not only the benefits of Roman civilization, but bring in the Jews and the British to boot:

> What was their civilisation? Vast, I allow: but vile. Cloacæ: sewers. The Jews in the wilderness and on the mountaintop said: *It is meet to be here. Let us build an altar to Jehovah*. The Roman, like the Englishman who follows in his footsteps, brought to every new shore on which he set his foot (on our shore he never set it) only his cloacal obsession. He gazed about him in his toga and he said: *It is meet to be here. Let us construct a watercloset*.[258]

Modernist Joyce, like the Pythons, manages to reduce the sum total of the Roman Empire to a WC. The helpful members of the PFJ are simply restating what they've likely heard for many years—that Rome has made Jerusalem more livable.

ANOTHER MASKED COMMANDO: "Irrigation . . . "—We don't actually see any irrigation undertaken in the finished film. There is only talk of aqueducts, and we won't see an actual Roman road, either.[259] These are all mentions from a list shared by those who may have studied the Roman Empire in school.[260] More recently, the influx of Jews into Palestine after World War I, while displacing in situ Arabs, was easily rationalized—"everyone would benefit from improved irrigation, medicine and sanitation."[261]

The conclusions drawn about why Britain so convincingly voted to remain part of the EEC in 1975 are germane here. Jerusalem has been under the thumb of Rome for about ninety-six years by AD 33, and it would seem that those so oppressed would have had ample time to be convinced that the situation was intolerable. The following list, a list agreed upon and even added to by everyone in attendance, gives the reasons why the Roman occupation had, for many common Jews, been far better than tolerable. Life was admittedly better in a safe, clean, and well-administered city.[262] For the people of Great Britain in 1975, foreign "domination" at home could be easily explained away: "The truth revealed by opinion polls is that sovereignty as an issue," Marr writes, "did not concern the public nearly as much as jobs and food prices."[263] Marr continues, describing the PFJ's (and the nationalist left of the Labour Party like Benn and Foot, and the right of the Tories, Powell) cabal mentality perfectly: "It may be that sovereignty is always of absorbing interest to a minority—the more history-minded, politically aware—and of less interest to the rest, except when a loss of sovereignty directly affects daily life and produces resented laws."[264] Everyday Britons of the 1970s wouldn't complain about Common Market membership until food prices jumped, but by then it was too late. They had been warned of this outcome, too. Two months before the day of the referendum, the British government had set up an EEC Referendum Information Office, and on that first day (3 April 1975)- hundreds of phone calls came in, most asking about food prices.[265] The vote for remaining in the EEC reached a majority, anyway. Members of the PFJ have clearly had sovereignty on the mind, but they, too, are nearly overwhelmed by all the benefits of being subject to Rome. When the Brexit Referendum emerged in 2016, the issue of sovereignty regained was

much discussed, and likely helped carry the day for the narrow "Leave the European Union" victory.

OTHER MASKED VOICE: "Medicine . . . "—There are no examples of Roman medicine offered in the finished film. Spiritual healing is the only healing we see.

Roman medicine was a bit dodgier than a passable road or a watertight aqueduct, but still better than some of the local remedies. The Romans (often from Greek influences) used many medical devices (rectal and vaginal specula, trephination tools, levers for setting bones or removing teeth, probes and catheters), many made of brass and finely crafted. Roman physicians were also better trained in anatomy, thanks to many Greek texts and practice on criminals and dead gladiators. They also regularly employed herbal medicines.

The Jews of first-century Judea, on the other hand, had been taught that illness tended to be a result of God's wrath, punishment for misdeeds or inadequate faith, or as a refiner's fire to make men more holy (think Job). As a consequence, "in ancient Israel, unlike Egypt, medicine as a profession was held in low esteem."[266] God was both the deliverer of pestilence and the true healer: "The fact that Yahweh was regarded by the earlier biblical writers as sole healer . . . accounted in part for the negative attitude toward human physicians."[267] There was probably a better chance that in a Romanized city like Jerusalem at this time, a Jew could seek out medical treatment not generally suggested by the priests, who had God's will in mind.

Caring for the health of the temple priests was the temple doctor, whose practice didn't seem to stretch beyond the vested few:

> He was called upon, not only when the priests hurt themselves in the course of their duties . . . but beyond that had an extensive practice since the priests had to go around barefoot on the flagstones of the Temple floor even in winter time, and so easily fell ill. Even more injurious to their health was their diet, which had a high meat content with only water to drink, as wine was forbidden them.[268]

Jeremias also records that there were doctors in virtually every town in the region, they worked on a fee-paying basis, and were lumped in with the manual laborers of the day.[269]

One noble goal of the British Empire had been for many years "the promotion of public health and morality."[270] This was easier said than done. Conditions in Uganda, Nigeria, and Kenya in the 1930s were poor by Britain's standards, with meager budgets stretched thin paying for local health and education, but more money was being spent than if these countries weren't under Britain's colonial wing. In Africa and the West Indies in the early part of the twentieth century

“overall government expenditure on [blacks] was never more than a few shillings per head”:

> For the West Indies a Royal Commission set up in 1938 painted an almost identical picture of past neglect: the social services still “all far from adequate for the needs of the population,” schools ill-staffed, hospitals impoverished, housing “deplorable,” sanitation “primitive in the extreme.” In twenty years almost nothing had been done to fulfil what Britain always claimed was her “positive trust” to her colonial subjects: little to justify the claim.[271]

These empire subjects could ask the “What have they ever done for us” question, as well, but the answer might fairly be “Something, at least.”

OTHER MASKED VOICE: “Education . . . ”—This is one of the “benefits” of Roman occupation for which there is no textual reference in the film, excepting this statement. The only real instruction we see is the Centurion correcting Brian’s Latin.

Education for observant Jews during this period would have been reserved primarily for priestly types, and for the wealthy, according to Jeremias. There were scribes and teachers and “academics” in first-century Jerusalem, though few or none dependent on the Romans for their education.[272] Women from wealthier families *could* be secularly educated, being taught Greek, for example, but in all cases “daughters came behind the sons,” meaning “their education was limited to learning domestic arts, especially needlework and weaving.”[273] “Better to burn the Torah than to teach it to women” was the saying of one ancient scholar.[274] “In every case,” Jeremias concludes, “schools were solely for boys, and not for girls.”[275] The likes of a Judith would have been few and far between in first-century Jerusalem.

This is one of those comments that seems better suited for the British Empire than the Roman one. Education is seen by many as one of the main successes of the British Raj in India, for example. In a lecture delivered in 1893 in Auckland, the Right Rev. W. G. Cowie laid out the benchmarks of the last forty years of British-run education in India, including the distribution of grants-in-aid, the founding of universities and teaching colleges, and educational opportunities for men and women (in an overtly patriarchal native culture). He quotes the former governor of Bombay, Sir Richard Temple, who pointed out the value of this education, especially in controlling the native population: “Among the educated natives, the first fruit of the new education was an improved standard of rectitude and integrity.” Temple concluded: “The men themselves saw that this was the case, and attributed it unhesitatingly to educational influences.”[276] These men were educated to be more British than Indian, he seems to be saying, and

were thereafter more trustworthy. The Romans admittedly provided the people of Jerusalem with many life-improving projects and services, perhaps even knowing that a healthy, well-fed, and educated subject might actually begin to chafe at the subjection. As presented in the film, the power and will of Pilate and his garrison easily deal with any such eruption. Not so in the actual world of the British Empire. As Cowie concludes his speech, he admits that the British educational program in India is sowing dragon's teeth,[277] but nobly admits there is no other conscionable way:

> It is said that there is a growing spirit of discontent amongst the educated classes from the very course which the Government during the last 40 years have followed for the general elevation of the people. The extending and improving of the system of public education has been described as a suicidal policy on the part of the State. How, it has been asked, can the people of India be expected to remain in contented subjection to a European State, when their rulers, through their colleges, make them acquainted with the writings of Milton and Mill, and other prophets of freedom? How can men be satisfied with an autocracy of foreigners, however paternal, when those who exercise it themselves glory in the representative institutions and the constitutional Government of their own native land? These arguments are not to be gainsaid; and it is to be expected that the discontent of the class to whom I have referred will continue to increase. But the Government must not on that account desist from the course that it believes is to be for the best interests of the people.[278]

The British Empire sowed the seeds of its own destruction as it educated its colonial subjects, and at least some in the empire seemed to understand that from the beginning. The Roman Empire as depicted by the Pythons doesn't seem to be nearly as progressive or inward-looking; Pilate can deal with an educated and enlightened Brian on the cross.

Elsewhere in the postwar, inter-colonial period, education has been seen by scholars as one of the crucial catalysts for unrest in Japan. There the postwar experiment to teach democratic principles and move Japan away from feudalism and fealty to the emperor had a similar effect already seen in the later stages of Britain's empire in India—freer thinking that compounds itself. In Farrell's *Blood and Rage*, he traces the wholesale changes made by General MacArthur to Japan's educational system as part of the occupation after the war. Hundreds of thousands of students who (with their parents) had never considered college and then university were suddenly thrust into the competition for this new path to success. These educational experiences varied from public universities to private, promising more than could be delivered in the rubble of postwar Japan, and disaffected students (those who might feel they were in a diploma mill with no real prospects) formed and joined student groups, which proliferated in the late 1940s and beyond. Farrell points out that these easy pickings were taken advantage of by Japanese Communists[279] (thousands of whom had recently been

released from prisons), leading to hundreds of thousands of students and recent graduates who saw a world they wanted to change utterly.[280] The largest and most influential Japanese student association, the *Zengakuren*, was controlled almost completely by the Japanese Communist Party, and its goals and practices aligned with the JCP's as they moved through the 1950s and toward the portentous 1960s.[281] MacArthur had a noble goal: Japanese youth could best recover from their parents' folly and Japan's feudalism by not only becoming educated, but by being allowed to "evaluate critically and intelligently the content of instruction," as well as "engage in free and unrestricted discussion of issues involving political, civil, and religious liberties."[282] This largesse led to the youth of Japan growing into cadres that wanted to not only throw off their parents' oppressions (including imperial fascism), but also the paternalistic Americans who invaded as a spoil of war, and who were, ironically, making this education available.

This is the very kind of outcome that the Romans hoped to avoid by not seeing to the education of the Jews. The insularity and refusal-to-be-governed mentality of the Jewish culture of this time, however, as well as their willingness to self-educate, kept the embers of perpetual revolution fanned anyway.

OTHER MASKED VOICE: "Health . . . "—Where there is a higher degree of cleanliness there tends to be better health, certainly. The fact that there may have been regular waste removal from the streets and an elevated sense of the need for ritual purity—washing with water—means good health might have been more possible in Jerusalem.[283] Hand washing, both before and after meals, a regular practice, may have gone farther than any other routine in keeping people healthy.[284] Also, staying away from undercooked and parasite-laden Roman foods likely helped in overall healthiness.[285] Significantly, Jeremias spends very little time discussing the health of first-century Jerusalemites, likely because there isn't much evidence to draw conclusions. As depicted in the film, the only real threat to a non-Roman's health is Pilate's willingness to decorate crosses.

COMMANDO NEARER THE FRONT: "And the wine . . . "—King and Stager note that the Jews didn't have to thank the Romans for wine, necessarily, since they'd made and consumed it regularly for generations: "Mentioned 185 times in the Hebrew Bible, wine served as the commonly consumed beverage in ancient Israel, since water was often contaminated."[286] Priests, though, "were . . . forbidden wine during their days of duty," and had to drink water only.[287] It could be that the PFJ simply liked Roman wine better, or it's mentioned because the Pythons know Italy as a home to significant wine production, and that wine

making and consumption were important to Roman culture and cultus across the empire. Magness notes that the "gentile" Roman wine should have been off-limits for more sectarian Jews, though many Italian amphorae have been discovered in the homes of the Jewish elite. She cites Nahman Avigad, who concludes: "It would seem there have always been more and less observant Jews."[288]

A sort of sideways suggestion that the Romans *did* provide wine (and other necessities) to the Jewish population in first-century Jerusalem can be found in Jeremias, in the section "Local Trade":

> Rabbinic literature provides a further piece of evidence on the chief requirements of foodstuffs in Jerusalem. . . . At the time of the outbreak of rebellion against Rome [three councilors] declared that they would supply the city with food for twenty-one years. The first intended to furnish wheat and barley, the second wine, salt and oil, the third wood. The only omission here is cattle.[289]

Clearly this indicates that the city leaders were concerned about loss of certain foodstuffs should the Romans be driven out, and then lay siege to the city. These were items that may have been produced in and around Jerusalem, but not in sufficient amounts without Roman-protected importations. Francis will conclude this section of the list by saying, in relation to Roman wine: "Yeah, yeah. That's something we'd really miss, Reg, if the Romans left." It looks like they might also "miss" wheat, barley, salt, oil, wood, and perhaps cattle, if the Romans left.[290]

MASKED COMMANDO AT BACK: "Public baths"—Given the Jews' views on modesty it's unlikely that even the Romans were able to build and promote the public bath concept in Jerusalem proper, at least during the first century. There were baths in relation to the temple, Jeremias notes, given that ritual purification was required, and laborers were employed specifically to maintain these baths.[291] As Koloski-Ostrow demonstrates, most Roman cities were expected to have public baths and public latrines; Jerusalem, being a Jewish city occupied by the Romans, seems to be an exception.[292] There have been private baths (and foot baths), and ritual baths (*mikveh*) found in various places in the city, but the clearly "public bath" has remained elusive, according to Levine: "While a number of baths (i.e., tubs) and bathrooms were found in the Upper City—some that even functioned as steam rooms with heating units (hypocausts) beneath the floors—no public bathhouses have been discovered to date [2002] in Second Temple Jerusalem, and none is ever mentioned in any literary source."[293] Levine goes on to say that it's possible the baths have simply yet to be discovered, archaeologically, and/or these bathhouses were so common

that they weren't mentioned in writing; but also, such baths might not exist because the Jews of Jerusalem did not embrace the more public version of bathing that Romans (and others) did.[294]

After the destruction of Jerusalem in the early 70s, the rebuilding around the new Hadrianic "Aelia Capitolina" (c. 135) *did* see the erection of Roman public baths, likely by and for Rome's Tenth Legion. This would have occurred about one hundred years after the events depicted in the film. Aelia Capitolina was a Roman-built city sited squarely on the remains of Jerusalem, and would be known as such for almost five hundred years.

This is also one of the ironies that is turned back on itself upon closer inspection. In the scene, Reg is being politely gainsaid by his siblings, who are helpfully pointing out the *positive* aspects of the Roman presence in Jerusalem (and by extension, in any occupied city where public works would/could be erected). This ironic but factual stream of thought can't be denied or second-guessed—it can only be shunted by a very Cleese-like, "Shut up!"[295]

The other penny waiting to drop is the implication that thanks to the advent of public baths, the "sanitation" and "public health" of the city and its inhabitants have concomitantly improved—this is clearly accepted as a given by the assembled PFJ. As Mitchell points out much later, however, the typical Roman public bath (had there been one in Jerusalem to enjoy) would likely have been an initially refreshing but ultimately foul place, with perhaps predictable health consequences. Mitchell sounds positively Reg-like, at least for a moment:

> Despite their large multi-seat public latrines with washing facilities, sewer systems, sanitation legislation, fountains and piped drinking water from aqueducts, we see the widespread presence of whipworm (*Trichuris trichiura*), roundworm (*Ascaris lumbricoides*) and *Entamoeba histolytica* that causes dysentery. This would suggest that the public sanitation measures were insufficient to protect the population from parasites spread by fecal contamination. Ectoparasites such as fleas, head lice, body lice, pubic lice and bed bugs were also present, and delousing combs have been found. The evidence fails to demonstrate that the Roman culture of regular bathing in the public baths reduced the prevalence of these parasites.[296]

Again, there's no indication that the PFJ are a "Jewish" political or religious group (in fact, they style themselves as a terrorist cell who hate the Romans "a lot"—that's all), though they may be, and perhaps are a more sectarian "splitter" like the Essenes, or Jewish political group like the Zealots. (Brian does make sure he mentions that his last name is "Cohen," meaning he at least thinks they are cousinly Jewish rebels.) In either case, the PFJ's use of the very Roman (pagan) public baths isn't a given, and they'll fight this religious or political intermeddling as they would anything else offered by their occupiers. Perhaps

what Reg (or Cleese and the Pythons?) is really saying is that what once appeared as a positive aspect of the Roman occupation—the improvement of public works and public health—has instead further afflicted the people of Jerusalem.[297] Any colonized peoples could and have voiced similar concerns. The British tended to build schools and roads, bridges and railways, hospitals and sewers wherever they planted the Union Jack, but those improvements didn't keep the people of India, Malaya, or Palestine from feeling subjugated and disenfranchised.[298] The PFJ have fallen prey to what Koloski-Ostrow calls the "old view" of Roman life:

> While some work has begun to explore the nature of hygiene and the quality of living conditions in ancient Rome, an old view persists, established over the last hundred years and propagated by a number of scholars, even those writing on Roman medicine. The argument states that the very presence of sewers, public latrines, baths, and aqueducts in the city must reflect a serious Roman concern for health and hygiene. Because the notion seems so logical to our modern, Western, sewer-lined outlook, it has been perpetuated.[299]

The Pythons grew up during this "hundred-years" time of propagation, so their view that the Roman way of life must have been a cleaner, more orderly life is understandable. Except for Reg as leader of the PFJ. Reg is the standard-bearer for the movement, and he can't let the realities of a better daily life de-yellow his jaundiced views of the Roman Empire. He is the production team of *The British Empire* (1972) documentary that can cast into a harsh light the failings, inadequacies, and "petty atrocities"[300] perpetrated by the well-intentioned empire, demanding an answer to an Anglo version of "What have the Romans ever done for us?" (The insulted viewers and letter writers are Xerxes and friends who raise timorous hand to rebut.)[301] What have the Romans done for the people of Jerusalem? The answer, as Mitchell points out, could have been that the Romans provided whipworm, roundworm, and dysentery. Characteristically, the Pythons are talking as much about themselves as they are about the Jews and Romans. The arguments made during the Pythons' lifetimes to support and defend British imperialism were quite similar—after all, India has benefited immensely from its British-built railway system, bridges, and manufacturing industries, hasn't it?[302]

STAN: "And it's safe to walk in the streets at night"—The level of safety provided by the Romans is estimable and even supportable: "The condition of things was the same for the Romans of the second century of the Christian era. To the period of war had succeeded the period of organization. After having conquered the world, Rome 'pacified' it."[303] This wouldn't be true between

about 68 and 70, when the Holy City was under constant siege by the Romans from without. Inside the city, sicarii assassins crept through the streets at night, ready to knife anyone suspected of being a Roman sympathizer or who might be willing to surrender the city or even "make peace."[304]

FRANCIS: "They certainly know how to keep order. . . they're the only ones who could in a place like this"—This is one of those many moments in the film where the Pythons are commenting on both Jewish history and contemporary British events. First the Jewish reference. Smallwood would have agreed with Francis—"in fairness to the procurators it must be admitted that governing Judaea was a tough proposition"—but it wouldn't be until *after* the year 50 that the series of procurators and their understaffed Roman garrisons began to have regular trouble keeping order."[305] Eleven years after the events depicted in the film, the façade of order begins to crack: "The story of the period 44–66 is largely the story of the progressive breakdown of law and order throughout the province."[306] This disorder would lead to Jerusalem's destruction by Roman troops in 70.

Quite a bit earlier than the film's setting, in 133 BC, King Attalus III of Pergamum died, leaving no heir. A longtime ally of Rome, Attalus III "left his kingdom to Rome," Richard writes. "Fearing a popular revolt when he died, he knew that the Romans would maintain order. . . ."[307] This was likely a good part of the reason that many regions later also welcomed Roman control, according to Kotker:

> But wherever Roman legionaries went, they established order and the rule of Roman law. Where before there had been squabbling city-states, constantly at war with one another, princes murdering their brothers to gain thrones, petty monarchs vying for a few square miles of land, pirates terrorizing the sea lanes, and highwaymen robbing travelers, there was now peace and safety. . . . Most of the conquered nations accepted Roman rule.[308]

But order could be illusory, or at best short-lived, especially in Jerusalem: "It is no wonder that the constant threat of messianic risings and brigandage made the procurators so nervous that they were perhaps over-severe when they had to face trouble," Smallwood writes. "Then a vicious circle was created: Roman severity inflamed Jewish nationalist antagonism to Rome, and this in turn led to fresh disturbances for the Romans to suppress.[309] These same prefects and procurators also had to deal with Jews fighting with Samaritans and Gentiles and Greeks, and with other Jews—a tall order, the PFJ know too well. Smallwood continues:

> The Jews' peculiar combination of what the ancient world regarded as fanaticism on both the political and the religious planes made them extremely difficult to handle, and even from Josephus' pro-Jewish

> narrative it is clear that they were often in the wrong and were responsible for disturbances, and that when trouble occurred the fault did not always lie with the Roman administration.[310]

At the heart of Britain's colonial influence in the Middle East, the Balfour Declaration in 1917 had acknowledged the rights of Jews in Palestine, just after the McMahon-Hussein agreements had already quid pro quo given the nod to *Arab* control of Palestine if the Arabs rose against the Ottoman Empire during World War I.[311] Schneer writes of the contested Declaration: "Because it was unpredictable and characterized by contradictions, deceptions, misinterpretations, and wishful thinking, the lead-up to the Balfour Declaration . . . produced a murderous harvest, and we go on harvesting even today."[312] It seems that neither Turks nor Brits, Arabs nor Jews could control "a place like this." By 1948, the British-administered Mandatory Palestine was moving into history, and the British Empire was growing smaller and smaller.

The specter of "ungovernability" was everywhere in 1970s Britain. Jenkins notes, for example, that crime had been on the rise since the Pythons' youth:

> The increases in crime which was the cause of such anxiety was real enough, even when allowances are made for increases and changes in the reporting of crimes. Violent crimes had turned sharply upwards from the mid-1950s and rose steeply through the 1960s. Reported crimes against the person increased from 38,000 in 1969 to 95,000 in 1979.[313] The rise was especially alarming among young persons.[314]

Starting with the coal miners' wresting control of the country's narrative in 1972 and leading inexorably through the eruption of punk music and violence and the events of the Winter of Discontent—to many, Britain seemed untethered and ungovernable.[315] After about 1968 the latter term appears hundreds of times in British newspapers, often referring to various banana republics,[316] but increasingly—as the 1970s move on—to Britain herself. There was even talk of a kind of palace coup in May 1968, when several leading figures—a newspaper baron, his editor-in-chief, a former chief of the Defence Staff, and the government's "chief scientific adviser"[317]—gathered to discuss the state of the Wilson administration, the country, and what could be done to effect immediate change. From Marr:

> There is no evidence that the talk of a coup was truly serious, or that the security services were involved, as has been publicly asserted since. Yet the Cecil King story counts in two ways. First, it gives some indication of the fevered and at times almost hysterical mood about Wilson and the condition of the country that had built up by the late sixties—a time now more generally remembered as golden, chic and successful. A heady cocktail of rising crime, student rioting, inflation, civil rights protests in Northern Ireland and embarrassments abroad had convinced some that the country was ungovernable.[318]

Francis sounds as if he could have been the fifth at this May 1968[319] tryst, perhaps ready to offer the Romans as effective rulers. Just a few years later it was Sir Walter Walker, former Commander-in-Chief of Allied Forces Northern Europe, who busied himself in 1974 starting an anti-Communist league, and then —since the country was sliding down the slippery slope—he planned for a kind of civilian standing army to fight long-haired Communism in the form of industrial anarchists in the streets, if and when that became necessary.[320] So many Britons seemed to find this new call for order and security appealing that by September 1974, MP Airey Neaves was speaking out in Parliament about the dangers of such private armies. Neaves, Margaret Thatcher's man,[321] so to speak, worried that the organizations might attract "political extremists" rather than patriots.[322] Sadly and ironically, Neaves would be killed by a car bomb, set by the IRA, on 30 March 1979, while Lord Mountbatten, who *supported* Walker wholeheartedly, was himself killed by an IRA bomb in August 1979. With these types of deaths—targeted and indiscriminate—and continually dreary headlines during the Winter of Discontent 1978–1979, it's easy to see why many in Britain felt discouraged about the future.

Heath and the Tories would famously ask in 1974 "Who governs Britain?" and the answer was not Heath, nor the Tories, and not even Labour (thanks to a hung parliament), but the trade unions. Even that could only last so long. Going hat in hand[323] to the IMF in 1976 meant that the Americans and other international interests were setting the agenda for Britain, fiscally, since she couldn't get her own house in order. Days lost to strike actions ballooned, into the tens of millions by the end of the decade, and even successful strikes (where the union received its increase) didn't improve production; Britain was falling further and further behind:

> It was this level of industrial inertia and the compounded results that would lead to Heath's ousting, a lackluster Labour win in 1974, a torpid mid-1970s that included supplication to the IMF, and the staggering Tory victory in 1979, led by Margaret Thatcher as an organized labor-crusher. As early as October 1970 (just after Labour somehow lost the [General Election]) one former Labour minister opined about the stop-and-go (-and-stop) policies of the party tied inextricably to the labour unions; these policies were "the perfect prescription for keeping Labour out of power through all eternity."[324]

By the time James Callaghan stepped in for Harold Wilson in 1976 the unions were lining up for enormous pay increases, raises that Wilson and Heath before him had tried to stem, and that the overheated economy couldn't possibly afford. This malaise also gave rise, according to Bogdanor, to an increase in "nationalism and protest parties," further diminishing the possibility of single-

party rule, and leading directly to Callaghan's inability to re-form a coalition in 1979.[325] Bogdanor continues:

> People were worried about political decline as well as economic decline. Some people felt in the '70s, particularly at the time of the Winter of Discontent in '78/'79, but also in '74, that they were looking into an abyss, that there was something very wrong with the country. Thatcherism was born out of that. It is a British equivalent of Gaullism in France, born out of economic and political decline.[326]

The very real question being asked by many was whether the country could be run without the trade unions' say-so, and had ungovernability by an elected body given way to governance by a self-imposed authority—not unlike a dominating Roman presence in the lives of the Jewish rebels of the PFJ. In an article leading up to the October 1974 election, David Wood asks the question: "Who can govern the ungovernable?":

> Mr. Wilson and Labour ministers have spent most of the week trying to establish their claim that Labour alone can carry Britain through the gathering crisis in conditions of industrial peace. One by one they have come forward to boast that they have yielded all the TUC's demands. One by one they have offered policy prospectuses that anticipate, they hope, the TUC's next demands. In return, the TUC has subscribed to the so-called social contract, although even Labour ministers know, from painful past experience and with the Ford strike before their eyes, that the TUC has neither the constitutional power nor the moral authority to sign a contract of any kind.[327]

It seemed to many that even though Labour had been in opposition since 1970, it was Labour and the trade unions—and more directly the trade unions themselves—calling the shots, since the unions had the power to make things stop or make things go across Britain.

FRANCIS: ". . . only ones who could in a place like this"—This comment elicits a knowing laugh from everyone excepting Reg, whose incendiary moment is being stepped on. They are all agreeing that they can't police themselves. This seems like a particularly English, not Jewish, reference, with the Pythons referring to themselves, and may be most directly connected to the perception of Britain spiraling out of control in the 1970s. In May 1975 American newsman Eric Sevareid famously said that Britain was "drifting slowly toward ungovernability," setting off a firestorm in Britain of denials (from Wilson and friends) and affirmations (from many on the Right). A banner headline in the *Wall Street Journal* had just days earlier proclaimed "Goodbye, Great Britain."[328] For those in the know across the pond, the writing seemed to be clearly on the wall, and on newspaper and monograph pages. Books like Christopher Booker's *The Seventies* (1980), written just as the decade ended, and *From Anger to Apathy* (2007) by Mark Garnett, tend to underscore this bleak assessment. George Bernstein's *The Myth of the Decline* (2004), Andy Beckett's

When the Lights Went Out (2009), and Black, Pemberton, and Thane's *Reassessing 1970s Britain* (2013), however, push back at these "declinist" versions of history, providing more nuanced explanations of the days' events, drawing conclusions for which banner headlines are ill-suited.

For the Pythons, the evidence of an ungovernable Jerusalem could be found, of course, with a religious body telling the State how to do its business in relation to Jesus, for example, followed by the scourge of the Zealots and the chaos leading up to the sack of the city in 70. Those are historical and defensible examples. Outside their windows in Britain, "order" seemed to be a thing hoped for, without much evidence, to paraphrase Hebrews. The labor-related stoppages put everyone in a bind; inflation cut into spending on all fronts; school-leavers could find few jobs; policemen were caught up in organized crime; the military and Britain's international influence were shrinking; some youth opted for loud music, anarchy, and the dole; the Callaghan government had no leverage and struggled to lead; and, in 1976, Britain's international financial prestige took a gut-punch. And this was all before the infamous Winter of Discontent. These were all historical and defensible examples available as the Pythons wrote and produced *Life of Brian*.

So who are the "only ones who could [keep order] in a place like this"? In reality for the film's setting, Pilate and the Romans effectively and brutally enforced Roman rule in Judea, which is why he is remembered (by Philo and Josephus, for example), and the PFJ grudgingly acknowledge there is no other way. Prior to the Romans coming to stay, the Jewish authorities had for generations[329] managed to maintain order in this overtly religious group, a laudable feat. Many in Britain in the seventies saw the erosion of such authority and accountability in their day as a worrying sign of the times, so it's no surprise to hear about a bleak future, and that some kind of revolution was coming, even inevitable.

REG: ". . . and public health"—Reg and the PFJ seem to agree here that the coming of the Romans brought all sorts of improvements in their daily lives, and in the life and health of the city. On the surface, it does seem to make sense that improved "sanitation" conditions would improve "public health," but both Mitchell and Koloski-Ostrow (and many others) have since observed the situation conditions as more nuanced. Paleoparasitologist Piers Mitchell discusses the actual *increase* in infection across the empire, thanks to the increased trade (of infested foods) from city to city, and the warm, shared bath waters (which went unchanged for long periods) in the public baths, among

other vectors. Sanitary improvements in the city might have, ironically, made life less hygienic. One example cited by Mitchell seems a win-win, but there's a third, darker side. The human waste that was so carefully washed out of the public latrines or scooped from private toilets and cesspits, for example, often was sold and carried straight into nearby agricultural fields as fertilizer. The latrine was then clean, which seems like a win, and the crops were given some much-needed biological nourishment in the otherwise sandy soils, another win. The sandal waiting to drop is an ominous one, according to Mitchell:

> The Romans were known to have used the human feces collected from towns to fertilize crops growing in the fields. . . . This has been shown in modern research to increase crop yields. . . . However, unless the feces are composted for many months before being added to the fields, this can result in the spread of viable parasite eggs to the plants grown. . . . Hence, it may be the use of human feces as crop fertilizer under the Romans that led to an increase in roundworm and whipworm despite their use of sanitation technologies.[330]

So the good intention of keeping a cleaner latrine led to a higher rate of disease, which sounds quite Pythonesque. Reg is perhaps justified in his "Shut up!" then. In this way, the Roman Empire couldn't claim any higher level of hygiene than that found in non-Romanized countries, or even in the supposedly darker early Middle Ages, where *Holy Grail* hung its hat.[331]

REG: "All right. But apart from the sanitation, the medicine, education, wine, public order, irrigation, roads, the freshwater system, and public health—what have the Romans ever done for us?"—A couple of reads here. First, this revision of Reg's diatribe of decline sounds very much like what came to be known as "declinism." The same chord struck by many in and just after the 1970s was that decline had set in, and that everything just got worse and worse. The media had taken up the talking points of the parties, and then the parties recycled the media predictions, and then candidates quote the media, and decline became a reality. Lawrence Black suggests a cultural move from actual decline to just perceived decline, even though this declinism flavored readings of the decade's tea leaves for long after.[332] The helpful terrorists in front of Reg may just be the revisionists who saw the 1970s as more nuanced than the decliners.

Second, this list leaps right off the pages of more contemporary sources, but in relation to the British Empire. The effects of the empire on its colonies and protectorates had been cataloged for decades, positive and negative. The struggles to get and then hold Egypt, for example, were well-rewarded as Cairo's stock exchange flourished under British control, and fortunes were made. Under Lord Cromer at the turn of the century, Egyptian prosperity increased; taxes

were reduced; the “administrative and judicial systems” were improved, as were education, tourism, and the telephone system; and “vast irrigation works which nearly doubled the crop area” could be claimed as a result of the British presence.[333] Still, these were only possible with the dominating presence of British troops and administration; strangers in a strange land weren’t always welcomed. In Burma, British works—railroads, “public health work, agricultural improvements and so on” completely failed to win widespread public approval; the Burmese remained “a nation of rebels.”[334] Further, in India there was a similar story, though to a greater degree given India’s place as the “jewel in the crown.” Brendon notes that “good government was the raison d’être of the Raj,” with Viceroy Lord Mayo listing “Sanitation, Education, Hospitals, Roads, Bridges, [and] Navigation” as the colonizers’ accomplishments in just “half a century.”[335] British colonial efforts often improved lives, but inevitably destroyed centuries-old ways of life. Reg and the PFJ are citing from the Romans, yes, but also their shared history of the British Empire as taught in grammar schools.

In 1972 a new and fashionably revisionist thirteen-part series, *The British Empire*, aired on the BBC, and the public response was immediate. In April the *Daily Telegraph* printed a series of reactions from outraged viewers.[336] Letters from veterans and socialites came in, as well as historians, journalists, television figures, and even the head of the BBC.[337] Most viewers were certain that producers had decided to focus on only the darkest, least flattering events in the empire’s history, undermining entirely the British attempts to make the world a better place. One respondent, Kathleen Wayland, complained about what was “omitted” from the series, particularly those things that *ennobled* the empire and its role, and she provided a helpful list: “Peace, order, justice, schools, communications, public health, growing trade and prosperity.”[338] This line was picked up and quoted by the *Telegraph* editorial staff, and was reprinted several times—a laundry list of what was *right* with the empire. It’s as if Lady Wayland is quoting the frustrated Reg before he can cinematically say anything.

Reg’s acknowledgments and Lady Wayland’s aplomb are versions of what British PM Harold Macmillan had famously said in July 1957 in the midst of a long Conservative term of leadership. Speaking at a Tory fete in Bedford, Macmillan reminded the faithful that “most of our people have never had it so good.”[339] He cited a robust economy, plenty of jobs, and Britain’s high place on the world scene, and predicted a bright and prosperous future.[340] Two years later, voters would seemingly agree with him, giving the Tories an increased majority

in the 1959 General Election. The Goons used the phrase—ironically, of course—a number of times during the latter part of *The Goon Show*, especially when the penurious Grytpype-Thynne and Moriarty could be found dining on boiled newspapers, cutlery, laundry soup, or fish bones.[341] Macmillan's point was that with life going so very well after the war and the ending of postwar scarcities, no one—not even the Labour opposition—had the right to complain.[342]

This is certainly an impressive list, but it's not complete. One of the most important allowances the Romans made for the Jews involved religious liberty. If Reg and his PFJ activists are practicing Jews, then they are only such because the Romans decided it was the best way to keep order in Judea. Very little of the film involves Jewish life or rituals, but we have seen a likely representative of the Sanhedrin officiating at a religiously sanctioned stoning that Roman guards allowed. Elsewhere in the empire, Rome reserved that privilege for herself as part of *jus gladii*—the right to take or spare a life. In Judea, the Jewish religious authorities held that power for noncapital crimes (until well into Pilate's prefecture). So Rome went out of its way over the years to not only avoid "religious persecution," but to protect those liberties: "When dealing with the Jews of the Dispersion, it was not enough for Rome just to say that they should have religious liberty," Smallwood notes. "Definite steps had to be taken to ensure that their Gentile neighbours respected that liberty and did not molest them when they exercised it."[343] Julius Caesar and Augustus managed "the details of Rome's methods of protecting the Jews," and later emperors and provincial governors wrote many letters "informing or reminding [cities in the eastern empire] that the Jews had certain rights and were not to be molested in the exercise of them."[344] Ultimately, they could worship as they saw fit, they did not have to participate in the Imperial cult or house soldiers, and were also encouraged, even cautioned (by Claudius) to practice religious toleration themselves. So we can add an eleventh gift (not forgetting "Brought peace") from the Romans to the Jews—religious liberty[345]—and Reg's list becomes more accurate (and more frustrating, to Reg).

Proof that the Python influence continues to be felt, a subheading in the first chapter of Andrew Marr's *A History of Modern Britain* is titled "What the Romans Did for Us."[346] Versions of the phrase have been used in scholarly settings dozens of times since 1979. Without putting too fine a point on it, Marr is aligning the postwar Attlee government with the Roman Empire, suggesting that the influence, oversight, and overreach of both states are comparable. The Britain that the Pythons grew up in may have seemed as controlled and managed

by the Labour government as Reg and the PFJ view their Roman occupancy—bled white by taxation and restricted by few choices, but with a list of begrudged benefits that can be ticked off at a moment's notice. All this order and restriction and, yes, safety is seen to dissipate after the advent of the Progressive Society and the long march into the uncertain 1970s. Before all that, the Attlee Labour government

> created the National Health Service. It brought in welfare payments and state insurance from "cradle to grave." It nationalized the Bank of England, the coal industry, which was then responsible for 90 percent of Britain's energy needs, and eventually the iron and steel industry, too. It withdrew from India. It demobilized much of the vast army, air force and navy.[347]

The list goes on, and includes the retrofitting of armament factories to consumer goods production, thousands of new homes, a reworked school system, food acquisition and distribution, fighting Communism overseas, developing the atomic bomb, and it even organized a positive and forward-looking Festival of Britain to cheer weary citizens.[348] This remarkable set of accomplishments was perceived in varied ways, of course. For those who had *never* had access to dental or vision care, the new NHS was a life-changer; for those who feared the influence of government in every financial institution, industry, and mode of transportation, it was far more Orwellian. It's easy to see how the Pythons (and others more conservative) could make the connections to the securely oppressive mantle Rome had draped over Jerusalem.

XERXES: "Brought peace!"—As hard as it might be to imagine, Xerxes's halting suggestion might be as accurate (and even prescient) as anything that's been said, according to Carl Richard, and specifically in regard to our first-century time period:

> For all of its horrible abuses, the system of imperial government established by Augustus [fl. 27 BC–AD 14] created unprecedented security, stability, and prosperity throughout the Western world for over two centuries. In the process it saved the political, cultural, and social heritage of Greece and Rome, which had been threatened by the instability, chaos, and violence of the late Roman republic.[349]

Ironically, the order imposed by the Romans led to peace, making possible the sharing of all the goods (medicine, infrastructure, education) saved from Roman chaos, to the current benefit of Judea and Jerusalem. To this neat syllogism the practical but incendiary (and frustrated) Reg can only say "Shut up!"

This list of Roman contributions to the well-being of the Jewish people having been presented, Reg still isn't ready to acknowledge the Romans' right to occupy Judea. (That won't happen until later, when Reg and the PFJ climb down from their active revolutionary platform, and leave Brian on the cross.) This

same buildup and then letdown was happening as the Pythons were writing the film, and it was colloquially known in Great Britain as "devolution." After years of stillborn attempts to get various governments to push through devolution legislation—so that Scotland and Wales could shake off the "occupying" English—the concerned players in Wales and Scotland finally had their referendum on 1 March 1979. But faced with the inevitably challenging changes such a separation would bring, and perhaps because many Welsh and Scottish citizens could tick off their own lists of the benefits of a united United Kingdom—voters acted in a familiar, cautious, way. Wales defeated the proposal by a four-to-one margin, while Scottish voters, slightly more than half, voted in favor. Even so, the minimum 40 percent threshold for voter participation was not reached, and both devolution efforts failed.[350] Similarly, given the opportunity to finally and with prejudice denounce the Roman Empire and its right to occupation, most of the PFJ demur, grateful for the sanitation, education, roads, medicine. . . .

REG *(scornfully)*: "Peace, yes . . . shut up!"—Cool-and-officious-but-easily-frustrated Cleese characters often erupt this way, including in Ep. 11 of *Flying Circus*, where Dove (Cleese) shouts off-camera at his wife to "Shut up!"[351]

> Cleese's characters often try and control their environments by resorting to this (shutting off or shouting down opposition), including the nervy interviewer (Ep. 1), the ex-RSM (Ep. 4), the psychiatrist (Ep. 13), Praline (Ep. 18), Jim the TV commentator (Ep. 20), and so on. On *The Goon Show*,[352] "Shut up, Eccles!" had become a catchphrase, while Minnie Bannister and Henry Crun often shouted "shut up" to each other.[353]

In the penultimate sequence of *I'm All Right Jack*, when Stanley is on trial for inciting to riot, Mr. Kite's daughter begins to cry. Mr. Kite tells her to "Shut up!", and then tells his wife the same, and the proceeding moves on, both women back in their place.

The Reg of the outside world, Reg Birch, Maoist union executive, also found that his colleagues, even those on the far left with him, didn't always (or even often) see eye to eye. Birch regularly locked horns with Hugh Scanlon and John Boyd,[354] men on the left and right of the AUEW leadership, respectively, and would even vote against what might be considered leftist orthodoxy, precipitating the PFJ's version of parliamentary trade unionism:

> [This] may also explain why, on occasion, Mr Birch has voted in solidarity with Mr Boyd, rather than his natural, if more orthodox, left-wing colleagues. Indeed the voting record of the AUEW's executive would show some very strange alignments. *All of which points to the danger of attempting to import the standards of conventional parliamentary politics into analysis of the trade union movement. It can only be misleading* and, in the case of the AUEW, destructive of serious analysis. Consider, on any single trade union question there are at least three answers. Because most leading trade unionists are first and

> foremost trade union patriots, they will divide in all sorts of ways depending on their own experience and estimation of the interests of the union. Even the allegedly disciplined battalions of the [Communist Party] have found themselves on different sides on a number of occasions.[355]

The PFJ is attempting to function as a terroristic parliamentary trade union—Carlos meets Mr. Kite, essentially—and the results will be as jumbled and unsatisfactory as might be expected.

Instantly everyone leaps into various ill-concealed hiding places—It's clear immediately that in this room and in the small city itself there would be very few places to hide. Josephus and his coconspirators were able to hide in the tunnels and caverns beneath Jotapata, though the Romans likely could have waited them out, eventually forcing them to appear, as evidenced by Josephus's own description of the vain hopes of other "tyrants" and "robbers":

> So now the last hope which supported the tyrants, and that crew of robbers who were with them, was in the caves and caverns underground; whither, if they could once fly, they did not expect to be searched for; but endeavored, that after the whole city should be destroyed, and the Romans gone away, they might come out again, and escape from them. This was no better than a dream of theirs; for they were not able to lie hid either from God or from the Romans.[356]

The anti-Roman prophets and Zealots had wisely made their homes in the caves and wastes of the deserts. What the PFJ won't be able to appreciate is the challenge of urban terrorism, since for contemporary terror operations, "the main scene of the action was in the countryside."[357] The South and Central American (and even Asian) guerrilla groups of the 1950s and 1960s realized very quickly that the countryside offered myriad hiding places and friendly enclaves, while the city offered something else entirely: "Castro and Guevara were firmly convinced that the city was the 'graveyard' of the revolutionary freedom fighter."[358] Brian will later be clapped on the shoulder and taken into custody near his home, in a populated section of the city.

REG: "What went wrong?"—This pessimistic tone *should* have been what the wet PFJ and most revolutionary groups kept on hand for their inevitable failures, but even collateral, accidental success breeds optimism. The terror forces who managed to assassinate their way into power in 66 and 67 in Jerusalem built on that accomplishment by sending forces to attack the Herodian fortresses at Jericho and Machaeros.[359] Those smallish garrisons were routed, and victories claimed for the Jewish rebels. The sideways victory for Reg, and thanks only to Brian's graffiti skills, is used as the springboard for the next and more ambitious assault, the attempt on Pilate's wife. The Jewish rebels of 66–67 were able to claim victories and justify more actions and more bloodshed. In

other cities, Greeks and Jews began killing one another, the Greeks "settling old scores" against the Jewish minority, according to Smallwood, and anarchy reigned.[360] The temporary "breakdown of Roman authority" in the region—after procurators fled but before Roman troop reinforcements could arrive—led rebels to the fatally optimistic conclusion that Rome's days in the region were numbered.

The "What went wrong?" paranoia is also endemic to the period of the film's production, and is found on both sides of the Atlantic. Reg and the PFJ hide their anti-Roman sentiments—they meet in small numbers, keep to themselves, shout in darkened garrets and whisper in the streets—because they do indeed "know the penalty" for sedition.[361] But this paranoia is also without, in the world beyond the film; and as is so often the case, the outside world informs the world of a Python film.[362] The immediate period leading up to the writing and filming of *Life of Brian* coincided with one of the most infamous revelations in modern political history, the Watergate affair. Palin records and comments on many of the names and events from Nixon's administration, right through to his jubilation at the Watergate investigation results, Nixon's resignation, and the prison sentences for those involved in breakins and cover-ups.[363] The Nixonian paranoia crept everywhere during these years, finding its way into many Hollywood films—*The Conversation*, *The Parallax View*, *Three Days of the Condor*, *All the President's Men*, and others—and the depths of secrecy and paranoia of Nixon's administration, and especially Nixon the man, had only become more apparent as the subpoenaed White House tapes emerged.[364] It's no surprise, then, that the PFJ want to whisper their anti-Roman epithets when in public, hide as they plot and plan, and eventually distance themselves from their man for crimes originally committed in "solidarity."

Jenkins discusses a recent book on American political paranoia by Richard Hofstader,[365] and the definitions ring quite familiar, especially remembering Reg's very recent laundry list of complaints the Roman occupiers:

> The conspiracy is always "gigantic" or "vast"; the message is always apocalyptic; it is always a turning point; time is always running out. The enemy is firmly ensconced in high places; usually he controls the press. The paranoid is often a pedant. "The enemy, for example, may be the cosmopolitan intellectual, but the paranoid will out-do him in the apparatus of scholarship, even of pedantry." Paranoid literature tends to begin with defensible assumptions but proceeds, through amassing facts or what appear to be facts, towards an overwhelming proof of the conspiracy and a total, or final, solution of the crisis brought about by conspirators.[366]

Reg has facts and proofs of the Romans' ill intentions, and to a certain extent he also has history on his side—we know that the Roman Empire imposed and

dominated where it would—but his seemingly iron-clad argument is undercut by his own admissions of the upside to occupation by Rome. It's conspiratorial without being a conspiracy. The occupation is assisted by many conspirers—Pilate and his demands for obedience, willing Roman soldiers, turncoat Jews like Ben who take the Roman side, everyday Jews and Samaritans who simply want to get on with their lives, and ineffective radical groups like the Judean Peoples' Front (suicide on demand), the Campaign for Free Galilee, and the Peoples' Front of Judea.

JUDITH: "The first blow has been struck . . . "—Most radical groups began their terror activities modestly, like the Angry Brigade, who fired discriminately at an embassy, and then followed up with a printed communique explaining why. The previously unknown Sons of the Occupied Territories started bigger, taking a plane and then blowing it up. "Terrorism is the strategy of the weak," Dobson and Payne write, "and historically the only successes of this form of war are recorded when the aim is precise and the conditions right":

> That is the point about terrorism. The planning of an act of violence involves so many different interests that there is no telling where it will lead, or what the final result will be. The process starts with a man, or group, fired by a political objective and by the belief that it is a good and necessary one. It cannot be achieved through argument and the conventional means of persuasion. The opposition is too powerful and too entrenched. So a short cut has to be taken. The zealot, often neurotic and self-obsessed, never pauses to reflect that perhaps his aim is unreasonable, and unacceptable to a majority of other citizens. So he and his group take the fast road marked terrorism. When other people become involved in organisation the consequences cannot be contained, even if the original objective is gained.[367]

The use of this kind of dangerous, threatening message—as near a manifesto as the Romans are to get from the PFJ—is critical to the revolutionary *modus operandi*, according to Demaris. Describing the significance of Carlos's propagandistic missive read out over Vienna radio during the OPEC conference ordeal, "in an age of instant communication [1975], propaganda is now a *sine qua non* of terrorism."[368] Similarly, the PFJ have announced their presence and intentions with "letters ten-foot high"; their "spectacle" will be the raid on Pilate's palace.

JUDITH: ". . . in letters ten-foot high!"—Size and height actually did matter, according to Cook, in Roman-era signage as today:

> The height of the letters in the first line indicates in part the function of the text as an advertisement to those who could read about the promised spectacle. The words of the greeting from Cuniculus to Lucceius are .08, .05, and .04 meters high respectively. The letters in the second line of the inscription are .09 meters high and those in the third line are .075 meters high.[369]

Clearly spectacle is the key, the spectacle of the advertisement, as well.

This idea of watching and spectacle could have been influenced by the media coverage given to seminal events of 1972—the Munich Olympics massacre and the siege of Asama Sams in Japan. In the latter episode—where a handful of Red Army terrorists held off hundreds of police for more than ten days—it's been estimated that television coverage of the tragic event reached 90 percent in Japan, a record that still stands.[370]

He flashes a brief look of alarm at FRANCIS, then returns to his revolutionary authority—This is Reg's first exhibition of his "stop-go" nature. In Britain the twin specters of pressure on the pound and inflation kept the economy unsettled through the 1950s. With so many overseas defense commitments costing so much money—as Britain attempted to keep its irons in the fire alongside superpowers America and Russia—the domestic situation was bound to be volatile. The answer tended to be a sporadic, fitful one, hence "stop-go": "Defend the pound and Britain's global self-image or let it fall and help Britain's exporters?" Marr writes. "'Stop-go' saw sudden tightenings of fiscal policy, then a stab on the accelerator, as government tried to break into a new era of growth, before slamming on the brakes to deal with the resulting surge in inflation."[371] Reg will flash hot, whipping up his siblings with revolutionary fervor, only to draw up short when action is imminent or actually accomplished. He has given Brian a "job" to perform, then regrets the too-bold assignment; he will send Brian and the rest of the PFJ to assault Pilate's palace, but will keep himself behind the lines (he has a bad back); and he will later boldly lead the surviving PFJ through the busy streets of Jerusalem to mark Brian's crucifixion. There, he will put the brake on again, reading out a proclamation rather than saving Brian from his fate.

As will be discussed later, there was often concern in these revolutionary groups that successful actions against strong imperialist aggressors could lead to devastating reprisals. There were also members of these groups who were only interested in civil disobedience and change through accepted channels, drawing the line at violence. Here, the PFJ and especially Reg (who hides the longest, and seems most surprised at any achievement) have no idea that their "little job" given to the acolyte Brian would have a positive effect—it was absolutely a shot in the dark. In his last term as PM, Harold Wilson knew the feeling. In 1974 the Wilson Cabinet had endured a particularly subfusc meeting at Chequers[372] discussing the faltering economy. Chancellor Healey had joked about Britain becoming a Third World country, perhaps only as a member of OPEC (North Sea oil being the impetus for this "joke"), but Foreign Secretary Crosland wasn't

laughing, maybe better understanding the "relative decline" in Great Britain that could allow for such a thought. As industrial productivity fell quarter after quarter, union demands rose, and real buying power dropped, Crosland admitted that the government truly had no answers: "All we can do is to press every button we've got. We do not know which, if any of them, will have the desired result."[373] The PFJ are in a similar boat, struggling against the unshiftable Roman Empire, willing to try almost anything but with no certainty anything tried could work, no matter how much will was involved.

REG: "Oh great, great. We need do-ers in our movement, Brian"—Britain's own Angry Brigade performed acts of more theatrical violence, including gunfire aimed at buildings, bombs planted to damage property, and bold manifestoes. There seems to have been quite a bit of talk, though, according to Gerald Priestland, reviewing a new book:

> And according to Gordon Carr's new book *The Angry Brigade*, the so-called Stoke-Newington Eight . . . would sit round debating "the violence of the production line, of the high-rise flat, state violence perpetrated on people in their everyday lives." All of which is dangerous nonsense.[374]

At some level Brian's message on the wall is propaganda. It is a message directed at the Romans, but meant to influence and encourage the Jewish people to join the PFJ's cause. Revolutionary groups engaged in this kind of innocuous propaganda often, in graffiti, leaflets, booklets, manifestoes, and eventually (and most effectively) for the television cameras. A short propaganda film made by/for the Japanese Red Army (and the PFLP) describes the war in Vietnam as the ultimate example of imperialist aggression against a smaller, more worthy foe.[375] This is the kind of message that Reg would have liked. The fact that the "propaganda machine" of the United States can't sell the war as one that is justifiable, and that many Americans are taking to the streets in protest, is just what groups like the Red Army need:

> This is propaganda, our propaganda. Propaganda is action and struggle. That is the only supreme form of propaganda. However, that action has to be supported by firm solidarity with various leftist parties, factions, and by the revolutionary propaganda system. Regardless, the basic is armed struggle by the masses.[376]

Another example: In early 1972, just months after the arrests of the Angry Brigade members at a flat in Hackney, a handmade pamphlet was published by the Stoke Newington 8 Defence Group. The pamphlet laid out what had happened during and after the arrest of the "brothers and sisters" of the Brigade, denied many charges brought by prosecutors, and then offered a list of the oppressed peoples' charges against the State, not unlike Reg's list earlier.

REG: ". . . there is not one of us here who would not gladly suffer death to rid this country of the Romans once and for all . . . "—The Python world is full of these mock epic moments, where a deflation or deflection undercuts the solemnity. In *Holy Grail*, Prince Herbert's father is talking up the kingdom:

> This deflation is a borrow from the mock epics of history—the whole of *Don Quixote* . . . or Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, where a bit of snipped hair is the cause of great turmoil, Swift's "Big-endian" civil war of *Gulliver's Travels*, and Dryden, Gay, and Fielding, et al.—and from their own sketches, including "*Njorl's Saga*," "Restaurant Sketch." . . . Herbert's father is talking grandly about lands and inheritances and the future, like any medieval lord; Herbert can only see the draperies.[377]

Reg here sounds like many of the Irish patriots on the eve of the Easter Uprising in 1916, especially the sanguine Patrick Pearse, who spoke rhapsodically about the glories of dying for the cause.[378] More recently, factions of the Japanese Red Army purged its ranks with the capture, torture, and execution of its own members and sympathizers whose "ideological fervour" was found to be "insufficient." Contemporary news reports pegged this fratricidal death toll at twelve in 1972, leading to a police hunt and epic standoff over ten days in February 1972.[379] This is also the first moment where we know of the PFJ's intent—to throw off the colonial yoke of the oppressor. This aligns the PFJ more with nationalist, liberation groups like the IRA, ETA, and Eritrean People's Liberation Front, and less with the Red Army Faction or Japanese Red Army, or even Britain's Angry Brigade.

COMMANDO: "Uhh, well one"—In the West German RAF and 2 June Movement circles there were those who did not share the full commitment to shedding blood, and especially the killing of innocent bystanders; they were known as *Aussteiger*, or "drop-outs."[380]

REG: "Oh yeah. There is one. . . but otherwise we're solid. Are you with us?"—So there's one member of the PFJ not ready to give his life to the cause, and Reg will miss the slog through the hypocaust due to a bad back. The various unions represented in *I'm All Right Jack* were also "solid," according to Mr. Kite, as they held out against management's unreasonable production demands. The only "one" on the outs ends up being Stanley himself, even though he's willing to work, and even work "not very hard" if that's more suitable.

Perhaps surprisingly, after all the atrocities and declarations and fanatical determination demonstrated by Japanese United Red Army members, commitments could wane. A married member of the URA, Yamamoto Junichi, had actually brought his wife and child to the communal hideout in December 1971, and, since he "acted just as an ordinary husband to his wife . . . and not as

a revolutionary," he was soon suspect. Under interrogation he was revealed as having only a "third party interest" in the revolution, and was tortured and killed.[381] In August 1975 other members of the faction were able to take fifty-two diplomatic hostages in Malaysia, then force the Japanese government to release imprisoned URA brethren from Tokyo-area prisons. The terrorists had demanded, by name, seven of their incarcerated URA colleagues, and the Japanese government quickly capitulated, fearing another Lod Airport-type massacre.[382] Five of the imprisoned terrorists were released and readied for transport to Malaysia (thence to Kuwait or Lebanon, e.g.), but two others balked. One claimed to be too ill to leave Tokyo, and the other, Hiroshi Sakaguchi,[383] "indicated he preferred solitary confinement in Japan to the uncertainty of finding asylum with his comrades."[384] It's possible that the horrific events of February 1972, when the more militant members of the Red Army (including Sakaguchi) tortured and killed a dozen less enthusiastic (or just ideologically divergent) members—leaving many bound to trees to freeze to death in the harsh Japanese winter—had soured the revolutionary wine for these two former zealots.[385] Even the seemingly indomitable Fusako Shigenobu, who masterminded the JRA's activities for much of the 1970s from the Middle East, realized there were limits to terrorist activity successes. After the arduous bargaining that had to be done to successfully complete a hostage-taking operation at the French embassy at The Hague in September 1974—the ransom demand had to be reduced, and international terror figure Carlos also had to weigh in to keep negotiations with the French and Dutch moving forward—Farrell describes the operation "as a bit of a comedown," and a lesson: "Shigenobu had come to realize that as a terrorist group the JRA had to depend on others for some kind of support. While there were many Japanese leftist sympathizers in Europe, *not everyone was willing to fight or die for the cause*."[386] In the silly world of Python, a third-party interest from a revolutionary doesn't mean expulsion or death, and even a bad back can trump anti-imperialist fervor.

REG: ". . . you shall be called Brian who is called Brian"—This Brian is clearly meant to be a new man, at least in relation to the revolutionary *Geist der Zeiten* of the early 1960s. Postcolonial revolutionary and writer Frantz Fanon argued that the dominant national bourgeoisie could be overcome by a strong, decentralized peoples' political party that effectively educates: "The purpose of political education is to invent souls."[387] The peasant stock must be educated and

formed into new men and women,[388] Burke notes, and Fanon's version of this new political party sounds a lot like Reg's PFJ:

> The party now becomes nothing less than the mechanism that will create the new man; his appearance will mark a new beginning in the history of mankind. This new man—political man—is the creation of the intellectuals. Is it totally an accident that just where Fanon is being the most straightforwardly descriptive, we suddenly find ourselves plunged into his utopian dream of the revolution?[389]

Brian the *political man* is invented here, and he is ready to embark on his admittedly utopian challenge to the dominant power structure, the Roman Empire. Like Fanon, as well, Brian, Reg, and the PFJ have "seriously underestimated the staying power of the national bourgeoisie."[390] According to Burke, Fanon didn't take into serious account the connection between the ruling class and the military, something Reg and friends should have been able to see clearly given the constant presence of Roman soldiers at every event we see, on the streets, and in the market place. Fanon was primarily focused on the plight of the underrepresented peasant classes of North Africa (and then Africa) where, coincidentally, the Pythons shot *Life of Brian*.

But the Pythons immediately undercut the idea of the "new revolutionary man," which should be expected, given their *modus operandi*. Instead of assuring Brian of his anonymity—crucial to his task of enacting revolution, according to anarchists and nineteenth-century Russian terrorists—Reg and friends double down on his Brian-ness, naming him "Brian Who Is Called Brian." Certainly not understanding that "the use of a pseudonym was an expression of liberation from all private and individual attachments," the PFJ instead underscore Brian's identity as the Brian the Romans will be looking for, essentially guaranteeing his arrest and execution, and even martyrdom.[391] And in a perfectly Pythonesque twist by the end of the film, Brian's notoriety is the reason he will be sent to the cross (he *is* recognized as the Brian who raided the palace), and his anonymity the reason he won't be saved from the cross (he *isn't* recognized as the Brian who was sentenced to death). Even the centurion who arrested him, twice, won't recognize the Brian we know to be Brian. He will be a martyr, still, at least to Judith and the PFJ, since they seem to be certain he is Brian, "the whole purpose of [whose] life and death is nothing but a last will and testament for generations to come."[392]

Finally, when *Dogs of War* mercenary Bob Denard completed the successful coup in the Comoros Islands in 1978, he took citizenship there, converted to Islam, married a local, and became known as Moustapha M'Ahdjou.[393] Sounds like a Brian dream.

REG: "Tell us about the raid on Pilate's palace, Francis"—The Pythons have aligned the PFJ with the revolutionary spirit of the times (the postwar and postcolonial years), but just a few years earlier and in Palestine, no less, similar work was afoot. Mentioned earlier, the Lehi freedom fighter group had formed in 1940 to push the Zionist cause, publishing their nationalist intentions to use terror "as proof of our war against the occupier. . . . It is not aimed at persons, but at representatives, and is therefore effective. And if it also shakes the population out of its complacency, so much the better. Thus and for no other reason, the battle for liberation shall commence."[394] The PFJ's war is against "the occupier"—theirs is a nationalist fight—and they've chosen Pilate's wife as a de facto representative of that occupying power. In scenes edited from the final film Pilate's wife is a grotesquely large woman, and quite capable of defending herself. Had this scene remained, the audience's sympathy for her would likely have been diminished, and the topical commentary regarding ideologically similar terror groups being their own worst enemies would have been lost. Either way, though, violence would have accompanied the attempted kidnapping scene, embracing what Burke characterizes as the best known and perhaps least understood conceit of Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*: the efficacy of violence. Burke notes the collective adoption of the book's myths by radical groups, including "the liberating force of violence in the anticolonial struggle," this adoption occurring without the understanding of Fanon's larger, later argument, that "violence, while it may be an understandable response to colonial domination, is far from being an adequate one."[395] It's as if the budding terror cells stopped reading after Fanon's first chapter, missing the necessary "howevers" across the balance of the book. The PFJ will "raid" Pilate's palace and then "kidnap" and even "cut" Pilate's wife; the palace and the prefect's wife are manifest representations of the oppressors—Pilate and the Roman Empire—and allow for, according to Burke, "an escape from the colonial stalemate. The way out is through violence. Because the system was established and perpetuated through violence, it must be destroyed through violence."[396] This act of violence will lead to reprisals, of course, to an increased level of vigilance and violence on the part of the colonizer, which will in turn make the oppressed more agitated, which will escalate to an ultimate act of violence in the form of a crucifixion.

Notes

1. Offshoots from or just sycophantic cadres loyal to Italy's notorious Red Brigades terror group, mentioned earlier. There were also internecine struggles within these, between those who sought worldwide revolution, and those who had come to enjoy the killing (Burleigh, *BRT*, 217).
2. *Private Eye*, 22 July 1977: 8; see also Burleigh's chapter 6.
3. *Private Eye*, 22 July 1977: 8.
4. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 55.
5. Delivered at Chippenham on 11 May 1968. The now infamous "Rivers of Blood" speech would be delivered at Birmingham just over a month later. See www.enochpowell.net.
6. Jenkins, *Anatomy of Decline*, 32.
7. The "conviction politics" of Thatcher, Michael Foot, and the modern two-party system will be discussed in some detail later, after the fiasco at Pilate's palace.
8. From the television documentary *Baader-Meinhof: In Love with Terror* (BBC, 2002).
9. From the BBC film *Baader-Meinhof: In Love with Terror*. Some of the Pythons will continue this study of so-called freedom fighters waging a war against an oppressive regime. In Gilliam's *Brazil*, a terror group has been setting off bombs for thirteen years as they fight the all-seeing Ministry of Information. Margrit Schiller would spend much of the later 1970s in prison.
10. Reproductions of these original maps and plans were part of the large museum exhibition installed in 1976–1977 at the Royal Academy of Arts, Piccadilly. See the *Pompeii AD79* book published in 1977 by Imperial Tobacco. *Private Eye* lampooned this exhibition in their 26 November and 10 December 1976 issues.
11. *BRT*, 123.
12. Bogdanor, "Collapse of the Postwar Settlement," a.t.
13. Bogdanor, "Collapse of the Postwar Settlement," a.t.
14. See Donoughue, Sandbrook, and Marr.
15. "The Situationist International," *Times Literary Supplement*, 3 September 1964: 781. During the mid-1970s the term "situation" popped up in coded, progressive speech relating to education, literature, white collar crime, the arts, and politics—so maybe the Situationists had more influence than imagined—and *Private Eye* even dedicated a section to lampooning these "situational" moments of high pseudery in 1976–1977.
16. "The Situationist International 1957–1972," *Sunday Times*, 9 July 1989: 1.
17. Facial hair is discussed earlier in relation to the stone and beard salesman.
18. "Facial Hair's Formative Years," *Telegraph*, 11 November 2014.
19. *JE*, "Beard"; see also the entry for "Shaving."
20. Quoted in Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 33–34.
21. Josephus, *AJ*, 17.10.5 (Whiston, 271).
22. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 29.
23. Roller, *The Building Program of Herod the Great*, 97.
24. Most of Rome's provincial governors (or prefects, procurators) have been lost to history, so knowing just a little about Pilate is a boon. Historian Jona Lendering and the information at Livius.org are very useful for summaries of the characters and main events of this period.
25. See the entry for "Other Evidence" under "Pilate" at Livius.org for the most up-to-date information. Years of scholarship about Pilate have come to these same open-ended conclusions.
26. Another borrow from *I'm All Right Jack*. During the melee on the TV show, a large woman is counting her ill-gotten money when someone tries to grab them. She socks him on top of the head.
27. *BRT*, 206.
28. In the only mention of Pilate's wife in the Gospels, sans name, Pilate ignores his wife's warning and gives in to the chief priests. See Matthew 27:19.

29. Quoted in Iviansky, “Individual Terror,” 49. This “centre,” according to Iviansky, went beyond the targeting of a leader, whether a tsar or king or general, to that leader’s most vulnerable points—family, friends, supporters, and on. This transition in thinking about the efficacy and employment of violence helped many anarchists and syndicalists (of the nineteenth century) rationalize the throwing of bombs into “soft targets” that included cafes (Carlos would do this), storefronts, and popular hotels. See Iviansky and Laqueur, *Terrorism*, for more.

30. Iviansky, “Individual Terror,” 49.

31. Iviansky, “Individual Terror,” 50.

32. *BRT*, 207. Aldo Moro will be branded with this epithet as justification for his kidnapping and killing in 1978.

33. Iviansky, “Individual Terror,” 50–51.

34. Horsley, quoting Thomas Thornton, in “The Sicarii,” 440.

35. Horsley, “The Sicarii,” 439.

36. Horsley, “The Sicarii,” 440.

37. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 79.

38. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 60.

39. Marighella was a Brazilian, a Marxist revolutionary who, after a series of robberies and kidnappings, was killed by police in São Paolo in 1969. His *Minimanual* has been photocopied and reprinted thousands of times, and used by virtually every revolutionary group mentioned in these pages, from the SLA in the United States to the Red Brigades, JRA, RAF, and the Provisional IRA.

40. Marighella, *Minimanual*, 62.

41. See the index in Larsen, *MPFC: UC*, “transactions,” for many more unsuccessful transactions (“Dead Parrot,” “Cheese Shop,” “Argument Clinic,” e.g.) in the Python world.

42. PHS, *The Times Diary*, 14 October 1970: 10.

43. “Murder as a Political Act,” *Times*, 19 October 1970: 11.

44. “Argentina’s Unlikely Guerrillas, *Times*, 25 May 1971: 12; see also “Death of a Guerrilla, *Economist*, 25 September 1971: 45, and “The Cult of Political Violence,” *Illustrated London News*, 31 October 1970: 9. These terrorists and their activities occupied many column inches across this period.

45. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 348.

46. *Eyewitness 1970–1979*, “Sir Geoffrey Jackson,” a.t.

47. Hearst was arrested in September 1975, convicted in March 1976, and began her sentence in May 1978; the story was front page news for almost three years as the Pythons discussed, wrote, and then shot *Brian*.

48. See https://www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/patty-hearst.

49. Horsely, “The Sicarii,” 441.

50. Quoted in Horsely, “The Sicarii,” 441. Ananias was a high priest.

51. Farrell, *BRJ*, 93–94.

52. “Guatemalan Abductions Warning,” *Times*, 10 March 1970: 8.

53. *Punch*, 11 March 1970: 381.

54. “The Man Who Fell Off the Earth,’” *Daily Mail*, 16 December 1974: 14.

55. “Kidnap Envoy Died after Bid to Escape,” *Daily Mail*, 17 February 1981: 10–11.

56. See the entry for the ELF in Newton, *Encyclopedia of Kidnappings*, 98. The group would also kidnap three Brits in 1976, holding them five months (“Rebels Treated Us Well,” *Daily Mail*, 6 October 1976: 18).

57. “Hearst Food Plan Altered to Meet Kidnapper’s Demands,” *Times*, 12 March 1974: 6.

58. The Christian Democratic Union of Germany, a conservative political party.

59. “Lorenz, Peter,” in Newton, *Encyclopedia of Kidnappings*, 174; “The Angry Young Terrorists Who Shocked a Nation of Violence,” *Daily Mail*, 3 March 1975: 4.

60. “The Fatal Flaw of Ulrike Meinhof,” *Times*, 10 May 1976: 4.

61. “Red Army Faction,” in Newton, *Encyclopedia of Kidnappings*, 244.

62. Four British-owned planes had been hijacked, all overseas, prior to this incident. See “First UK

Hijacking: Questions Raised," *Flight International*, 16 January 1975: 57. Bernard Donoughue reports that PM Wilson stayed up all night following the negotiations with the hijacker, "directing the hijack affair till midnight." Donoughue concludes: "It ended successfully and he apparently enjoyed himself enormously—just like a schoolboy" (Donoughue, *DSD*, 1.275).

63. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 229.

64. "Now Free Our Friends," *Daily Mail*, 7 September 1977: 4; "Schleyer, Hans," in Newton, 265.

65. *DSD*, 2.235.

66. See Orsini and Node's *Anatomy of the Red Brigades* (2011) and Catanzaro's *The Red Brigades and Left-Wing Terrorism in Italy* (1991) for more.

67. A Vermeer had been stolen three years earlier in Brussels, with the ransom demand asking for relief monies to Catholic charities serving East Pakistani refugees ("Waiter Charged with Theft of £1M Vermeer," *Times*, 8 October 1971: 6).

68. See also "Fear for £lM Painting Grows," *Times*, 26 February 1974: 3.

69. The Provos-affiliated Price sisters were being held in Brixton prison for their roles in a car bombing at the Old Bailey in 1973. See Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 364–65.

70. "Review of Security at Kenwood Promised," *Times*, 25 February 1974: 2.

71. *DFBE*, 414.

72. Discussed later in relation to Palin's characterization of Pilate.

73. Marr, *HMB*, 257–60.

74. *HMB*, 259.

75. "Britain in the 20th Century," a.t. This speech (part of the famous "End of the Beginning" speech) can be found in its entirety at the Churchill Society website. The war and postwar period saw the complete dismantling of the great British Empire—the "pink bits" on most period maps, Hitchens calls them—from India and Palestine through the Suez Crisis and Rhodesia. See Hitchens's chapter "The Pink Bits" in *The Abolition of Britain*.

76. Bogdanor, "Character of the Postwar Period," a.t.

77. Cited in Bogdanor's lecture. There is also a very interesting article from the Marxist journal *The Militant*, titled "Labour's Programme—1964–70 Disaster was a Warning," by Ted Grant, which also identifies the postwar Labour Party's overly optimistic reliance on weakness and vulnerability in the capitalist system.

78. As in the person of Dennis the Peasant, as seen in *Holy Grail*.

79. Quoted in Bogdanor's "Character of the Postwar Period," a.t.

80. See Bernstein, *Myth of Decline*, 61–62.

81. "Collapse of the Postwar Settlement," a.t.; italics added.

82. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 8.

83. Beveridge, *Beveridge Report*, 6.6.

84. Philip Zec, *Daily Mirror*, 4 November 1942.

85. The Arab Rejection Front was comprised of or supported by "the PFLP, the PDFLP, the PFLP-GC, the Arab Liberation Front (Iraq), and the Popular Struggle Front. . . All were against the plan [for peace with Israel]" (Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 188).

86. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 8.

87. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 80.

88. Wheen, *Strange Days*, 147. See all of chapter 6 in Wheen's book for more.

89. *MPFC: UC*, 1.255–56.

90. *MPFC: UC*, 2.117.

91. *ATW*, 1.16.212.

92. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 77.

93. *ATW*, 1.15.198.

94. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 97.

95. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 97n2.

96. See Carr, *The Angry Brigade*.

97. Carr, *The Angry Brigade*, 71–72; also a more complete collection at The Anarchist Library. At the end of this first communique, the Brigade couldn't promise to be as careful if Britain continued to "assist" France in the fight against Basque separatists—the threat of physical harm was there.

98. Secretary of State for Employment Robert Carr, Attorney-General Peter Rawlinson, and Metropolitan Police Commissioner John Waldron—all targets of Angry Brigade attacks in 1970–1971. Also found as part of "Communique 5," The Anarchist Library; "Bombing at the Home of Attorney General," *Times*, 28 January 1971: 1.

99. See the entry for "cut all her bits off" for more on this gruesome ordeal.

100. Bernard Donoughue was in the US capital during this time, and he comments about the events (*DSD*, 2.158–59). Demands included the release of men who had allegedly killed family members of the leader of the assault, Hamaas Khaalis, and the destruction of the movie *Mohammad, Messenger of God*, which they saw as sacrilegious. See "Terrorists Threaten to Behead Hostages in Washington Siege," *Times*, 11 Mar 1977: 1.

101. Part of what is allegedly a French New Wave film, *Le Fromage Grand, à la* Godard, where the imperialist "violence inherent in the system" is juxtaposed with the violence of everyday life (*MPFC: UC*, 2.349–59).

102. See the entries for those episodes in *MPFC: UC*, volumes 1 and 2, for much more.

103. *ATW*, 1.15.195.

104. Cricketer Grace appears as the face of God in *Holy Grail*, for example.

105. *MPFC: UC*, 1.240.

106. This is the time-honored resolution to most terrorist outbreaks. "There is no known case in modern history of a small terrorist group seizing political power; society usually tolerates terrorism only so long as it is no more than a nuisance," Laqueur writes (266). The flare-up is doused by authorities with a level of force that exceeds anything the terrorists could manage, often followed by increased oppression. Following the Quebec attacks Trudeau's government cracked down brutally on leftist groups, while in California the FBI ran SLA members to ground, killing most of them. Israel's reputation for revenge after the Munich massacre became legend.

107. Marighella, *Minimanual*, 61–62.

108. IRA communique, 28 August 1979; Wharton, *Wasted Years*, 235.

109. "The Carnage: Despair or a New Resolve?" *Guardian*, 28 August 1979: 14.

110. Leviticus 21:17–24.

111. *AJ*, 14.13.10 (Whiston, 307).

112. Kotker, *HLTJ*, 123.

113. *Times*, 23 November 1973: 6.

114. "Yard Testing 'Vermeer' Piece," *Times*, 7 March 1974: 1.

115. Smallwood, *JURR*, 154.

116. Horsley, "The Sicarii," 438.

117. See scene 16, the "Hiding with the PFJ," later for more on the Lod attack.

118. Fisk, Robert. "Spectacular, Ruthless Terrorists," *Times*, 5 August 1974: 5.

119. Wharton, *Wasted Years*, 235.

120. Lampooned in *Flying Circus*, Ep. 39.

121. "World of Theatre," *Private Eye*, 24 June 1977: 6.

122. The film's torturous existence is discussed in the book *Soon to Be a Major Motion Picture* by Theodore Gershuny (1982). Tynan is referenced in *Flying Circus* Ep. 21.

123. *Pompeii AD79*, 56.

124. The hardwood is in good company—there are coconuts and orangutans in *Holy Grail*.

125. This was in response to the Jews in Jamnia destroying an altar built by "heathens" to honor Gaius. See the entry for "Caligula" in the *JE*.

126. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 85–86.

127. “Terrorists Raid OPEC Oil Parley in Vienna, Kill 3,” *New York Times*, 22 December 1975: 59. For details of the raid and demands, see Dobson and Payne, *The Carlos Complex*, 89–123.

128. *DSD*, 2.94; “No Arms for South Africa,” *Times*, 29 October 1970: 8.

129. Larsen, *BAFHG*, 19; Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 602. Also further left than Cleese, Palin is upset when Nixon beats McGovern so easily in the 1972 presidential election (*Diaries 1969–1979*, 96).

130. “Unions and Downing Street Talks,” *Times*, 28 June 1973: 1.

131. *Times*, 28 June 1973: 1.

132. “A Tight Squeeze under the Bed,” *Times*, 4 February 1974: 12.

133. PHS, “The *Times* Diary: Britain’s Black Revolutionaries,” *Times*, 20 February 1974: 14.

134. At this time the Pythons were working on varied individual projects, and trying to get financial backing for *Life of Brian*. See Palin’s *Diaries* for spring 1978.

135. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 32.

136. Not unusually, these demands included the release of jailed JRA members, a significant cash ransom, and safe passage to a friendly country. See *BRJ*, 186–91.

137. *BRJ*, 190.

138. “New Guerrilla Group Says Hijack Was Revenge,” *Times*, 27 July 1973: 6.

139. In October 1977 Lufthansa Flight 181 was commandeered by the PFLP, the goal being the release of RAF members in German prisons. All hostages were to be killed if demands were not met. A raid by a West German counterterrorist unit rescued the hostages and ended the standoff.

140. *Germany in Autumn*, a.t.

141. *DFBE*, 243.

142. *DFBE*, 269.

143. *DFBE*, 295.

144. *BRT*, 137.

145. “‘Grapes of Wrath’ Hint for Healey,” *Telegraph*, 14 December 1976: 1.

146. *MPFC: UC*, 2.59.

147. See “A B Foods’ Attack on Price Controls,” *Times*, 15 July 1978: 19; “Bled White as Sellers Take Over,” *Sunday Times*, 10 January 1971: 54; “Stop Drift from ‘Grey’ Areas,” *Telegraph*, 11 October 1969: 19, respectively.

148. “Friedman Warning on ‘UK Road to Disaster,’” *Times*, 30 November 1976: 1.

149. “Majority of 14 for Labour’s Bill to Intervene in Industry,” *Telegraph*, 19 February 1975: 7.

150. Mannix, *TAD*, 5. This is simply an old (Dickensian) phrase referring to the pallor of flesh when an animal (or human) had lost a great deal of blood; it is not a racial-tinged phrase. It simply means the giver has given so much he can no longer give. There are racial phrases in the film—“You’re a real Jew”—which do carry flip or negative connotations.

151. Geoffrey Smith. “Scottish Nationalism Now Commands More Than Courteous Boredom,” *Times*, 22 October 1974: 14.

152. *DSD*, 2.257.

153. Dobson and Payne, *Carlos Complex*, 209.

154. Dobson and Payne, *Carlos Complex*, 209–10.

155. Sartre in Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, lv.

156. Dobson and Payne, *Carlos Complex*, 210.

157. Remember that novelist Forsyth listed the absolutes for a successful coup, the last one being a workable substitute for the dictator being deposed.

158. *BRJ*, 72–73; italics added.

159. Dobson and Payne, *Carlos Complex*, 168.

160. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 13–14.

161. In *Holy Grail*, King Arthur also cites his lineage and justification for claiming kingship. His battle is equally hopeless, as his claims are never recognized outside of his small band of followers (*BAFHG*, 169).

162. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 13–14.

163. From Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, 201.

164. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 137.

165. Laqueur also points out that these assumptions were actually "highly arbitrary" (169), since the social and economic situations, to name just two potential areas of frustration, varied from culture to culture and across time. In a moment, Reg's entire foundation for the use of such violence will be undermined by his comrade's reminders of the benefits of Roman occupation—another frustration that Reg and the PFJ must deal with.

166. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 39–40; also *BRT*, chapter 3. Heinzen was more like the gingered-up Reg—he retired to domestic life in 1860 New York, and died quietly in 1879.

167. And, in the case of Carlos's takeover of the OPEC meetings in Vienna, dramatically read out over the state's public radio waves.

168. Quoted in Richard, *WWAR*, 176.

169. *WWAR*, 176.

170. *WWAR*, 181.

171. Crosland was a Labour minister, the author of the influential *The Future of Socialism* (1956), a former Treasury Secretary. He was Foreign Secretary at the time *Brian* was being written. Crosland will be discussed later, in the "'He's Not the Messiah' (Panto)" scene.

172. Following a wave of redundancies in 1956, national strikes involving shipbuilding and engineering unions in March 1957 led to significant increases in trade union membership among younger, formerly disinterested workers, and also to more energized, even "radicalized" unions, including the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) and the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU). Governments began to deal with these large unions as partners, not constituents, the bad fruits of which wouldn't fully ripen until Callaghan's administration, 1976–1979.

173. Bogdanor discusses this period in his lecture "The Collapse of the Postwar Settlement, 1964–1979," looking at events that set the table for Thatcherism.

174. Tories had envisioned a minimum annual growth of 4 percent, while Labour (specifically under Wilson) expected more. The fly in the ointment was the sobering reality of recent history:

> There was one very small problem with the four percent growth rate: we had not achieved it since mid-Victorian times. . . . Wilson said four percent was far too unambitious and the Labour Party would have a much higher rate of growth. As I said, the rate of growth in the 1960s was lower than the 1950s, and economists did not know how to secure it. ("The Collapse of the Postwar Settlement," a.t.)

175. Jenkins, *Mrs. Thatcher's Revolution*, 9.

176. See, for example, Jenkins's discussion in "At the Head of the Queue for Collapse" in *Anatomy of Decline*, 73–77. Britain was also being told that EEC membership would require a step away from the embrace of the Americans, which sent a Cold War shudder through many.

177. Jenkins, *Anatomy of Decline*, 74. Jenkins wrote this article in May 1975, less than one month prior to the referendum where 67 percent of the British electorate voted to remain part of the EEC. Conservatives tended to vote for membership as almost a bloc, while Labour was fractured badly, many voting against. See Williamson's "The Case for Brexit."

178. Jenkins, *Anatomy of Decline*, 74.

179. Jenkins, *Anatomy of Decline*, 75.

180. Jenkins, "At the Head of the Queue for Collapse," *Anatomy of Decline*, 75.

181. *HMB*, 349–50.

182. During the time this book was being written, the Brexit referendum was organized, voted, and reacted for and against; then put into limbo by a High Court ruling confirming Parliament's role in its implementation; finally Royal Assent was given to the bill on 16 March 2017. Article 50 was signed by PM Theresa May on 29 March 2017.

183. "Anthony Benn on the Common Market," *Spectator*, 18 January 1975.

184. *BAFHG*, 94–160; also *BAFHG* index under “Tony Benn” and “syndicalism/syndicalist.”

185. Jenkins, *Anatomy of Decline*, 77.

186. Palin devotes a handful of paragraphs to his thoughts on the referendum, seeing it as one of the few national subjects that crossed party and class lines in positive ways; he votes “Yes” (*Diaries 1969–1979*, 238–39).

187. Reprinted in the *Telegraph*, 9 March 2006.

188. “Rugby Union: Welsh Caught in Time Warp,” *Independent*, 4 February 2005.

189. Quoted in *Seasons in the Sun*, 512.

190. See *MPFC: UC*, 1.88, 90, 290, and 375 for Powell references; also *BAFHG*, 277–81, for more on contemporary immigration issues in Britain.

191. *HMB*, 321.

192. See Pitchford, *The Conservative Party and the Extreme Right, 1945–1975*, 193–94. *Private Eye* also covered this rather shameful course of events, bringing the episode back into public view as Callaghan was preparing to take office following Wilson’s surprise resignation in March 1976 (“Julian’s Caesar,” 2 April 1976: 16). Asian immigrants would be at the forefront of the Grunwick strike later.

193. Joseph, *Monetarism*, 19. This was delivered as the Stockton Lecture in 1976, and available at the Margaret Thatcher Foundation website, http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/110796.

194. Money paid directly to families for each school-age child (excepting the eldest child), and which was initially set at five shillings per week.

195. “Character of the Postwar Period,” a.t.

196. Roman taxes are mentioned in a *draft* version of the *Brian* script, in relation to the questions to Jesus about appropriate tribute to Caesar (Matthew 22.17, Mark 12:14, and Luke 20:22).

197. “Character of the Postwar Period,” a.t.

198. Brandon, “The Zealots,” 632.

199. *WWAR*, 43–44, 101–2.

200. Donoughue calls it both a “national humiliation” and “a prime example of a Cabinet government operating at its best” (*DSD* 2.5). The latter comment reads understandably like he’s putting a good face on an otherwise bad situation.

201. *HMB*, 9.

202. American Secretary of State Dean Acheson credits PM Attlee with admitting that the United States had indeed “come to our rescue in the war,” so this opinion may have been quasi-official (*HMB*, 25–26). As for the distribution of Marshall Plan funds, Great Britain had actually been given almost $3.2 billion in European Recovery Program aid after the war, *more than any other single country*. Britain’s Welfare State demands during the same period and the “total war” had exhausted the country’s strategic reserves in every way.

203. “1976 Sterling Crisis Details Made Public,” *Financial Times*, 9 December 2005.

204. *DSD*, 2.108.

205. *DSD*, 2.39.

206. Bernstein sees Callaghan’s handling of these negotiations, as “masterful,” given the initial IMF demands (*Myth of Decline*, 264–66).

207. *ATW*, 1.7.84

208. See the index entry for “narrative disruption/transgression” in *MPFC: UC*.

209. This is also a sideways glance at Britain’s Empire efforts in places like India and Ceylon, where improvements to transportation, industry, agriculture, and education were fundamental parts of the occupying presence.

210. The prisoner Ben (Palin)—much older than these revolutionaries—is more likely to remember difficult times in the city, so he can praise the Romans. The celebrated Augustan reign began sixty years prior to the film’s setting; if Ben is seventy he has a very different conception of what might merit complaint. See the entries later in the “In Pilate’s Jail” scene for more.

211. Ovid’s magnum opus, like the Pythons’ work, is reflexive: “*The Metamorphoses* is an egocentric

work, constantly drawing the reader's attention back to the author through personal asides, puns, alliteration, and the author's sheer virtuosity in re-telling well-known tales" (*WWAR*, 107). For Python reflexiveness, see *BAFHG*, 310–11.

212. *WWAR*, 102.

213. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 146.

214. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 146.

215. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 146.

216. *The Red Army Faction*, 1.401.

217. Grant, *Gladiators*, 73.

218. The site of Jerusalem (or the City of David) was particularly ill-suited for large-scale habitation, given its distance from sufficient, consistent potable water (and arable land). For generations, the Gihon Spring was the city's only water supply, with waterways carved into the rock beneath the city helping capture the water. A second, dependable (and defensible) water source would seem necessary, which might have been Pilate's goal.

219. Jeremias, *JTJ*, 14.

220. Maier, *Pontius Pilate*, 112–13.

221. *AJ*, 18.3.2 (Whiston, 379); see also *JURR* 162–63.

222. *JTJ*, 16n30.

223. See "The Palestine Exploration Fund," *Times*, 21 May 1866: 11; "A Palace of Herod the Great," *Times*, 22 April 1955: 14; a picture of the aqueduct at Caesarea is included in "An Introduction to Israel," *Illustrated London News*, 30 March 1968: 34; and "Israel on a Package Tour," *Times*, 22 April 1967: 21.

224. "Pilate's Aqueduct: Stone Pipe Brought from Bethlehem," *Times*, 2 February 1938: 9.

225. "Jerusalem Yields Its Ancient Secrets," *Times*, 1 January 1971: 6; also, "The Temple Mount of Jerusalem," *Illustrated London News*, 24 February 1973: 54.

226. *WWAR*, 59.

227. "Jerusalem's New Water Supply," *Times*, 10 August 1918: 5.

228. *I, Claudius* aired November 1976; *Diaries 1969–1979*, 348–49.

229. On 16 June 1978, Palin diaries that they had all agreed to invite The Who drummer Keith Moon into the small "repertory company" of players for the film, which would also include John Young, Sue Jones-Davies, and Terence Bayler, among others (*Diaries 1969–1979*, 472–73). Moon may have been eyed for a "Psychopath" role, which was not included in the final film. Moon died of a drug overdose in September 1978, just before he was scheduled to fly to Tunisia and join the film shoot.

230. Magness, *Stone and Dung*, 131–32.

231. Magness, "What's the Poop," 81.

232. Koloski-Ostrow, *ASRI*, 42–43.

233. Magness, "What's the Poop," 82.

234. David, "Ancient Romans, Jews."

235. These workers would have qualified for the "despised trades" descriptor, dealing in haulage and, even worse, haulage of impure waste. See *JTJ*, for more.

236. See Mitchell, "Human Parasites in the Roman World," 1–3.

237. Jewish sectarians prohibited the consumption of "fish blood," even from approved fish handled properly, but evidence indicates that after 70 Roman fish sauce became quite popular among Jews (Magness, *Stone and Dung*, 39).

238. "The History of Plumbing in Jerusalem," *P&M* (unpaginated).

239. Magness, "What's the Poop," 80.

240. Pompey conquered most of the Seleucid Empire by about 62 BC (*WWAR*, 14–15).

241. Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People*, 251. Ben-Sasson is commenting on the absence of unrest detailed in Josephus's descriptions of the period.

242. The images of medieval life in *Holy Grail* were also filthy. There is an "*impoverished, plague-ridden village*," and a scene of peasants digging for "lovely filth." Arthur is identified as a king simply because "he

hasn't got shit all over him," though by the end of the film he has a load of ordure dumped on his head. Robin will also soil his armor when confronted by the Killer Rabbit. With the exception of the Castle Anthrax, this is a filthy world.

243. From Bogdanor, "The Character of the Postwar Period," audio transcription.

244. Bogdanor, "Character of the Postwar Period," a.t.

245. Bogdanor, "Character of the Postwar Period," a.t.

246. Bogdanor, "Character of the Postwar Period," a.t.

247. As much as twenty percent of the population were dues-paying union members in 1977; add their dependents, and this is a significant voting bloc.

248. *Private Eye*, 22 July 1977: 15.

249. Caryl, *Strange Rebels*, 55–56. The NHS, to cite just one state-owned entity, is lampooned often by the Goons and Pythons, poking at the one-size-fits-all standardization, rationing, and inefficiency of such a bureaucracy. The Goons mention "the dreaded National Health hospital at Hampton Court" ("The Last Smoking Seagoon"), and that peace and quiet at an NHS hospital is much louder than at a private hospital ("The End").

250. Caryl, *Strange Rebels*, 55.

251. Caryl, *Strange Rebels*, 56. Attlee had routed Churchill in the 1945 General Election; pundits concluded that British voters believed Labour and Attlee were much more likely to enact the Beveridge Report policies than Churchill and the Conservatives. The PFJ might be enjoying what Jenkins terms the "gentle decadence" Britain found itself in by the mid-1970s, when virtually every measuring point of prosperity showed long-term decline, but a "perpetual lagging behind" had yet to produce absolute decline from which there was no escape (Jenkins, *Anatomy of Decline*, 95–96). In this, the PFJ more resemble the educated, affluent, upper-middle-class members of the overtly political RAF or JRA groups, *et al.*

252. See Bogdanor's "Thatcherism, 1979–1990," for much more on consensus and its demise.

253. *WWAR*, 57.

254. *BAFHG*, 94.

255. By the end of the second century, the Romans had "constructed over fifty-three thousand miles of major highways and two hundred thousand miles of secondary roads" across the Empire (*WWAR*, 57). These roads fell into disrepair across much of Britain after the Romans left, and before the Victorian Age.

256. The fifth king of Rome, living ca. 616–579 BC. He is also credited with erecting the original Circus Maximus; *ASRI*, 63.

257. Quoted in *ASRI*, 63–64.

258. Joyce, "The Grandeur That Was Rome," in *Ulysses*, 131; Koloski-Ostrow mentions this alliance in *ASRI*, 103.

259. This is likely a holdover from *Holy Grail*, where the world of the Middle Ages is posited, but there are few visual indicators of that time. See *BAFHG*, xiv–xv for all that's "missing" from the Python's medieval film setting. In *Life of Brian*, the archaeological evidences of Roman occupation in their corner of Tunisia were all the Pythons had, so evidence would have to do.

260. See the entries later in the list for more on the benefits of Roman occupation, as well as the *absence* of those benefits as the film unfolds.

261. *BRT*, 89.

262. There were of course factions, like the Zealots, who could never stomach a foreign power ruling the Holy City, especially an idolatrous power praying to both men and multiple gods.

263. *HMB*, 351.

264. *HMB*, 351.

265. "EEC Referendum," *Times*, 4 April 1975: 6.

266. King and Stager, *LBI*, 76–77.

267. *LBI*, 77.

268. *JTJ*, 26.

269. *JTJ*, 17. Chapman acted as physician on the film set, incidentally.

270. “Our British Empire,” *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 19 March 1902: 3.
271. Porter, *The Lion’s Share*, 281.
272. See the entries in *JTJ* under “education” for more.
273. *JTJ*, 363.
274. *JTJ*, 373n70.
275. *JTJ*, 373.
276. “The British Empire in India,” *New Zealand Herald* (reprinted), 21 October 1893: II.
277. This is how many Englishmen saw the Raj: a nursery in which India “matures” and from which it is eventually weaned. See Brendon, *DFBE*, passim.
278. “The British Empire in India,” *New Zealand Herald* (reprinted), 21 October 1893: IV.
279. These had been active in prewar days, prior to the army and the Right assuming control in 1937. The proletarian and “tendency” films popular in the 1920s and 1930s, for example, had disappeared along with their producers as the country moved toward ultranationalism.
280. *BRJ*, 39–46.
281. *BRJ*, 46.
282. *BRJ*, 45.
283. *LBI*, 69–70.
284. *LBI*, 71.
285. *LBI*, 73–75; also, Mitchell’s “Human Parasites in the Roman World,” passim.
286. *LBI*, 101.
287. *JTJ*, 170–71, also 26. Wine was such a part of daily and even ritual life that Jeremias is able to mention grapes, wine, and wine production over and over again in *JTJ*.
288. Magness, *Stone and Dung*, 57.
289. *JTJ*, 38.
290. Jeremias notes one item the PFJ leave off their list of gratitudes, wheat, was usually the first to fail in times of famine; much of it had to be imported to begin with (*JTJ*, 39).
291. *JTJ*, 174.
292. See the index entries for “baths” in *ASRI*.
293. Levine, *Jerusalem*, 329–30.
294. Levine, *Jerusalem*, 330.
295. Cleese plays this slow-burn-but-eventually-hyperbolic, frustrated, upper-middle-class type throughout the run of *Flying Circus*, as will be discussed later.
296. “Human Parasites in the Roman World,” 1.
297. See also Borowski, *Daily Life in Biblical Times*, 78–80.
298. In India, “between 1850 and 1947, more than 40,000 miles [of rail track] were laid, involving heroic feats of embanking, tunneling, and bridging,” leading a Scottish engineer in 1890 to rate Britain’s building program in “dependent” lands higher than even Rome’s (*DFBE*, 148).
299. *ASRI*, 49.
300. A defendant’s phrasing as he apologizes for multiple murders in Ep. 27 of *Flying Circus*, congratulating the counsel, jury, and judge for successfully condemning him. See *MPFC: UC*, 2.3–19; *ATW*, 2.27.46.
301. This obvious genesis moment is discussed in detail below, just as a slightly crabbed Reg sums up the benefits of the Roman occupation.
302. See Adrian Lee’s “The Remarkable Raj: Why Britain Should Be Proud of Its Rule in India,” *Express*, 22 June 2013; and Lalvani’s *The Making of India*.
303. Pellison, *Roman Life in Pliny’s Time*, 228.
304. *HLTJ*, 116–17.
305. “Jews and Romans in the Early Empire,” 316; also, Smallwood’s *JURR*, chapter 11.
306. *JURR*, 257.
307. *WWAR*, 10.

308. *HLTJ*, 11.
309. Smallwood, "Jews and Romans in the Early Empire," 318.
310. Smallwood, "Jews and Romans in the Early Empire," 319.
311. See Bernstein, *Myth of Decline*, 101–2. The announcement coincided to the day with another uprising, the Bolshevik coup in Russia (*DFBE*, 319).
312. From Schneer, *The Balfour Declaration: The Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 376.
313. The entirety of the Pythons' combined working lives stretched across this volatile period.
314. *Mrs. Thatcher's Revolution*, 74.
315. See the introduction to Black, Pemberton, and Thane's *Reassessing 1970s Britain*.
316. One of the more clever versions—from the Sex Pistols' manager Malcolm McLaren—referred to Britain as a "banana republic without the bananas" ("Proud Pirate of Punk," *Times*, 27 May 1983: 10). To be fair, an *Irish Times* columnist had made the same reference in regard to Ireland seven months earlier.
317. In order: Cecil King, of IPC and the *Daily Mirror*; Hugh Cudlipp; Prince Philip's uncle Lord Louis Mountbatten; and Solly Zuckerman. Of these, it seems that only King truly wanted to foment rebellion.
318. *HMB*, 307.
319. Not coincidentally, the student-led sit-ins and riots in France had begun in earnest just six days before this odd congress.
320. Profiled in the film *The Lost World of the Seventies*, presented by former BBC journalist Michael Cockerell. The film also looks at 1970s-era interviews with Lord Longford ("Lord Porn"), Metro Police Commissioner Robert Mark, and the writ-happy James Goldsmith. See also "Gen. Walker May Recruit 'Three Million,'" *Telegraph*, 28 August 1974: 2.
321. Neaves was her adviser and campaign manager, and she called him a "dedicated warrior for freedom." See the text of her speech at his memorial service, 16 May 1979, at the Margaret Thatcher Foundation (http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104085).
322. "MP Warns on Private Armies," *Financial Times*, 5 September 1974: 11.
323. Black *et al.* remind us that "cap in hand," "ungovernable" and "decline" are used over and over again by the more pessimistic assessors of the decade (*Reassessing 1970s Britain*, 4–5). I will try to be mindful of that.
324. *BAFHG*, 156n98; the quote within the block quote comes from David Wood, "Mr. Wilson Fails to Smother Vote," *Times*, 1 October 1970: 1. He was slightly exaggerating, of course, but Labour would be out of power for eighteen long years.
325. Bogdanor, "Thatcherism, 1979–1990," a.t.
326. Bogdanor, "Thatcherism, 1979–1990," a.t.
327. "Who Can Govern the Ungovernable?" *Times*, 30 September 1974: 15.
328. See Peter Stafford's "An American Wonders Who Is Controlling a Once-Reliable Ally," *Times*, 8 May 1975: 1; Garnett's *From Anger to Apathy*, 18–19, 21; "In Answer to Our Ungovernable Friends," *Financial Times*, 9 May 1975: 19.
329. Think of the First Temple Period, for example. See Levine, *Jerusalem*, xiii.
330. Mitchell, "Human Parasites," 7.
331. See Mitchell, "Human Parasites," passim. See also the entries in the index in *BAFHG* under "filth," "grotesque," and "sewage" for more.
332. Black et al., *Reassessing 1970s Britain*, 6.
333. *DFBE*, 178–81.
334. *DFBE*, 432.
335. *DFBE*, 235.
336. Produced in association with the American *Time-Life* book series, which the Pythons would lampoon in *Flying Circus* Ep. 31 (*MPFC: UC*, 2.75). Episode 31 was recorded in April 1972, and written in the months before, just when this documentary uproar hit the pages of newspapers.
337. The kerfuffle was such that the BBC's director-general, Charles Curran, was forced to apologize and admit the program was "not entirely up to standard" ("BBC Chief Rocks British Empire," *Daily Mail*, 6

April 1972: 3). Journalist Peregrine Worsthorne even called for the BBC to lose its privileged public charter in the wake of this scandal ("Disestablish the B.B.C.," *Sunday Telegraph*, 9 April 1972: 20). (Waugh makes fun of the earnest Worsthorne a number of times in his diaries.) The program ran in both February and March 1972 on BBC 1.

338. Lady Wayland's letter to the editor: "Benefits from British Rule," *Telegraph*, 6 April 1972: 16; an unsigned *Telegraph* editorial: "BBC's British Empire," *Telegraph*, 7 April 1972: 16; the documentary series' producers' reply (Max Morgan-Witts [b. 1931]): "British Empire on Television," *Telegraph*, 14 April 1972: 18, and "BBC Empire Series," *Times*, 11 July 1972: 15. There are dozens of other letters both decrying and supporting the controversial documentary series. There was even a follow-up series of articles in *The Listener* looking at reactions to the series, featuring comments of scholars who worked on the documentary.

339. The phrase was already in newspaper editorial-page parlance (appearing within quotation marks, and perhaps as an adaptation of a similar American phrase from the war) as early as 1954, and used regularly by 1956, always in relation to what the Tories saw as the results of successful Conservative policies since 1951.

340. Presciently, inflation was the only hiccup that seemed to worry Macmillan during this rosy stretch; rising inflation would maul the Wilson, Heath, and Callaghan administrations over the next two decades.

341. Listen to *Goon Show* episodes "Pam's Paper Insurance Policy" (24 November 1958); "King Solomon's Mines" (2 December 1957); "The Spanish Doubloons" (21 January 1960); and "The Spon Plague" (3 March 1958). *Never Had It So Good* is the title of Sandbrook's 2006 book about the post-Suez period in Britain.

342. The one complaint that could be made, justifiably, was that even though Britain's economy was strong and growing, it was consistently growing at a slower rate than most other developed countries in the West. See Marr and Bernstein.

343. Smallwood, "Jews and Romans in the Early Empire," 234.

344. Smallwood, "Jews and Romans," 234. The fact that these writs and letters continued to appear across the years indicates that the actual practice of such tolerations (i.e., intolerant prefects) was less effective than the ideal of toleration (i.e., Rome's good intentions) ("Jews and Romans," 313–14).

345. For a deeper discussion of this subject, see Smallwood's *JURR*, chapter 6, "The Diaspora and Jewish Religious Liberty."

346. *HMB*, 61.

347. *HMB*, 61.

348. *HMB*, 61.

349. *WWAR*, 35.

350. Bernstein, *Myth of Decline*, 266–67. In 2014 Scottish voters were offered another bite at the apple. The "No" votes accounted for more than 55 percent of the final tally, defeating the measure yet again.

351. *ATW*, 1.11.142.

352. In *So, Anyway*, Cleese calls *The Goon Show* "the Greatest Radio Comedy Show of All Time. . . . I love this show with an intensity that almost defies analysis" (71–72).

353. *MPFC: UC*, 1.180.

354. Hugh Scanlon, a proponent of workers' control (along with Tony Benn), is discussed in *BAFHG* (119–20). John Boyd was the general secretary of the AEU during this period.

355. "Trade Unions," *Spectator*, 29 November 1975: 10.

356. Josephus, *WJ*, 6.7.3 (Whiston, 585).

357. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 33.

358. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 33.

359. Machaeros was the fortress where John the Baptist was held, and eventually killed.

360. *JURR*, 295.

361. For the safety of his kingship, Herod earlier had "prohibited all unauthorized gatherings, even if only a few people were involved," with the punishment for violation "harsh, including death" (Levine,

Jerusalem, 173).

362. *Holy Grail* is as much about Britain in the 1970s as it is about Arthur and the Middle Ages. See *BAFHG*.

363. Palin, *Diaries, 1969–1979*, 142, 186–87. Nixon is referenced a number of times in *Flying Circus*. As a noted antagonist of the Left, Nixon was an easy target. He also appears (via his signature) in *Holy Grail*, meaning he holds a pivotal position in the upper echelons of world leadership and in the Pythons' pantheon of evildoers. Some of the troupe had also just recently (1977) finished assisting with the production of the *Monty Python and the Holy Grail (Book)*, which featured a number of Nixon references on the back cover (*BAFHG*, 13, 24n58, 24n59, and 24n61).

364. The times tainted biblical films, as well. *The Passover Plot* depicts a Jesus-led conspiracy to survive the cross and "prove" his messiah-ship via subterfuge.

365. Hofstader, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (Jonathan Cape, 1966).

366. Jenkins, *Anatomy of Decline*, 33.

367. Dobson and Payne, *Carlos Complex*, 206–7.

368. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 14.

369. Cook, "Crucifixion as Spectacle," 71.

370. See *BRJ*, 19–28.

371. *HMB*, 134.

372. The PM's official retreat, in Buckinghamshire, since about 1921.

373. This comment was recorded by Barbara Castle, Secretary of State for Health and Social Services, and quoted in Jenkins's *Mrs. Thatcher's Revolution*, 45. Jenkins is citing *The Castle Diaries*, 223.

374. *Spectator*, 18 July 1975: 18.

375. *The Red Army/PFLP: Declaration of World War* is a 1971 agit-prop film by Masao Adachi and Kôji Wakamatsu made in Lebanon.

376. *The Red Army/PFLP: Declaration of World War*, a.t.

377. *BAFHG*, 367.

378. *DFBE*, 305–6; *BRT*, 19. Pearse was executed on 3 May 1916.

379. "Toll of Japanese Terror Murders Rise to 12," *Times*, 14 March 1972: 6; also, "Tale of Guerrilla Torture Killings Shock Japan," *Times*, 9 May 1972: 7. The final death toll would rise to fourteen, not including law enforcement deaths.

380. *BRT*, 259.

381. *BRJ*, 15.

382. Tel Aviv, 30 May 1972; see "Cut all her bits off" earlier for more on that tragic event.

383. Sakaguchi, the third-ranking URA member at the time, had been sentenced to hang as early as 1993, and remained on death row through 2013, when his death sentence was again upheld.

384. "Nine Hostages Freed in Malaysia," *Times*, 6 August 1975: 1. It was reported that Malaysia was having trouble finding a country willing to allow the Japanese plane to land with its load of terrorists, even though they were seeking asylum, and even though many of the countries—including Lebanon, Syria, and North Korea—had histories of accepting such "freedom fighters." See also "Japan Releases Terrorists," *Times*, 5 August 1975: 1; *BRJ*, 164–68; and Dobson and Payne, *The Carlos Complex*, 182–84. Some members of terror groups, once incarcerated, refused to be released when other hostages had been taken—they wanted to finish their sentences and be done.

385. At this writing, Sakaguchi is still on death row.

386. *BRJ*, 163; italics added. Incidentally, a German police team tasked with attacking 1972 Olympic Black September kidnappers at the airfield took a vote and opted out of the deadly encounter (*BRT*, 166).

387. Quoted in Burke, "Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*," 134.

388. In prison awaiting trial, members of the Red Army Faction had plenty of time to consider these kinds of existential questions. They would communicate with one another and the outside (through their attorneys, often) using aliases; Ulrike Meinhof became "Therèse," while Baader wanted to be called, revealingly, "Ahab" (Lasky, "Ulrike Meinhof and the Baader-Meinhof Gang," 12).

389. Burke, “Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*,” 134.
390. Burke, “Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*,” 133.
391. See Iviansky, “Individual Terror,” 56.
392. Iviansky, “Individual Terror,” 56.
393. “Ex-Mercenary Is Police Chief,” *Telegraph*, 6 June 1978: 4.
394. Quoted in Iviansky, “Individual Terror,” 46.
395. Burke, “Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*,” 131–32.
396. Burke, “Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*,” 132.

SCENE ELEVEN
IN THE PALACE SEWERS

(draft) . . . eight MASKED COMMANDOS. Their faces are partially hidden—Even though this film is carefully crafted to reflect the look and atmosphere of first-century Judea (just like *Holy Grail* displayed a tenth-to-fourteenth-century mien), the connections between the "then" and the "now" are detectable, perhaps most initially and most identifiably in visual forms. The commando attire in this scene reflects not only the *sicarii* religious/terrorist sect, but the very recent and harrowing images of balaclava-wearing terrorists leaning out of hijacked airliners in the Jordanian desert[1] or peering over balconies of the athletes' village at the Munich Olympics. Our "masked commandos" are at least partially based on the notorious sicarii terror group, whom Laqueur describes as "a highly organized religious sect consisting of men of lower orders active in the Zealot struggle in Palestine."[2] What differentiates these men from the Zealots of the first century is that the Zealots were "primarily a coalition of peasants turned brigands [who] first challenged and then successfully opposed the high priestly regime in Jerusalem."[3] The PFJ are fighting the Romans, period.

Incidentally, the term "commando" is relatively young, harking back to the activities of the Boers across South Africa, where "commandos" were armed, civilian-led raids into native territories to recover stolen cattle, goods, and kidnapped women and children.[4] By the mid-1970s, commando missions were more military in nature—heavily armed military units inserted into inimical and (often) postcolonial territory to "rescue the innocent from the consequences of terrorism."[5] The West German military snuck into Mogadishu in October 1977 to save hostages taken by the PFLP from Lufthansa Flight 181; this less than a year after the Israeli commando raid at Entebbe—which set the example for action for many governments' future responses to terrorism—had saved more than one hundred hostages from Air France Flight 139.[6] The Entebbe raid had spawned not only worldwide news coverage but three separate films from which the Pythons could draw influence: *Victory at Entebbe* and *Raid on Entebbe,* both 1976, and *Operation Thunderbolt*, 1977. *Victory* began life as an ABC television movie; *Raid* was a Hollywood feature film for cinemas; and *Thunderbolt* was an

Israeli-influenced production helmed by Menahem Golan, with appearances from some of the actual participants in the raid. *Times* critic David Robinson reviewed both *Raid* and *Victory* in the same column in late December 1976, with *Raid on Entebbe* coming out as the better viewing choice.[7] *Operation Thunderbolt* didn't appear in London cinemas until October 1977, though Robinson judged it "certainly the best" of the three Entebbe films.[8] *Private Eye* offers a mock advertisement for a selection of "New Year Films"—*The Entebbe Memorandum, Carry On, Entebbe! Confessions of an Entebbe Pilot*.[9]

Lastly, another well-publicized and contemporary image of the balaclava is attributed to the so-called "Black Panther," Bradford-born Donald Neilson. Neilson perpetrated a crime spree across West Yorkshire 1971–1974, kidnapping and killing Lesley Whittle, killing three in various Post Office robberies and trying to kill others, and all stemming from myriad house burglaries that grew progressively more violent. Neilson's crimes were enumerated in 1976 during his trials, and he was eventually sentenced to several life sentences. During testimony, Neilson claimed that "he always remained hooded in the kidnapped Lesley Whittle's company."[10]

Wide shot exterior of PILATE'S palace. Night time—So far this undertaking is a "raid and penetration," helpfully described in some detail in Marighella's 1969 *Minimanual*. These operations are "rapid attacks on establishments located in neighborhoods, or even in the center of the city, such as small military units, commissaries, hospitals, to cause trouble, seize weapons, punish and terrorize the enemy, take reprisals, or to rescue wounded prisoners or those hospitalized under police guard."[11] The cover of darkness is important, too. "Raids and penetrations are most effective," Marighella writes, "if they are carried out at night."[12] The PFJ is certainly out to "cause trouble," to "punish and terrorize," and to certainly undertake "reprisals" against the hated Roman Empire in the form of Pilate (and his wife). The kidnapping element—a separate section in Marighella's book—has been appended here by the PFJ, though they are more considerate than Marighella and his Brazilian counterparts: he promotes the ancillary aim of the raid and penetration as a means to "destroy vehicles and damage installations."[13] Ever thoughtful, Francis will want his brothers to be careful to *not* damage the newly tiled sewers.

FRANCIS (VO): "This is the palace at Caesar Square . . . "—This was likely Herod's palace, initially, taken over by Pilate when he became prefect, and it is in the process of being redone, as we will see. This palace wouldn't be discovered by archaeologists until 1999.

Francis's voiceover is not part of early editions of the scripts as printed, nor the version read aloud in July 1977. It may be that for the purposes of narrative continuity this voiceover was added in the postproduction phase, likely by Palin and Jones. After principal photography had been completed on *Holy Grail*, a cheap credit sequence was needed (animation was ruled out and the production budget was gone), so Palin produced the "silly Swedish subtitles" idea for the film's opening credits.[14]

Many ROMANS are attempting to scrub off BRIAN'S slogans by torchlight —These would likely have been slaves, historically, as opposed to Roman citizens. During some of the worst of The Troubles in Northern Ireland, it was reported that "Catholics paint the sides of houses and other buildings white so patrolling troops will be clearly outlined for IRA snipers. The [British] army resprays the walls with black or purple paint. 'The loser may be the side that runs out of paint first,' joked a British officer."[15] The remnants of the antisocial actions perpetrated by those defending George Davis weren't so easily cleared away. Those that broke into the Headingley Cricket Ground and ruined the turf were able to boast a lasting effect—the pending cricket match had to be canceled. This case will be discussed in detail later in relation to an inscription seen in Pilate's quarters.

FRANCIS (VO): "Our commando unit will approach from Fish Street . . ."—One of Jerusalem's gates was known as Fish Gate; it was located near where "Tyrian fish merchants" kept shop.[16] There was a Fish Street in Oxford, where Jones and Palin attended university. This is likely a more period reference, referencing the "fishes and loaves" story in the Bible (or even "Jesus fish" the "Ichthys").

. . . *black-robed figures*—The revolutionaries are dressed in black flowing robes, with yellow ties around their heads. This isn't unlike the "uniform" some Dark Ages Muslim rulers demanded their Jewish citizens wear, including "distinctive clothing, a black habit with a sash and a yellow piece of cloth as a form of identification."[17] The PFJ are dressed this way in the film for a less sinister reason, likely. Later, when they come across the terrorists from the Campaign for Free Galilee, who will be wearing black robes and red sashes, it will be easier to distinguish them.

FRANCIS (VO): ". . . we are sewage workers on the way to a conference"—It's no stretch for the PFJ to employ this mode of entry into Pilate's sanctuary, especially given recent, highly visible events. There had been much talk between 1974 and 1978 in both the British and American press of the

“plumbers” used by Nixon’s White House to initially plug information and security leaks, and later burgle enemies’ offices for sensitive or damaging information. The infamous Watergate break-in was just one such attempt. Palin writes of these sordid details a number of times, and for obvious reasons: “The whole Watergate case has taken up more press and broadcasting time than any other cause célèbre I can remember.”[18]

There may well have been such men “employed” in Jerusalem’s waterways; there were elsewhere in the Roman Empire. Carl Richard mentions that slaves were often assigned to keep the sewers clean, and not the trade union or guild members Francis seems to be describing.[19] Koloski-Ostrow notes that Augustus’s *aedile* (the man responsible for maintaining public buildings), Marcus Agrippa (c. 64–12 BC), “apparently employed a team of about 240 specially trained enslaved workmen, who were later inherited by the state in accordance with Agrippa’s will. ”[20] The emperor Trajan (53–117) would later write to Pliny (c. 23–79) in regard to the building of a water-controlling sewer in Amastris, Turkey, advising him that “the work of maintaining the sewer on a more regular basis might be effected by workers ‘not far removed from punishment’ (that is, convicted criminals) and by communal slaves.”[21] Francis and the PFJ clearly see their disguised persons not as slaves, but as working freedmen, even guild members on their way to a trade union meeting where management (like the Romans) would get a verbal hiding from the righteously indignant rank and file. (In short, the meeting we’ve just seen with Reg and the PFJ, and those depicted in *I’m All Right Jack*.) There are estimates as to what a “trained sewer worker,” a *clocarius*, might have earned around this time: “Based partly on the Price Edict of Diocletian, we can speculate that the salary . . . could not have provided more than a meager daily subsistence, perhaps twenty-five denarii per day,” writes Koloski-Ostrow. “Such men were subjected to nightmarish pathogens in the wastewaters of the sewers, such as leptospirosis, sometimes causing a type of jaundice that is potentially fatal.”[22] A network of sewers for water run-off and waste has been found in Jerusalem; the only question might be how many latrines or cesspits, public or private, were actually attached to this system. The most likely time for this upgrade would have been *after* the fall of the city, however, when Rome (and later occupants) could build and rebuild without the worry of desecration. Francis and the PFJ terrorists might be fairly safe with their cover story, then, given the filthy, disease-ridden, poorly remunerated nature of their work.

Across the British Empire, though, there were similar workers who wouldn't have been given a pass with this claim. In India, during the height of the colonial "sinecurist" afflictions, the Public Works Department acronym, PWD, was popularly known as "Plunder Without Danger," this "byword for villainy" pilfering wherever and whatever it could.[23]

FRANCIS: "Reg, our glorious leader and founder of the PFJ. Will be coordinating consultant at the drain head . . ."—The terrorist Carlos often led his acolytes into their attacks, and carried out his own. He attempted to assassinate the "Zionist" businessman Joseph Sieff in 1973, engineered several explosive-type attacks in London and Paris, and even attempted rocket-propelled grenade attacks at Orly Airport in 1975. He also led the Vienna OPEC raid that killed three. This increased notoriety forced Carlos's backers and protectors to withdraw, fearing international reprisals.[24] If Reg had gone on this glorious mission, he would either have been killed or taken hostage, like Brian. Either way, his terrorist days would have been over.

The JRA's Fusako Shigenobu, on the other hand, went to the Middle East in 1971, and was able to plan and set into motion terror actions both in Japan and abroad from a place of relative safety. Shigenobu was the "coordinating consultant" for the JRA, and with good reason. She didn't have a bad back, but she did realize that increasing police anti-terror action in Japan, as well as the bad taste left in the public's mouth after the internecine torture and murders of URA members had rendered the homeland inhospitable for the JRA. She would remain abroad for nearly thirty years.[25] Upon returning to Japan in 2000, she was arrested, tried, and sentenced to two decades in prison, where she remains at the time of this publication.

REG *(making revolutionary gesture)*: "Solidarity, Brother"—Ironic, of course, that Reg's devotion to the cause is only as solid as his bad back allows, and Brian picks up on that, clearly, as he wanly returns the salute. This variation in revolutionary fervor and usefulness has been categorized, helpfully. Nechaev and Bakunin's famous *Catechism* divides society into six categories: (1) the "intelligent and energetic" (a threat—they are to be killed first); (2) those whose "monstrous crimes" could be used to "[foment] revolution" (they'd still be killed, but later); (3) next came the "high ranking, the rich and the powerful" (useful as dupes and for blackmail); and (4) politicians are of value as long as they are manipulable (meaning weak and blackmail-prone).[26] Reg and perhaps Francis and Stan fall into Bakunin's fifth category, the "loudmouths," whose description should sound familiar: "those platonic advocates of revolution,

should be engineered into making dangerous declarations, most would perish in the struggle but a few might become authentic revolutionaries."[27] The PFJ advocate revolution without being fully committed to the violent acts necessary for its conduct, they talk a good game (as long as Romans aren't within earshot), but on their first raid they all perish, but one, another somehow slipping away. They are "loudmouths," at best. The one, however, Brian, manages to become something of an authentic revolutionary as he successfully delivers an anti-imperialist message, escapes from the oppressors' clutches, and *perhaps* sows the seeds for future insurrection with his glorious death. Perhaps just the fact that at the end of the film, there are 140 non-Romans who agree "crucifixion's a doddle" as they sing and dance on the crosses is the glimmer the revolution needs? The sixth segment of society Bakunin mentions is women; that category will be discussed later, when Judith tries to spur the PFJ into action following Brian's second arrest.

FRANCIS (VO): "Once in the sewer . . . there is a Roman feast later in the evening so . . . don't wear your best sandals"—Pilate's house would have certainly had a private toilet, for he and his family, and likely more than one, separate spaces designated for men and women. Latrines connected to the palace for soldiers and staff should be assumed, as well as the possibility that a larger, public latrine would have been attached to the palace for use by visitors and guests. It might be assumed that all of these would have likely been plumbed to empty into a larger sewer beneath the palace or under the streets adjacent, but that's not necessarily the case. Koloski-Ostrow mentions that in Pompeii and Herculaneum, for example, "virtually every house . . . had its own private toilet," meaning the ruling and wealthy classes would have almost certainly enjoyed this amenity in Jerusalem.[28] And if Seneca is to be taken at his word as he castigates the Romans—"they vomit that they may eat, and they eat that they may vomit, and they do not deign even to digest the feast for which they ransack the world"[29]—then what's on its way to the scuttling PFJ will include ejecta from every human orifice. But Koloski-Ostrow goes on to say that even though in Rome, where *private* toilets could legally be connected to the city's massive sewers, most were not—"sewers were really a last resort to problems of waste removal in the Roman city"—meaning these toilets had to be emptied in some other way.[30] The Cloaca Maxima network, Koloski-Ostrow believes, was designed to channel not sewage but the city's river and storm water. Sewage overflow into the drains was inevitable, but not their primary function. If the

same held true for Jerusalem, the PFJ wouldn't need to be worried about offal or vomit, but floodwaters.[31]

FRANCIS (VO): ". . . the Caesar Augustus Memorial Sewer . . ."—The Goons would use a water pipe said to be buried beneath the Via Appia (the famous Appian Way road) to escape from the Romans in their "Pliny the Elder" episode, and in "Ten Snowballs That Shook the World," Bluebottle sings "Sideways, through the Sewers of the Strand on a Sunday Afternoon" ("Ankle-deep in sludge, dear/ We'll walk hand in hand").[32]

The Romans did name their monumental structures, several of which we've already seen in the images Gilliam gathered for the opening credits. In that credit sequence, the Pons Fabricius (bridge), portions of the Baths of Diocletian, and the Arch of Constantine are used as backgrounds for the falling Brian image. Rome's main sewer was known as the "Cloaca Maxima." One of its main aqueducts, the "Aqua Claudia," was named for Claudius, who finished the project. Claudius was also responsible for an ambitious tunnel project meant to control flooding on Fucine Lake.[33] Perhaps the largest and quite complex water system built by the Romans was also named for Caesar Augustus, the Aqua Augusta, near the Bay of Naples. (This wouldn't have been a "memorial," since Augustus lived until fourteen.)

There were also many buildings in the empire connected to sewage, both literally and figuratively. Structures like the Forum of Julius Caesar, the Baths of Titus, and the Domus Tiberiana all bear the names of Roman emperors and all have been identified as housing latrines connected to sewers that channeled waste away from the city.[34] Koloski-Ostrow notes that to this building-mad race, all structures had similar significance, including those associated with waste:

> In almost every case we have considered in some detail, the public toilets were connected to the piping system of the urban infrastructure in a permanent way that required an impressive amount of technological know-how and advance planning. Latrines were not to be a passing experiment in Roman urban architecture. When latrines were built inside Roman cities, they were built to last.[35]

And, as Koloski-Ostrow concluded earlier: "As with so many other features of Roman architecture, the Romans dealt with sewage problems in a practical, levelheaded manner, in some instances with the sophisticated engineering skills they employed in other fields of architecture."[36] It's perhaps no wonder that Francis wants his fellow terrorists to be careful of the new tilework—any public latrines and sewers of Jerusalem would have served everyone, rich and poor, Roman, Jew, and Samaritan.

This same kind of subterranean entry—in Jerusalem, against an oppressive government, and with violent intent—had been tried to grisly success when the Pythons were young, and even well before. First, the ancient example: Zealots helped sicarii slip into Jerusalem via secret passages, according to historians, "where they committed atrocious acts."[37] These activities would eventually lead to Titus bringing the full force of the Roman military to bear against Jerusalem. More recently, on 22 July 1946 the Irgun conducted what was the most egregious and bloody attack on the British government in the Middle East to that point: the bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. The hotel was in part a government facility, housing British military police and investigations personnel, likely the bombers' primary targets. On 22 July "a dozen men in flowing Arab robes carried milk cans" into the basement of the hotel, which had been left unprotected. At about half past noon that same day the cans exploded, leveling parts of the hotel, and killing more than ninety.[38]

The REVOLUTIONARIES . . . enter the main hypocaust or central heating duct . . . —(PSC) As ever, the Pythons have done a bit of homework here, accurately describing the Roman structures for providing heat to villas and baths; they also know that this kind of system was expensive, so only a place like a former Herodian palace or Roman fortress could claim such amenities. Study aside, these structures were actually much in the news during the run-up to *Life of Brian*. A number of separate archaeological digs in England—including Bishophill, Chichester, Woodchester, Southwark, and Wetherby—featured significant hypocaust finds and descriptions; the term was certainly much in the public lexicon between 1973 and 1977.[39]

Also, on 17 June 1974 the IRA detonated a bomb *beneath* Parliament, injuring eleven and doing significant damage.[40] *Private Eye*'s Waugh attributed the blast not to the IRA but to a particularly gassy Commons' Serjeant at Arms who happened to have a long-standing grudge against *Private Eye*.[41]

FRANCIS (VO): "This has just been retiled, so terrorists: careful with those weapons!"—This sounds particularly Pythonesque, but there is a precedent in the world of terror organizations for such consideration. In 1970 as the Japanese Red Army was conducting robberies to finance its political activities, they would stay at rented "hideouts"—apartments, really—far away from their targets. When they moved from one hideout to another, they cleaned the apartment "thoroughly": "Not only was this done to remove possible evidence and fingerprints," Farrell writes, "but it also insured return of the rent

deposit and a happy landlord who knew that these nice clean tenants could not have been radicals."[42]

Secondly, even though the script direction calls them "*REVOLUTIONARIES*," Francis actually uses the term "terrorists" here, and in a positive way, which hasn't usually been the case, historically. Laqueur notes that the terms "terrorism" and "terrorist" are relatively new, dating to the end of the eighteenth century, to the Jacobins, and "the period in the French Revolution broadly speaking between March 1793 and July 1794," where it was "a synonym for 'reign of terror.'"[43] (In newspaper coverage of the 1970s terror world, the terms "terrorist" and "revolutionary" tend to be used interchangeably, often one in the headline and another in the body of the story.)

Also, the fact that these terrorists are armed with seemingly pointed, sharpened weapons—those that could scratch the ceramic sewer tiles—identifies them, generally, as sicarii, or brigand types who bear at least short swords. In Latin, "sicarius" is a common term for "assassin," and "has the same general meaning" in the Mishnah, and "sicæ" is a small dagger—they were known as "dagger-men"—according to the *Jewish Encyclopedia*.[44] Josephus mentions the sicarii conducting a raid very much like this one:

> But now the *Sicarii* went into the city by night, just before the festival, which was now at hand, and took the scribe belonging to the governor of the temple, whose name was Eleazar, who was the son of Ananus [Ananias] the high priest, and bound him, and carried him away with them; after which they sent to Ananias, and said that they would send the scribe to him, if he would persuade Albinus to release ten of those prisoners which he had caught of their party; so Ananias was plainly forced to persuade Albinus, and gained his request of him. This was the beginning of greater calamities; for the robbers perpetually contrived to catch some of Ananias's servants; and when they had taken them alive, they would not let them go, till they thereby recovered some of their own *Sicarii*. And as they were again become no small number, they grew bold, and were a great affliction to the whole country.[45]

The sicarii in the first century set the tone, clearly, for the tactics of the JRA, the Baader-Meinhof group, and the PFLP nineteen-hundred years later.

FRANCIS (VO): ". . . directly beneath Pilate's audience chamber. . . "—Part of the reason that revolutionary groups transitioned from targeting high-profile figures to more collateral or indiscriminate groups and places was simply availability—nineteenth-century tsars and first-century Roman prefects alike tended to be "well-guarded and almost inaccessible."[46] The PFJ's enemy is Rome, as they've said, not necessarily Pontius Pilate or the Roman soldiers in Judea (most of whom weren't Roman, by birth), but Rome qualifies as "inaccessible," and there are likely far too many soldiers in even the Jerusalem garrison to consider a head-on assault. Even Pilate himself—the local

representative of Roman authority and oppression—has likely been considered and dismissed as a potential target. Pilate's family, then—like the scions of wealthy bourgeoisie from the Romanovs to the Gettys to the Hearsts,[47] or the representatives of foreign, colonizing governments (part of the "invisible enemy who afflicts and distorts . . . lives")—become the "accessible targets," and Third World terrorism is born.[48] In our case the PFJ manage to make their way into the sewers and heating space beneath Pilate's household, and, at least in the earlier drafts of the script, even accost Pilate's wife in her own bed—surely the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Pilate family. This accessibility doesn't help the PFJ, of course, since in the draft version Pilate's wife is an enormous woman who can easily defend herself, and in the finished version, the PFJ get into a scrap with the CFG terrorists, never even reaching the bedroom.

FRANCIS (VO): ". . . the moment for Habakkuk to get out his probe"—Habakkuk will be mentioned later as one who does not survive this raid. He was one of the so-called "minor prophets" gathered into the Hebrew Bible. His might be a name drawn from the newspapers of the day. Beginning in the early 1950s there was much scholarly and public discussion of new finds among the Dead Sea Scrolls relating to Habakkuk.[49]

This assault might also be modeled on the popular biblical version(s) of David's successful penetration of Jerusalem, as mentioned in 2 Samuel 5: "And David said on that day, Whosoever getteth up to the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind, *that are* hated of David's soul, *he shall be chief and captain.*"[50] Other translations use the word "shaft" instead of "gutter" as a translation for "zinnor," including the English Standard Version. Joab's troops climbed the fourteen-meter shaft, entered the city unmolested, and led the successful assault. Some also see this assault referred to in a passage in 1 Chronicles 11, where Joab "climbed" ("went up") into the city and, arriving first, became the "chief" or leader based on David's prophecy.[51] For many, this interpretation rang true, certainly even through the 1960s as archaeological work continued under Kathleen Kenyon in the area of the eastern slope of the City of David.[52] Not all scholars agreed with these interpretations, Reich notes, but they certainly could have impressed the Pythons as the PFJ's assault on Pilate's palace was being blocked. The actual genesis, construction, and use of this vertical shaft was the subject of much discussion during this period. By the late 1990s, additional digs and reinterpretations of the strata determined that Warren's Shaft was actually a *natural* formation, and was an unlikely water source or siege avenue.

. . . a large, rather erotic mosaic, in which a naked couple are embracing. The man wears a fig leaf—(PSC) On the title card for the "*It's the Arts*" animation in *Flying Circus*, there is a Statue of David wearing a fig leaf, and at some point that fig leaf gets yanked away, revealing a face. This same statue is seen later, in Ep. 32, also covering its modesty, and there is a story behind that leaf:

> There has been a David cast replica of the original statue housed at the Victoria & Albert museum since 1857. . . . The V&A website reports that upon receiving the unannounced gift, Victoria was so shocked by the nudity she commissioned a fig leaf to be made, and ordered that it be installed before any royal visit. It seems the Pepperpots and Mary Whitehouse may have had something of a patron saint in their Queen Victoria.[53]

This is a Python inclusion of the fig leaf, since the models for these erotic works, drawn from the frescoes in the brothels and bathhouses of Pompeii, left *nothing* to the imagination. This mocked-up version appears to be based on an image found in the Lupanare brothel in Pompeii. These would have been paintings and mosaics kept hidden from public view, adorning the walls of the back rooms of the small brothel/tavern, so it's odd seeing them here. Perhaps, since this setting is supposed to be the more private rooms of Pilate's house (even though it is an "audience chamber"), such adornment can be depicted. A very popular museum installation featuring Pompeian artifacts occupied the Royal Academy for many months in 1976, just as the Pythons were formulating the world of *Life of Brian*.

FRANCIS emerges from the tunnel . . . —If this moment *were* modeled on Joab's alleged assault on the city and the Jebusites, then Francis would now be leader—thanks to David's own words that the first to emerge becomes "chief and captain"—an outcome Reg, the "glorious leader and founder of the PFJ," might not have anticipated or appreciated.

Tunneling would also be used later as Titus's forces surrounded and attempted to lay siege to Jerusalem in 69. As the Roman troops built "earthworks" to support siege engines, the Jews tunneled beneath, eventually undermining the earthworks and forcing Titus to opt for waiting and starvation, rather than frontal assault.[54] Titus was eventually successful, and Jerusalem fell.

. . . an IDENTICAL GROUP appears . . . —This "identical" group scenario would have been quite recognizable to the astute viewer in 1979. The 1960s–1970s had seen the eruption of dozens of militant groups around the globe, in developed and developing countries, in those countries recently decolonized, still colonized, or in the painful process of decolonization. These terror groups, large and small, could be found in Britain, Northern Ireland, France, Germany,

Italy, Palestine, Israel, Syria, Bolivia, the United States, and on and on. There were multiple "Red" groups (Red Army, Red Brigades), various "Popular Front" and "Peoples' Front" and "Revolutionary Front" cadres, and eventually subgroups—"splitters"—from many of these, as well. With so many contenders, it was inevitable that a potential target for one group had already been chosen by another.

From another angle, as the Angry Brigade went to trial for their crimes, prosecutors managed to lump together several terror groups into one conspiracy, and successfully convict many. Also, the US-based carrier Eastern Airlines was identified as receiving more hijacking attempts than other airlines, meaning more terrorists competing for targetable Eastern flights (those within fuel range of Cuba), and in 1969 Eastern confirmed they were introducing security measures to try and deal with this unwanted attention.[55]

The LEADER of the OTHER REVOLUTIONARIES is called DEADLY DIRK—(PSC) "Deadly Dirk" is never named in the finished film, just in the script. A "dirk" is also a ceremonial dagger ("skean dhu") worn in the stocking as part of Highland dress, and was occasionally in the news when a particularly nationalist Scottish MP decided to wear full costume into the Commons. The dirk had become ceremonial over time, and so was allowed by the Serjeant at Arms. In this, the dagger version of the dirk and the terrorist version end up equally ceremonial—both are just for show.

More seriously, in 1977, Northern Ireland could offer a very similar situation, where two seemingly aligned but rival terror groups cancel out each other's efforts. Militants (calling themselves "loyalists") at the Ballylumford power station had called for a general strike, even though the majority of workers in the region and the population were against such an action. "Loyalist paramilitants" were using the critical power plant as a tool to leverage the British government, demanding a return to "majority rule at Stormont," and threatening terror against any who opposed.[56] The bellicose preacher Ian Paisley was one of the loudest voices behind the strike action. *Private Eye* read the situation with a cocked eye, as usual, seeing less-than-pure motives everywhere:

> The newspaper reporting of the ultra-Loyalist "strike" in Ulster has been at its usual abysmal level. Thus, the heroic workers of the vital Ballylumford power station have been portrayed as nobly resisting the calls of Paisley and his ilk because of a deep-seated loyalty to non-sectarianism. In fact, many of the workers are members of the rival paramilitary organisations, the UDA and the UVF,[57] and it is the split between the two organisations that has frustrated the strike-call in the area. The UVF, who have condemned the strike, are still reeling from the effects of a recent trial in the area two months ago, when 27 of their members received a total of 700 years of imprisonment on a variety of charges including the

> murder of two members of the UDA. In the circumstances, members of the rival armies are far too concerned in carrying out their private vendettas to be able effectively to organise a strike at the plant.[58]

So while the UDA and UVF struggle together, Northern Ireland continued to be ruled from Westminster, and another "common enemy," the IRA (not the Judean Peoples' Front) was free to attack all sides.

DEADLY DIRK *(saluting)*: "Campaign for Free Galilee"—First, the silliness. The "salute" Dirk gives is a Three Stooges borrow, a hand between the eyes to prevent an expected, two-fingered eye gouge.

There are contemporary and historical influences for the coming dustup, not surprisingly. First, an *au courant* to-do. *Private Eye*'s semi-regular column "Letter from . . . "[59] included one dispatch from the Holy Land that reads quite familiar. In November 1976 two Jewish groups—the Asian-descended Sephardi Jews and the European-descended Ashkenazi Jews—disagreeing over a Sephardi synagogue on Mount Zion, led to fighting between two rabbis and their followers: "[Ashkenazi Jew] Rabbi Goldstein was to be seen in the front rank, hitching up his skirts and blowing a whistle. In the battle several holy books were desecrated and fighting was only stopped by the Jerusalem police after several days had passed and Rabbi Goldstein had been arrested."[60]

Much earlier, as the battle for Jerusalem would heat up significantly in late summer 66 (after temple sacrifices for the well-being of the emperor were halted), there were at first just rivalries between those factions more devoted to Rome (and peace) and those fighting for freedom from Rome. As passions became more inflamed and war was certain, battles between "rival factions of insurgents" increased (led by Menahem and Eleazar, e.g.), making fatally certain that when Titus's troops finally surrounded the city, the city wasn't nearly ready.[61]

Even before the penultimate battle for Jerusalem, Galilee had "a history of guerilla warfare," according to Smallwood, with the "Galilean rising in 4 B.C. amounting to a revolt."[62] Josephus tells of "a certain Judas from Galilee" who called the Roman census "nothing but downright slavery."[63] This Judas saw it as "a confession of weakness for people who regarded God as their only master . . . to accept a human overlord and pay tribute to Rome."[64] Smallwood goes on to say that even though only "a certain amount of active opposition" arose directly from the census, the writing on the wall, to bring Brian and the PFJ back into this, *should* have been clear to the Romans. The seed planted was a "nationalist party," an ur-PFJ, growing out of anger over the tax imposition, and flowering eventually into extremist thought and action.[65] But it wasn't just Judas, and anti-

Roman feelings weren't confined to just Galilee. Yadin notes that there were multiple parties seeking independence from Rome: "The discovery of [the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*] scroll at Masada allows us to conclude that the Great Revolt was not restricted to the 'Zealot' sect alone: rather, as Josephus also states, many sects of Jewry took part in it, including the sect of the Essenes, either as a whole or in part, or at a certain stage of its development."[66] The Campaign for Free Galilee could be the Pythons' nod to the Zealots, who, under their leader, another Judas of Galilee, were known to operate from the Galilee area.[67]

More recently, Caryl notes the postwar fracturing of seemingly similar political movements after the war, and especially through the 1960s: "To be sure, the appeal of Marxism-Leninism was waning in the developed world, where leftist ideology was splintering into a kaleidoscope of options: Social Democracy, Trotskyism, Eurocommunism, Maoism, the New Left, the Extra-Parliamentary Opposition."[68] Every oppressed people during this period could declare a "Campaign for a Free Something, Somewhere," from Aden to Zimbabwe. This was a popular phrase in the 1960s and 1970s. There were "campaigns for free trade unions," Tony Benn's left-leaning "Campaign for Press Freedom," and a right-wing "Campaign for Free Speech" on campuses.[69] Despite its popularity, this will be the last we hear of the Campaign for Free Galilee, or any other terror group other than the PFJ.

During the 1971–1972 trial of the Angry Brigade, the prosecution laid at the Brigade's feet additional charges for bombings that had been initially claimed by other groups. The prosecution was certain that bombs allegedly set by the "First of May Group, Revolutionary Solidarity Movement," "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid," the "Wild Bunch," and "Lotta Continua," were actually placed by this Stoke Newington gang.[70] The "Stoke Newington 8 Defence Group" pamphlet denied these additional charges. There were so many disaffecteds looking for a measure of revenge on the "Man" and his world that it's no surprise that they might have trod on each other's toes and then been blamed for each other's actions by authorities.

DEADLY DIRK: "We're going to kidnap Pilate's wife . . . take her back . . . issue demands"—This is a classic example of political hostage-taking, a tactic employed over and over again in the world of international terrorism of the 1970s, but which also occurred in the first-century Roman Empire, with the Romans even acting the part. First the Jewish machinations.

The High Priest Ananias's son, Eleazar, was captain of the temple in Jerusalem. As mentioned earlier, when sicarii kidnapped Eleazar's secretary, he was held for a ransom involving the release of ten other sicarii already imprisoned. The procurator, Albinus, released prisoners more than once, succumbing to the extortionate acts at the insistence of Ananias and Eleazar. Not much later, Albinus cleverly put an end to the problem by executing the remaining sicarii in his prisons, and releasing criminals with "trivial charges" against them.[71] The PFJ never do consider rescuing or ransoming for Brian, even though many terror groups like the sicarii and more recently, the Japanese Red Army and the Baader-Meinhof Gang, successfully forced such transactions.[72]

As for the Romans, procurator of Jerusalem Agrippa II had a new dining room built as part of his palace, one that allowed him to see down into the Temple's inner courts while he ate. The Sanhedrin and the high priest Ishmael objected to this intrusion, and erected a higher inner courtyard wall, blocking Agrippa's view. The disagreement led to a delegation journeying to Rome from Jerusalem —including the high priest, the Temple treasurer, and others—to argue before the emperor. The case was actually heard by Poppaea, the wife of Nero, who decided in the Jews' favor. Poppaea, after ruling favorably, then detained the delegation, "ostensibly as hostages against the misuse of the privilege of privacy," a reminder that all the Jews' privileges came at Rome's pleasure.[73]

More contemporarily, after Black September carried out its successful, deadly raid on the Israeli athletes during the 1972 Olympics, details of the familiar plan emerged following the interrogation of Abu Dawud, Black September "chieftain":

> Mohammed Masailah had taken with him the instructions for the operation from Abu Iyad and a list of the names of the prisoners held by the Israelis who were to be bargained in exchange for the Israeli hostages. He had a statement prepared in English setting out the aims of the operation and Black September's conditions for releasing the hostages.[74]

The Japanese Red Army seemed particularly adept at hostage taking, according to Farrell:

> Political hostage taking attempts to flavor the incident with an air of legitimacy. The hostage takers are perceived as having some reason or motivation worth considering. Since the government has *allowed* this heinous act to occur in the first place it now *owes* it to the victims to listen to the demands and perhaps give in so that the incident might be resolved.[75]

As Farrell continues, we can fit the PFJ alongside the JRA's place in the equation:

> Since the JRA's [PFJ's] objective was not negotiation but rather capitulation, the political flavor to the

> demands worked to the group's advantage. Communiques issued by the group during the hijackings of the 1970s [attempted kidnapping of 33] made it perfectly clear that the onus was on the Japanese [Roman] government and not the JRA [PFJ]. The government [Pilate] had a choice: give in or accept responsibility for the deaths of its citizens [his wife, a Roman citizen].[76]

The JRA have more success in the 1970s than the PFJ enjoy in 33. The PFJ's hostage taking fails miserably (they scrap with the CFG instead), and leads quite directly to Brian's execution, *not* his ransoming by the PFJ so that he can fight another day. The situation in first-century Jerusalem is different, since Pilate is in a position to win by the use of overwhelming force—he has at his command the "shock and awe" of the empire, if necessary. Unlike modern democracies, where public opinion matters, Pilate does not worry much about local, national, or even international approval, short of pleasing Rome. His position as Judean prefect won't be untenable until Rome loses faith in his ability to keep order; after that, Pilate's days are numbered.

This was also the failed Roman consul candidate Catiline's (and his associates') plan as they readied their overthrow of Pompey's Rome in 63 BC. Cicero uncovered the plot, and Catiline fled to Etruria. One of the Catiline coconspirators "still in Rome plotted to kill all of the senators and to take Pompey's children hostage," a familiar-sounding plan.[77] And even though the usually tempestuous Julius Caesar argued for calm and a fair trial, Cicero and Cato—Pilate-like—insisted on immediate execution of the conspirators.

The oddest version of this hostage-taking-accompanied-by-demands scenario has to be what happened to English ex-pat Charlie Chaplin. The entertainer died in Switzerland on Christmas Day 1977, and was buried soon thereafter. On 2 March 1978—just when the Pythons were reeling from the shock of losing EMI's backing for *Life of Brian*—grave robbers stole Chaplin's body and immediately demanded a $600,000 ransom. His widow balked, and the robbers threatened the Chaplins' children next. A little more than a month later the hapless villains were arrested and the body recovered and securely reinterred.[78]

DEADLY DIRK: "We're not telling <u>you</u>"—Disagreements between seemingly similar revolutionary movements weren't unusual in the 1960s and 1970s, in life or in film. In 1967 Japan, "leaders of the three main *Zengakuren*[79] factions" were invited by a liberal professor to come to university and discuss their platforms for change, but all three refused to appear if they had to share the stage, and each denounced the other in his response to the professor.[80] One student spokesman concluded that "the qualitative difference [between] the movement[s] is so great that we do not think of seeking their aid, even if our

power is weak."[81] A foreign visitor made the following observation, comparing the German and Japanese student movements: "There is a difference: in Germany the students fight the police; in Japan the bitterest battles are fought among the students."[82] Similarly, the Galilee and Judean factions, even though they seem to have the same goals and even methods, can't agree to work together for the betterment of Jerusalem.

FRANCIS: "Tough titty for you, fish face"—In an early *Goon Show* episode "fish face" is used as an insult, with Peter Sellers delivering the line in a Jewish accent, while "tough titty" is a very recent American colloquialism.[83] Auberon Waugh's father, Evelyn, used the term "Fuddy-Duddy Fish-Face" as a slighting nickname for Peter Quennell.[84]

DEADLY DIRK pokes FRANCIS in the eye—Another Three Stooges (and by extension, cartoony) moment, akin to the "salute" Dirk displayed earlier. In the 1934 Tex Avery cartoon *Porky in Wackyland*, a three-headed creature performs these same Stooges' slaps and pokes.[85]

BRIAN: "Brothers, we should be struggling together . . . "—There are versions of a penultimate scene like this one found in several films, and even in life. First, in the influential *I'm All Right Jack*, a panel discussion show ("*Argument*") involving all sides of the industrial strike erupts into wrestling and fisticuffs. The shop steward, Mr. Kite, stands amid the punch-up and tries to call for order from all sides: "Brothers, please brothers! Use your self-control!" He is immediately socked, and the donnybrook continues. Also, in the Woody Allen film *Bananas* (1971), Fielding (Allen) is telling his psychiatrist about his childhood. In a Bergmanesque dream sequence we see two groups of flagellating monks carrying two crosses, with Fielding strapped to one of them. When both processions vie for the same parking space, a fight erupts, and the monks slaughter each other.

In the world outside the film, the Grunwick Strike[86] in the summer of 1977 pitted the Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staff (APEX) union against the Grunwick film processing laboratories. APEX represented many female, immigrant employees (most East African Asian). In this strike action, vocal and active support from the famed Arthur Scargill and his miners came to picket and chant, and to happily be arrested for their union sisters. *Private Eye* pointed out the irony of this very loud and photogenic support, citing recent history:

> Why was Miners leader Arthur Scargill arrested (with maximum publicity) outside Grunwicks? Scargill and his pack have never been noted for their concern for the union APEX (which is on strike at

> Grunwicks). In fact, six years ago, during the big national miners' strike,[87] extremely bad publicity was attracted by the miners picketing the Coal Board Doncaster HQ—Coal House. Miners and their wives were shown on television and in the papers kicking APEX members trying to get into Coal House. Teenage girls were kicked, punched and spat upon. Publicity was so bad[88] that during the next miners' strike Scargill had to tell the pickets to moderate their violence because the general public was thought to be in support of those APEX members trying to keep the Coal Board working.[89]

Art can imitate life as the PFJ and CFG struggle together in common cause, party feeling being wrestled into submission as Roman sentries watch.

"Struggling together" has been the warning heard from the earliest days of modern socialism. Socialists fighting each other, factionally, ideologically, means they are not fighting their "common enemy," just fatiguing themselves. In Petr Lavrov's *The State Element in the Future Society* (1876), the proper focus of "the struggle" and "solidarity" (precious terms for the revolutionary) is laid out:

> The working out of a socialist morality therefore requires one thing only: struggling against the Old World and unavoidably making use of the monopolies that exist, we must never even temporarily give ourselves the aim of creating new monopolies as instruments in the struggle for the socialist principle; never and in no case must we resort to monopoly, to exclusive control of any instruments in the social struggle, for the purposes of group rivalry among the socialists themselves, who, whatever their differences [. . .] are obliged, in the name of the solidarity which they have established as their aim (workers' socialism), and of their one and only hatred, towards their common foes (the present-day state and capitalism), [and not to] to fight amongst themselves . . . which . . . undermines the solidarity among all the builders of a world of solidarity, the world of workers' socialism.[90]

The right cause could unite even bitter ideological foes. In the years leading up to World War II, Chiang Kai-Shek's Kuomintang and Mao's Chinese Communist Party laid aside their political enmity in the face of the invading Japanese troops, fighting for a free China together.[91] After the war, they started up again, right where they'd left off.[92] John Sinclair, writing in the *Militant Irish Monthly* in June 1976, says the same of James Connolly's fractured Irish Socialist Republican Party in the first decade of the twentieth century, where ideological hair-splitting would lead to "years of further splits and fusions among tiny groups." Bringing the argument forward, Sinclair concluded: "As today [1976] these groups spend more time fighting amongst themselves than fighting for workers' interests."[93] During this very same period (1975–1976), and in the region our film is focused on, the Lebanese Civil War raged into life—Christian, Palestinian, and Muslim forces fought with and against one another, killing and displacing thousands.[94] The charter distributed by the PLO at its inception in July 1968 echoes Brian's plaintive cry:

> Article 8: The phase in their history, through which the Palestinian people are now living, is that of

> national (*watani*) struggle for the liberation of Palestine. Thus the conflicts among the Palestinian national forces are secondary, and should be ended for the sake of the basic conflict that exists between the forces of Zionism and of imperialism on the one hand, and the Palestinian Arab people on the other. On this basis the Palestinian masses, regardless of whether they are residing in the national homeland or in diaspora (*mahajir*) constitute—both their organizations and the individuals—one national front working for the retrieval of Palestine and its liberation through armed struggle.

The PFJ and CFG could have benefited from creating, then reading such a "work and play well together" declaration.[95]

But not just social progressives and terror groups, of course, suffer these internecine challenges. In the late 1960s, the French Fourth Republic was attempting to climb back from the depths (having fallen after the Algiers fiasco[96]), but scrapping among themselves threatened their ascension; in Israel the contentious premier race also featured infighting; and in the supposedly united new version of the Common Market, infighting among European members helped Britain forge better deals for the home country.[97] The 1970s in Britain were also a decade of turbulence for the middle class, especially as the home economy sputtered;[98] higher education failed to provide promised success; and the manufacturing base in Britain struggled, restructured, nationalized, and ultimately became perpetually uncompetitive.[99] The former bedrock of British life, both economic and social, the middle class, responded to this uncertainty with perhaps understandable worry and agitation, according to Will Ellsworth-Jones in September 1975: "The middle classes are on the warpath, fighting with all their considerable armoury a very bitter little battle. Their enemy, though, is not Harold Wilson, or Tony Benn, nor even Arthur Scargill;[100] their fight is with each other."[101] Ellsworth-Jones goes on to outline the vicious but sad and even silly infighting between two groups with seemingly similar goals—saving the endangered British middle class—styled the "Middle Class Association" and the "National Federation of the Self-Employed," the "MCA" and "NFSE," if you will. These so-called "fanatical moderates" had tried to put aside their differences when confronted with the breakdown of the world around them, but the leadership couldn't agree on tactics, vision, or useful actions. The MCA would become VOICE, or the Voice of the Independent Centre, and a "palace revolution" brought down MCA's original leader in favor of another, more strident and colorful leader (derisively called "the middle-class answer to Gary Glitter").[102] Like Reg and Francis, each group promised "dynamic action," even an "autumn full of action." Each group and factions within each group, though, ended up spending donated funds on fraternal squabbling rather than concerted

external political activity, with the result, one insider admitted, that they were "looked upon as a bit of a joke."[103]

Circling back to our film's depicted world, in the city of Jerusalem in 70 there were at least three separate factions of "Zealots who were all determined to win the war," Kotker writes, but who disagreed on how to do it. One group—with their cry "No king but God"—seized the Temple and used it as a fortress. They continued to perform the Temple sacrifices, even while under attack from a rival band, which was itself being assaulted by soldiers of the third Zealot group. The Zealots were so full of hatred for one another that they seemed to have lost their senses. Members of the three groups even burned one another's food supplies.[104]

These three bands managed to agree they had a common purpose once Titus's forces had completely surrounded the city—a case of too little, too late. In the depicted 33, Pilate's best scenario for survival couldn't have imagined two like-minded fanatical groups bent on undermining his government actually killing each other almost completely before they reached their target—*and* leaving Pilate with one survivor to punish as a public demonstration of the power of the empire. In Britain of 1975, the status quo of the Labour party had nothing to fear from the "moderate militants" of the MCA, the NFSE, or even VOICE; they'd all killed each other long before coming within earshot of No. 10.

BRIAN: "We mustn't fight each other"—The circumstances of historical infighting among specifically revolutionary and terror groups would be risible—if the results weren't so deadly for so many. In the Pythons' lifetime and earlier, such bloody internecine scuffles occurred regularly, including rival Irish groups in the early 1920s, Bulgarian terrorist factional "feuds" between 1924 and 1934, and later "the killing of IRA regulars by Provisionals and vice versa."[105] In 1966 the emerging Palestinian leader Yassir Arafat and his newly formed al-Fatah "resistance" group faced a hostile takeover attempt from one of its backers, the Syrian government, leading to both assassination orders and attempts from either side.[106] The consolidated PFLP under Dr. Habash were, by 1968, the scourge of the more "patriotic" Palestinians—often killing those who opposed them ideologically—they were a "gang . . . of rascals and ruffians . . . trying to tear the revolutionary movement into pieces," according to the organs of competing resistance groups.[107] A pamphlet from another, competing terror organization charges al-Fatah with, essentially, "ruining it for the rest of us": "Habash is trying to tear the resistance movement into pieces from the inside," Demaris records. "This fascist gang is sabotaging the security of the resistance movement and is opening the way for counterrevolutionary forces to intervene in order to

destroy the resistance movement."[108] The line "sabotaging the security of the resistance movement" meant that al-Fatah was rocking the boat, not only killing alleged friendly forces but possibly inviting, thanks to the chaos, a larger, more violent response from the Israelis, who had become known for both pinpoint assassinations and attack jet retaliations by this time.[109] Earlier, when Judith announced to the PFJ that Brian as a "do-er" had "struck a blow" against the Romans and for their movement, Reg and Francis were momentarily concerned, knowing that *actual* action might draw unpleasant reprisals from the Romans.

In early June 1948, a large shipment of arms and ammunition was sent from a French port to what had become the State of Israel less than one month earlier. The Irgun faction saw an opportunity to improve its position in (or situate itself in place of) the new government, and wanted the weaponry. The nascent, democratic government under David Ben-Gurion needed the "arms . . . [to] go to the army, whatever happens," and devised a plan to head off Irgun and seize the shipment aboard the *Altalena*.[110] Ben-Gurion's Hagana troops swarmed the beach where the landing was to take place, while Menachem Begin led the Irgun fighters. Ben-Gurion's concern that he voiced to his lieutenants was that they were fighting each other, and not the Arabs. He told his commander, Yigal Allon: "We are faced with open revolt. . . . The very future of the state is at stake. You are to take personal command of the Tel Aviv area. Your new assignment may be the toughest one you've had so far. This time you may have to kill Jews. But I'm depending on you to do what is necessary for the state of Israel."[111] A pitched battle did erupt between Begin's Irgun fighters and the legitimate members of Israel's army, all Jewish combatants, but Begin, who had boarded the *Altalena*, tried to call (Brian-like) for a cease-fire: "Stop shooting! Do not kill your own brothers!"[112] The ship was partly unloaded, then set afire in an artillery barrage from the shore. Begin allegedly refused to surrender, and wanted to die as a witness to the democratic government's "evil" nature, but he was ordered to be tossed overboard, and, like Brian, survived the failed mission.[113]

BRIAN: ". . . surely we should be united against the common enemy"—The immediate answer here is the mysteriously feared Judean Peoples' Front, but they realize it should actually be the Romans. In February 1974 the JRA and the PFLP had worked together to take over the Japanese embassy in Kuwait, their demands being the release of comrades being held in Singapore. By August 1974, there was real concern that the rumored "joint autumn operations of the Japanese Red Army Group and the PFLP" might mean bloody attacks on the

Asian Games in Tokyo.[114] By 1976, police were finding evidence of cooperation between the IRA, PFLP, RAF, and Red Youth, a Dutch group.[115] The PFJ and CFG could have benefited from such cooperation, and perhaps survived the palace raid. The "odd bedfellows" idea of these groups linking up, "struggling together," was at this time being discussed in relation to the Japanese Red Army's seemingly suicidal bent, in juxtaposition to the various Al-Fatah groups who espoused more political (and survivable) motives and activities. Of the groups depicted in the film, only the briefly seen Judean Peoples' Front seem as set on self-destruction as the JRA.[116]

In terms of governance, the mid-to-late 1970s was a period of forced coalition, of unusual bedfellows "united against the common enemy," in this case the Tories. Heath's government had enjoyed a sizable majority in June 1970; Wilson's 1974 victory was by a much smaller margin (301–297 seats), and Labour *lost* the popular vote in that same election. The Conservatives were unable to convince the smaller parties to join them in a coalition to break the hung parliament, and Labour was then asked to form a government. Writing in August 1974, Peter Jenkins pointed up Labour's real challenge, and it had to do with "struggling together":

> To discuss coalition within the Labour Party is as perilous as to lecture on genetics at the London School of Economics. The taboo makes it difficult to be realistic about the possibilities of our politics which at the moment, with first holidays and then the election to come, have the appearance of being stuck. The biggest log in the jam is the wooden inability of the Labour Party to develop the potential which exists for a winning alliance on the Left of the centre of British politics.[117]

"Coalition is not some form of conspiracy against Labour," Jenkins would conclude, nor against the Peoples' Front of Judea or the Campaign for Free Galilee, we can conclude, the latter two seeming to have identical plans and goals.[118] Even though Labour had a visible, tilt-worthy opponent in Heath's Tories, they could not put aside ideological differences—the far Labour Left yawing further left, the center doubling down on moderation, and the Right skewing conservative—so coalition became the party's only lifeline. And rather than embrace the like-minded others in the metaphorical tunnel beneath Pilate's palace, Wilson will push on "alone," trusting the fact that he'd managed to win three of four national elections.[119]

The hastily called October 1974 "snap" election gave Wilson the small majority he needed to govern *sans* coalition, but just (319–277). Callaghan's Labour government (from April 1976) officially lost its majority on the day he took office, forcing a series of coalition balancing acts over the next several

years. A Lab-Lib pact[120] helped for a while, offering a sort of power-sharing agreement with the smaller, third-party Liberals in return for their bloc votes or abstentions, whichever was necessary, followed by a turn to aggregate support from the fringe nationalist parties—the SNP, the Ulster Unionists, *et al.* The simple goal was to maintain a majority in the House so that Labour's policies could continue to move forward thanks to control of No. 10, especially as the country's economy seemed on the verge of positive change,[121] with inflation easing and North Sea oil ready to flow.[122] Donoughue notes over and over again that such associations and even concessions represented the greater good—Labour remaining in power, and Labour's agenda remaining in gear.

The PFJ will find that power-sharing to fight the common enemy isn't an option—the PFJ and CFG immediately kill each other in Pilate's house—and the PFJ especially will discover that revolutionary *in*action is a much safer path to remaining in power (and remaining alive).

A ROMAN GUARD walks by at the end of the hallway—This guard is clearly in ear shot of the arguing and whispers, meaning this is yet another cartoony moment; after he passes, they can continue.

DEADLY DIRK *(to Francis)*: "Right. Where were we?"—Francis reminds Dirk that he was about to punch him, the CFG leader does so, and the melee can continue. This kind of acknowledgment of the artifice of the action is seen in Tex Avery cartoons. In *Screwball Squirrel* (1944; MGM), Meathead the Dog is chasing Screwy to a frenzied version of the "William Tell Overture," when the action begins to cycle, as if they're stuck. Screwy steps out of frame (the camera pans with him) to an old Victrola, which is stuck in a groove and repeating itself; he jogs the needle, steps back into the frame with the dog, who is waiting patiently, and then the chase continues. Ten years later, in the fight scene (for Laurie's affections) in *The Searchers*, even after biting, eye-gouging, and a kick to the chin, both fighters stop when a fiddle is about to be crushed. They find out who it belongs to, hand it back, and the fight immediately resumes.

Around him lie the remains of the two REVOLUTIONARY GROUPS—A substantially longer fight scene between the PFJ and CFG, an attempted tryst between effeminate centurions, and the "Leviathan"-like appearance of Pilate's enormous wife were gone by the time the film was completed. In that version, Pilate's wife inflicts most of the damage seen here.

By the 1970s the formerly cohesive Students' Socialist League of Japan had splintered badly, leaving dozens of smaller groups with individual axes to grind against Japan, the United States, the war in Vietnam, the emperor, and on. By

late 1975 the bomb attacks and assaults of all kinds were coming from myriad tiny groups, their lack of coordination making it much harder for the police to infiltrate and track them. Peter Hazelhurst covered the events in a series of columns for the *Times*, and he may as well have been describing the ridiculous PFJ-CFG clash:

> With each faction accusing the other of betraying Marxist ideals, hardly a day passes without reports of violent clashes. In most cases groups of radicals, wearing crash helmets and masks and wielding steel pipes, surround a small group of rivals and beat them senseless, and in many cases to death, before escaping in broad daylight. Again in most cases, the public do not intervene. Sixteen victims [have] died in political infighting this year so far. A total of 39 radicals have been killed and another 283 have been injured since 1969.[123]

(draft) Her vast fist descends on BRIAN'S head . . . —Right out of a score of Warner Bros. cartoons, including *Baseball Bugs* (1946), and a throwback to the Pythons' use of both the rubber chicken and the giant hammer in *Flying Circus*. In the finished film, this thump on the head happens offscreen, after the screen's gone black. There, it's not clear who actually hits him, but it's hinted that it's one of the guards, and not Pilate's Wife.

Notes

1. See Burleigh, *BRT*, 155.
2. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 18. The murderous sicarii may or may not have been actively involved with the actual Zealot movement, which appeared a full decade after the rise of sicarii bandits. The Zealots appear to have been a confederation of "brigand bands" forced together by the Roman armies as they pursued a "scorched earth" policy across Judea in 67–68 (Horsley, "The Zealots," 159-71). The PFJ are clearly meant to be more of a political, nationalist group.
3. Horsley, "The Zealots," 189.
4. See the *OED*.
5. "Beating Terrorism," *Spectator*, 21 October 1977: 3.
6. The Air France hijacking was led by individuals from the PFLP-External Operations and (German) Revolutionary Cells terror groups. All four of the hijackers were killed in the Israeli rescue operation, as were three hostages.
7. David Robinson, "The Year the Cinema Looked Back," *Times*, 31 December 1976: 24.
8. "A Swiss Film That Stands Apart," *Times*, 21 October 1977: 17.
9. *Private Eye*, 7 January 1977: 13.
10. "Whittle Kidnapper Always Hooded," *Times*, 23 June 1976: 2.
11. Marighella, *Minimanual*, 53–54.
12. Marighella, *Minimanual*, 54.
13. Marighella, *Minimanual*, 54.
14. Larsen, *BAFHG*, 14 and 20.
15. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 313.
16. Jeremias, *JTJ*, 20; also 2 Chronicles 33:14.
17. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 115.
18. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 120. Palin was also reading John Dean's *Blind Ambition* in early 1978. Dean was White House Counsel for Nixon. See *BAFHG*, 24 for more.
19. Richard, *WWAR*, 29.
20. Koloski-Ostrow, *ASRI*, 80; also *WWAR*, 59–60.
21. *ASRI*, 81.
22. *ASRI*, 81.
23. Brendon, *DFBE*, 236.
24. Dobson and Payne, *Carlos Complex*, 235, 239–41; also Follain, *Jackal*, 192–93.
25. See Dobson and Payne, *The Terrorists*, 53–55.
26. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 43–44.
27. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 44.
28. *ASRI*, 32–33.
29. Quoted in Sandnes, *Belly and Body in the Pauline Epistles*, 85.
30. *ASRI*, 68, 83.
31. *ASRI*, 63–70.
32. First broadcast 28 March 1957 and 10 February 1958, respectively.
33. Claudius had chosen this larger lake many miles east of Rome to present an enormous *naumachia*, or staged naval battle, as part of his grand plan for the finest games ever. To keep the lake from flooding, a three-and-a-half-mile tunnel was cut as a water channel, taking eleven years to complete. The result was a lake large enough to stage the fifty-strong armada of full-size attack boats (Mannix, *TAD*, 36–37). The tunnel collapsed not long after it was completed (and rebuilt more than once), which may be why it does *not* bear Claudius's name.
34. *ASRI*, 13.
35. *ASRI*, 32.

36. *ASRI*, 30.

37. See the entry for “sicarii” in *JE*.

38. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 83. In the months that followed, dozens of hoax bomb threats were reported (“Lessons of Jew Bomb Outrage,” *Aberdeen Journal*, 25 July 1946: 1); see also *DFBE*, 481.

39. See the “Archaeology Report” sections in the *Times*, including 26 September 1973: 5, 15 November 1973: 21, 28 February 1974: 15, 12 April 1975: 3, and 13 August 1977: 14.

40. There were at least six other bombings attributed to the IRA in 1974.

41. Waugh, *FCY*, 13 June 1974.

42. Farrell, *BRJ*, 97.

43. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 16–17. *Private Eye* also pokes fun using the current terrorist climate. In a February 1977 issue, a gala awards ceremony is interrupted by the appearance of “a number of highly trained Marxist guerrillas” who “broke into the hall and clubbed Mr. [Ivor] Richard to death with Soviet-made *knobkerries*” (7 January 1977: 10). Richard had been very recently (and, to some, ineffectively) helping to broker the Rhodesian negotiations at the 1976 Geneva Conference.

44. See the “sicarii” entry, penned by Richard Gottheil and Samuel Kraus, in *JE*.

45. Josephus, *AJ*, 20.9.3 (Whiston, 424).

46. Iviansky, “Individual Terror,” 53.

47. J. P. Getty III and Patty Hearst are discussed elsewhere in this section. Frank Sinatra Jr. had been kidnapped and ransomed in California in 1963; the former child actress Shirley Temple Black had also been a target, it was discovered much later, for possible kidnapping by the JRA (*Daily Mail*, 18 March 2016). Black had become US ambassador to Ghana in 1974.

48. See Iviansky’s “Individual Terror” and Laqueur’s *Terrorism* for more.

49. “New Light on Habakkuk,” *Times*, 30 May 1950: 3.

50. 2 Samuel 5:8.

51. See Reich’s interview/presentation, “The Question of the Biblical ‘Zinnor’ and Warren’s Shaft.” Reich translates the words used in both the ESV and the KJV, “went up,” as “climbed,” meaning Joab and his men may have climbed upward through a shaft.

52. See Reich and Shukron’s “Light at the End of the Tunnel,” 22–33, 72.

53. Larsen, *MPFC: UC*, 1.100; 2.81.

54. Smallwood, *JURR*, 321.

55. “Airlines Want Inter-government Action to Combat Hijacking,” *Financial Times*, 21 October 1969: 19.

56. “Troops Called in to Block Ulster Strike Measures,” *Times*, 30 April 1977: 1.

57. The Ulster Defence Association and the Ulster Volunteer Force, respectively, both Protestant loyalist paramilitary groups.

58. *Private Eye*, 13 May 1977: 4.

59. This column featured real news from troubled areas of the world, usually detailing sad political and military absurdities that made life miserable for many.

60. *Private Eye*, 24 December 1976: 7.

61. *JURR*, 292–93.

62. *JURR*, 153n40.

63. *JURR*, 153.

64. *JURR*, 153.

65. *JURR*, 153–54. In 1969 Peter Lewis wrote a lengthy *Daily Mail* article on Judas Iscariot and his motivations in betraying Christ. Lewis spent a number of column inches discussing Barabbas, the Zealots, and first-century Judea anti-Roman movements (“Can We Really Believe Judas Did It Just for Money?” *Daily Mail*, 3 April 1969: 8).

66. Yadin, *Excavation of Masada*, 108; quoted in Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 62n4.

67. Maier’s historical fiction, *Pontius Pilate*, also places the Zealots in Galilee (195).

68. Caryl, *Strange Rebels*, 38–39.

69. For the last reference, see “Rival Union Fights,” *Daily Mail*, 6 October 1976: 11.

70. “How the Angry Brigade Cracked,” *Daily Mail*, 7 December 1972: 16–17. The “Revolutionary Solidarity Movement, First May Group” claimed credit for shooting up the US Embassy in London in 1967 (“Sequel to Shots at US Embassy,” *Times*, 25 August 1967: 3); at least two bombs were claimed by “Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid” and “Wild Bunch” (“Explosions Case Court Told of Letters,” *Times*, 28 April 1971: 4); and Lotta Continua was an Italian terror group with reported links to the IRA. Jesus and his disciples’ “raid” on the temple in *The Passover Plot* is structured just like one of these demonstrative Angry Brigade actions.

71. *JURR*, 281–82; *AJ*, 20.9.2–3 (Whiston, 424).

72. The Japanese government was especially prone to making deals with terrorists, hoping to avoid additional collateral damage.

73. *JURR*, 279; for Josephus’s version, see *AJ*, 20.8.11 (Whiston, 422–23).

74. “How Black September Threatens Europe,” *Telegraph*, 15 July 1973: 6.

75. *BRJ*, 231.

76. *BRJ*, 231.

77. *WWAR*, 114–15. For more on this incident, see “The PFJ’s Plan” scene.

78. The bizarre Chaplin story stayed in the news through most of 1978, with a well-attended retrospective of his films and memorabilia running at the National Film Theatre starting in May and the trial for the grave robbers being conducted in December 1978.

79. An acronym for *Zen Nihon Gakusei Jichikai Sorengo*, or the “All-Japan Federation of Student Self-Governing Associations,” a student offshoot of the Japan Communist Party.

80. *BRJ*, 61.

81. *BRJ*, 61.

82. *BRJ*, 62. Farrell goes on to note that between just 1968 and 1975, there were more than 1,770 “internal factional disputes” among these student groups—and those were just the fights “violent enough to require police involvement” (62). The PFJ and CFG are in good company.

83. *The Goon Show*, 22 January 1952.

84. “Peter Quennell,” *New York Times*, 31 October 1993.

85. *BAFHG*, 315.

86. Discussed in more detail in the “Stoning” scene section.

87. This is the strike that hobbled Heath and the sitting Tory government, forcing power rationing and the three-day work week, and eventually a losing election for the Conservatives in 1974. *Holy Grail* was being written during this cold, dark period. See *BAFHG*, 86, as well as the entries in that index under “strikes” for more.

88. This “bad publicity” was worse than anyone assumed at the time—it helped sour the electorate to big labor causes, preparing the way for a Thatcher victory in 1979.

89. “Blackleg,” *Private Eye*, 8 July 1977: 4.

90. Sapir, *“Vpered!” 1873–1877*, 326.

91. Caryl, *Strange Rebels*, 29.

92. There are even incidents of the authorities in charge of fighting insurrection “struggling together.” *Private Eye* reports the following: “General Minguel Arracha, head of the anti-urban guerrilla section, Buenos Aires north, was blown to pieces by a bomb that his friend General Carlos Mendoza had forgotten to take away with him after their weekly game of dominoes” (“True Stories,” 26 November 1976: 8).

93. Reprinted at http://redlug.com/LabHist/LabOrigins.htm. James Connolly was an Irish Republican activist who also spent time in the United States. He would be executed by the British in 1916. The *Militant Irish Monthly* began publishing in June 1972 to “put forward a clear and consistent Marxist view of the bloody events in Ireland,” according to the broadsheet for its third issue.

94. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 235–36.

95. “Rejectionist” groups—PFLP and PFLP-GC—targeted the more moderate PLO after 1974, so both Mossad and “friendly” agents were killing Palestinian “brothers” (*BRT*, 178).

96. “The Fourth Republic Creeps out of the Shadows,” *Daily Mail*, 9 May 1969: 2.

97. “Who Steps In?” *Daily Mail*, 27 February 1969: 2. In the first case, François Mitterrand was a contender, but Georges Pompidou won the race; in the latter, Golda Meier. See also, “Hard Pounding on the Bargaining Table,” *Daily Mail*, 19 October 1972: 6.

98. Wage inflation, for example, had just scaled to a new record of 30 percent, and “the irresistible surge of prices and wages” was bringing “the tide of inflation” to “monstrous proportions” (Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun*, 332 and 344).

99. See Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun*.

100. Labour leader Wilson was still at this point the sitting PM, having narrowly won reelection in February 1974, and strengthened his position (slightly) in the October 1974 election. His government’s policies seemed to be having no positive effect on the moribund economy. The far left of the Labour party featured Benn, secretary of state for energy, who was busy trying to reshape entirely British industry and economy and life into a more state-controlled workers’ paradise. Scargill was the NUM leader whose earlier strike activities had essentially brought down the Heath government (*BAFHG* 119, 120, and 238).

101. “The Middle-Class Warriors Split Down the Middle,” *Sunday Times*, 14 September 1975: 2.

102. See Will Ellsworth-Jones, “The Middle-Class Warriors Split Down the Middle,” *Sunday Times*, 14 September 1975: 2. Gary Glitter was a glam rocker of the period.

103. Ellsworth-Jones, “The Middle-Class Warriors,” 2.

104. Kotker, *HLTJ*, 118.

105. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 129.

106. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 144.

107. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 152–53.

108. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 152.

109. “Jets Take Revenge for Cinema Raid,” *Daily Mail*, 13 December 1974: 4.

110. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 109–10.

111. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 111.

112. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 111.

113. Begin, a Jew devoted to the idea of a historically large Israel, would go on to form a right-wing political party, Herut, and after a coalition with other opposition parties, would become prime minister in 1977. Reflecting on his time in Palestine leading up to and including the British withdrawal in 1947 and the declaration of statehood the next year, Patrick O’Donovan would write of these men of leadership:

> Ben-Gurion was in Britain quickly accorded the rank of elder statesman and the many British journalists who stayed behind were treated courteously and helpfully. The only exception to all this was Menachem Begin. We hated him. Ben-Gurion hated him. The Israeli Foreign Minister of the time, Moshe Shertok, told me that he was a “pathological phenomenon.” (“Memories of Begin,” *The Spectator*, 19 November 1977: 9)

114. “Games May Face Guerrilla Attack,” *Daily Mail*, 31 August 1974: 4.

115. “Swoop on Terrorists with an IRA Link,” *Daily Mail*, 30 September 1976: 4.

116. “Death Wish of a Red Army,” *Times*, 7 February 1974: 5.

117. Jenkins, *Anatomy of Decline*, 60.

118. Jenkins, *Anatomy of Decline*, 63.

119. In a post-election column (12 October 1974), Jenkins would remind readers that Heath was neatly juxtaposed to Wilson, having “played four, lost three”; Jenkins was certain that Heath’s political prospects, especially as leader of his party, were snuffed out (*Anatomy of Decline*, 66). Jenkins was prophetic. The next leadership tilt for the Tories went to Thatcher, and Heath faded into surly, same-party opposition status. (Jenkins, like most everyone else, gave Thatcher little chance to overcome the “Carlton Club” misogyny and carry the day [67].)

120. Made with Liberal leader David Steel, these were colloquially known as “understandings,” where it was agreed that “Labour would take full account of the Liberal point of view” in selected areas of policy (*DSD*, 2.214). The fact that the agreements didn’t last terribly long gives an idea of just how much “account” Labour gave to Liberal policies.

121. This optimism was short-lived, as was Callaghan’s premiership. By the winter of 1978–1979, the trade unions began to flex their muscles again (*viz*., the ramping-up of exorbitant pay claims), helping crush not only Britain’s fragile economic recovery, but its labor-friendly Labour government, as well. Labour would be relegated to opposition until 1997.

122. Donoughue, *DSD*, 2.167. Interestingly, this was also the period that the leash held by Big Labour—the trade unions—went slack. The PM and his Labour Party minions had to concentrate on staying in power, meaning the bulk of the behind-the-scenes machinations were directed not at trade union representatives like Jack Jones or Hugh Scanlon, but toward the Ulster Unionists like Paisley and Powell, the SNP, and other outliers whose votes were not owned by the Tories. The daily newspapers were filled with rumors and realizations of such deals. See Donoughue and Sandbrook.

123. “Japan’s Terror Groups Raise Fears of a Police State,” *Times*, 22 October 1975: 16.

SCENE TWELVE
IN PILATE'S JAIL

He wakes up with a smile on his face to find himself being dragged along . . . —This is likely meant to indicate that Brian's been dreaming pleasantly, and even that everything he just went through was actually a dream. The camera is fixed on him in such a way that he seems to be asleep in his bed, his hand under his cheek, a pleasant look (not really a smile) on his face. A quick zoom out reveals his actual condition—he's being dragged down stairs and into Pilate's dungeon.

This may be one of the less obvious connections to the more "human" Christ figure depicted in *The Last Temptation*, the 1955 novel by Nikos Kazantzakis. There, Christ falls into a dream state while on the cross, lives a long and happy life, only to wake up still on the cross in time to make his ultimate sacrifice. In this controversial novel Christ possesses all the human weaknesses and strengths, including physical lust, and still manages to remain sinless and accomplish his role as savior.

. . . flings him into the dark damp cell, slamming the iron gate . . .—In "The Spanish Inquisition" sketch from *Flying Circus* Ep. 15, the Inquisitors drag the Dear Old Lady down into a "torchlit dungeon" where they will torture her with a comfy chair and soft cushions.

The contemporary version of Pilate's jail would have been the infamous Lubyanka, the headquarters of the KGB as well as a much-feared prison. Waugh mentions Lubyanka often in his diaries, sometimes in relation to its well-known former guest Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, and sometimes in relation to the *Daily Mirror*'s looming, brutalist-style headquarters in Holborn Circus.[1] The Roman version would have been the *Carcer Tullianum*, where inmates included Simeon bar Giora, former leader of the Jerusalem resistance as the Romans besieged the city; Vercingetorix, the Gaulish chieftain captured by Julius Caesar; and the apostles Peter and Paul. Ben is actually in good company when the notoriety of other Roman prisoners is considered.

. . . an emaciated figure, suspended from the wall . . .—Borrowed from the clapping figure seen outside Camelot in *Holy Grail*, an odd juxtaposition to this

“silly place” of singing and dancing. The Goons had offered an almost identical setup in their second “Robin Hood” episode. When Robin (Secombe) is thrown into jail, Friar Balsam (Sellers) is hanging in chains on the wall behind him.[2] There is also a very similar set piece in the 1976 film *The Passover Plot*. There, John the Baptist (Harry Andrews) is being interrogated in a Herodian prison; he hangs against a stone wall, his arms chained above him.

We aren’t ever told why Ben is here, whether he’s Jewish or Samaritan or a Roman; we don’t know if he’s a slave or a free man convicted of a crime. If Ben was ever a Roman citizen, then he must have been “condemned as a result of a fair trial to corporal capital punishment, [the] consequence of which was a slave-like exclusion from the civic community, technically known as a *servitus poenae* [slavery of the punishment].”[3] He is also hanging from the wall, his feet off the ground—considered a sacrilege—exacerbating the victim’s suffering and confirming his status as a *noxius* (criminal).[4] His verbiage later, when he credits the Romans with being “fair” and a “terrific race,” means he’s likely not from Rome, but he still may be a citizen, based on his residence in the empire, past Roman military service, or the like.

BEN: “I sometimes hang awake at nights dreaming of being spat at in the face”— One of the rituals found in ancient Israel surrounding a marriage refusal (involving a man and his brother’s widow) included the woman loosening his shoe, then spitting in his face “in the presence of elders.”[5] In other mentions, Jesus spits to make clay for healing, while Job was spat at due to his lowliness. Perhaps Ben is simply longing for the physical acknowledgment of his existence that being spat upon implies.

In Roman prisons like the Carcer Tullianum, according to Whiston, prisoners weren’t held long, generally just until trial and/or execution. Ben’s longer sentence is then more a reflection of the contemporary prison situation in Britain—life sentences had become the upper limit of state punishment after the abolition of hanging in 1965. Most Roman-era prisoners were simply strangled to death in the prison.[6] Jewish rebel leader Simeon bar Giora was taken to Rome, paraded through the streets, scourged, and executed as soon as he reached the prison.[7]

And speaking of “fair” treatment, during the Patty Hearst trial, the court heard of Hearst’s “jailer” (members of the SLA) taking sexual liberties with her, which Hearst described in a Stockholm Syndrome kind of way. The prosecution argued the relationships were consensual.

BEN: "Manacles! Oooh" ***(his eyes go quite dreamy)***—Firstly, these impedimenta would have been standard for prisoners in Roman jails, according to Plautus. If Ben were a slave, for example, and still able to work, he would have been "chained up by night in a prison and [taken] to work in the quarries during the day."[8] Plautus writes of a "slave . . . ordered to be taken to a smith, Hippolytus, who makes thick shackles forged of iron and attached them to the slave."[9] (Perhaps Ben is an old slave, then?)

Secondly, there exists an almost sexual gratification here, with Ben being dominated by a powerful "partner" (in this case, the Centurion, and even Rome) in a sadomasochistic relationship. He may be a Stockholm Syndrome sufferer. Popular in the news media of the day, captor and captive formed unexpected bonds. This relationship was noticed during the 1970 hijackings orchestrated by the PFLP, with passengers/hostages reporting they were "treated pretty well," and a number of hostages even felt significant sympathy not only for the young hijackers, but for their stated cause. A *Time* magazine correspondent interviewed a young American girl who had been held, and when it was all over she was certain that the Palestinians had been "kicked out of their homes," and that even though the pamphlets she was given to read were certainly "propaganda," she "believed that some of it was true."[10] Our Ben has been hung upside down for a number of years, and his captors have only recently righted him—for this he's clearly grateful. The Romans have not taken the next possible step—execution—so Ben is relieved and grateful. This almost groveling response to a kidnapper's supposed largesse isn't odd (or even Pythonesque) at all; an aberrant behavior psychiatrist of the period called it "common as dirt":

> Dr. [David G.] Hubbard[11] says that the phenomenon is caused by the fact that the hijacker does not use all the force that is available to him. This makes the victims feel grateful. "The fact that he has no right to use the force doesn't come through because the people are so damned scared they are not thinking."[12]

Ben exhibits these same characteristics as a five-year hostage to Rome's imperial ambitions; he's grateful because they could have left him upside down, increased his pain and suffering, or even killed him. Rome isn't using all its force against Ben, though Brian won't be so lucky, or so grateful.

BEN: "They must think you're Lord God Almighty!"—This is a Hebrew classification—the one ruling God—and we're already far away from the hypersensitivity of the stoning scene, where the simple utterance of "Jehovah" (not as part of an oath) is sufficient to condemn Matthias.

BEN: "Oh, you'll probably get away with crucifixion"—Perhaps Ben has read his Livy (59 BC–AD 17), who had recently written of Rome's "gentle" punishments, at a time when those punishments included both immolation and crucifixion.[13] Strangulation inside a prison was also practiced, and often, generally after the victim had been paraded through the streets.

Josephus mentions quite a number of Roman executions by crucifixion, primarily for sedition, but not entirely: "But Varus sent a part of his army into the country, against those that had been the authors of this commotion, and as they caught great numbers of them, those that appeared to have been the least concerned in these tumults he put into custody, but such as were the most guilty he crucified; these were in number about two thousand."[14] Josephus also describes Ummidius Quadratus going to Caesarea and crucifying "all those whom Cumanus had taken alive,"[15] and:

> Felix took Eleazar the arch-robber, and many that were with him, alive, when they had ravaged the country for twenty years together, and sent them to Rome; but as to the number of the robbers whom he caused to be crucified, and of those who were caught among them, and whom he brought to punishment, they were a multitude not to be enumerated.[16]

And:

> they also caught many of the quiet people, and brought them before Florus, whom he first chastised with stripes, and then crucified. Accordingly, the whole number of those that were destroyed that day . . . was about three thousand and six hundred. And what made this calamity the heavier was this new method of Roman barbarity; for Florus ventured then to do what no one had done before, that is, to have men of the equestrian order whipped and nailed to the cross before his tribunal; who, although they were by birth Jews, yet were they of Roman dignity notwithstanding.[17]

As a member of the lower class *humiliores* (even though his father may have been a Roman), Brian might also have been eligible for two other approved methods of execution. While the nobleman could expect a quick beheading, or even be allowed an honorable suicide,

> the rest of the population (the *humiliores*) found themselves subject in late antiquity to the forms of the death penalty to which only non-citizens had been liable in earlier centuries. These were: crucifixion, being torn to death by animals (*ad bestias*), and being burnt to death (*ad flammas* or *crematio*)—the first two perhaps borrowed from the Carthaginian military practice at the time of the first Punic war.[18]

As Nisus Wettus will say later: "Crucifixion? Good." Perhaps, then, Ben isn't diminishing Brian's punishment—he might actually see crucifixion, like Matthias later, as preferable to death by wild animals or fire.

More contemporary with the Pythons themselves, but still in Judea, after World War II the Jewish nationalist terror groups put aside their internecine

disagreements and began to cooperate against the "occupying" British in the Mandate of Palestine. This united front engaged in dozens of acts of sabotage (against rail lines, power stations, oil installations, police and government offices), as well as bombings, shootings, and even murders of British police and government officials across the region. The British reaction in January 1946 was to announce "new Emergency Regulations that called for the death penalty for acts of terror and in some cases even for membership in a terrorist group."[19] Pilate's immediate resort to the death penalty for anti-Roman activities was well within his purview as prefect of the region (maintaining order being paramount). To try and curb the violence as well as appease the Arabs clamoring for British control in Palestine, the British high commission took the same tack.

An uprising in colonial Jamaica in 1865 led the governor, Edward Eyre, to "declare martial law," and he "then hanged and flogged many hundreds of black people, and burned over a thousand dwellings."[20] Acting in a Pilate-like manner, the governor also executed a Baptist preacher, G. W. Gordon. Eyre was recalled to London (like Pilate to Rome), but never punished, and Jamaica then "came under direct rule as a crown colony."[21] Coincidentally, Gordon was the mixed-race son of a Scotsman and a Jamaican slave.

BEN: "Yeah, first offense"—The fact that Ben not only leads with such a gruesome punishment, but he also sees it as an *expected* and *fair* penalty for a first-time offender says that such Roman punishments were common, at least in the Pythons' version of first-century Jerusalem. We've already seen the grisly evidence of past executions on display as Mandy and Brian walk home, and the script directions have alerted us that they've become commonplace—they aren't noticed. This is interesting because it might indicate lacunae in some period biblical scholarship, specifically the originality of some of Jesus's words as recorded in the Gospels. In the 1977 BBC production (and accompanying book) *Who Was Jesus?*, Don Cupitt look at Mark 9:34: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me," noting that there are similar sections in both Matthew and Luke. He concludes:

> Now if one thinks oneself back into the situation during Jesus' lifetime, before it was known that he was going to be crucified, and certainly before any idea that being a follower of Jesus meant sharing in his crucifixion, then it seems clear that the saying would not have been intelligible before Jesus' death. So it cannot be a saying of the historical Jesus.[22]

In the Python version of Judea, the specter of death on the cross was visible and talked about, long before Brian or any of the other 139 condemned find themselves on crosses at the end of the film.[23] And since the Romans had been

employing crucifixion as a method of punishment for at least a century by this point, and Jesus was being accused of defying Rome (charged with sedition) by at least some of his Jewish antagonists, Rome's wrath would seem a possibility for a rouser of rabble like Jesus (or Barabbas or Judas, et al.).[24] Therefore, Jesus might actually have meaningfully and sincerely told his disciples to "take up his cross," assuming or even knowing where he would end his life.

BEN: "Best thing the Romans ever did for us . . ."—Ben isn't a voice in the wilderness, either. Jewish historian Josephus had no patience or praise for the violent action of the Zealots, whose activities he saw as undermining the Jews' beneficial relationship with Rome.[25] He would blame the Zealots "for the ruin of Israel and found no term too damning with which to condemn them."[26] And the "peace" that Xerxes earlier credits the Romans with bringing to the region (at which Reg snorts) is also key here. The idea of a *pax Romana* would be celebrated by Romans and Greeks, conquerors and conquered, blossoming from the acts and personality of Augustus (it's even known as *pax Augusta* by some). "Herod wholeheartedly advocated identification with the *pax Romana*," Levine writes, "and many followed suit":

> Indeed, most people probably reconciled themselves, to one degree or another, with Roman rule. Nicholas of Damascus, Herod's trusted adviser and a prominent historian in his own right, regarded Roman patronage as a blessing for all peoples. A generation later, R. Hananiah, a high-ranking Temple official, succinctly worded the merits of Roman rule: "One must pray for the welfare of the empire . . . for were it not for the fear of it, each person would swallow the next alive."[27]

Carl Richard supports Levine and Ben, underlining, like the PFJ, the benefits of Rome's rule:

> The Romans were not merely the modifiers and transmitters of Greek culture and of Christianity. They also made original contributions to the Western world. They not only provided the conditions of peace and prosperity necessary for the transmission of Greco-Roman culture and Christianity but also proved themselves the most capable administrators and lawgivers in human history. They effectively administered an empire of unprecedented size with minimal bureaucracy and technology and bequeathed to the West a system of law whose principles of equity and justice endured long after the fall of the empire.[28]

The PFJ have also already agreed that the Romans are the "only ones" who can keep order in Jerusalem. The Greek Aelius Aristides (c. 117–181) waxed positively Ben-like in his praise and admiration for what the Romans offered. Aelius saw the world outside the empire's influence as pitiable; those not under Rome's protection were "denied" the "blessings" of being subjects. Aelius cites the security of even the remote, formerly treacherous parts of the empire, "for safety it is enough to be a Roman, or one of your subjects."[29] Aelius isn't done

(and in his exuberance sounds appreciably like the helpful PFJ in response to Reg's rhetorical question):

> In very deed you have made real Homer's dictum that the earth is the property of all; you have measured the whole world, spanned rivers with bridges of divers kinds, cut through mountains to make levels roads for traffic, filled desolate places for farmsteads, and made life easier by supplying its necessities amid law and order. Everywhere are gymnasia, fountains, gateways, temples, factories, schools, and it could be said in technical phrase that the world which from the beginning has been laboring in illness has now been put in the way of health.[30]

Reg has complained of his people being bled white, the Romans taking "everything" for several generations. But history also seems to be on Ben's side, and not the PFJ's:

> As the year 68 unfolded, the city of Rome was approaching a century of unbroken peace. Prosperity reigned and dangerous times seemed buried in history as people pursued lives of comfortable routine. They rose at dawn and prepared to make, or receive, morning visits. . . . "We are now in such a happy time of peace," the elder Pliny wrote.[31]

Pliny was writing during the time the film's events are unfolding, as well. He was writing about Rome specifically, but the bulk of the empire in Augustus's and Tiberius's lifetimes could claim unprecedented peace. Lastly, the Greek Plutarch (46–120) also had mixed feelings about being a Roman subject, but managed to balance those feelings:

> Plutarch was no imperial lackey; he characterized Augustus' early career as ruthless and bloodthirsty and his republican opponents as heroes. Yet Plutarch clearly valued the peace Augustus had restored to the devastated Roman world after a century of civil war and appreciated his skillful administration of the empire. Nor did Plutarch bewail the Greeks' loss of freedom to Rome, despite his nostalgia for the eras of Greek greatness. Like Polybius and Josephus . . . Plutarch considered the Roman Empire the product of a divine will that was irresistible.[32]

BEN: ". . .if we didn't have crucifixion this country would be in a right bloody mess . . ."—This sounds like those who favored keeping capital punishment in the face of sweeping changes that ushered in the so-called "permissive society" in the mid-1960s, as well as a contemporary judge in a high-profile legal action important to *Life of Brian.*

In the first, one of Home Secretary Jenkins's "updates" in law and society was the abolition of the death penalty in Great Britain in 1965,[33] ending generations of capital punishment for myriad offenses.[34] Between 1965 and 1977 there had been plenty of criminal atrocities (including the Moors Murders, the Yorkshire Ripper, the Black Panther, and IRA bombings in England) that reignited the calls for a death penalty,[35] but the will for such a change couldn't be sustained in either the Commons or No. 10. This didn't stop backbenchers from often

stridently calling for capital punishment's return, including Colonel Carol Mathers, MP for Esher:

> His concern is to reassure the public, particularly the old people and the widows, who are frightened to go out alone at night. He says the nation must show that it is determined to stamp out serious crimes. There is no proper deterrent to the serious criminal. . . . His main argument for a Government initiative and a parliamentary *volte-face* is that the dimension of crime has changed completely since the death penalty was abolished in 1965. He said: "We have terrorism spilled over into this country from Northern Ireland."[36]

Finally, Mather was asked about his move to the right of the Tory party, and he offered this familiar litany of unpleasant changes seen in Britain over the previous decade: "It was the general situation, violence, mugging and the very real effect which permissive legislation introduced during the Labour Government had on the deterioration of standards. Abortion, relaxation of censorship, the homosexual bill, all that lot. The system seemed to be collapsing."[37]

In *Flying Circus*, the Pythons had already offered a judge who's had it "up to here" with a whinging society that feels sorry for criminals and excuses such behavior. He is "emigrating to South Africa" where he can dish out corporal and capital punishment, and for his last "fling" he sentences the man in front of him to be burnt at the stake.[38] The actual legal case that had many watching and wondering how the more permissive society would fare in court involved the *Gay News* prosecution in 1977. Judge Alan King-Hamilton presided over what was known as *Whitehouse v. Lemon*, and the editors of *Private Eye* (friends of those accused) published a helpful list of the judge's pro–corporal punishment views that read like Ben's own pronouncements. The article notes that in 1965 King-Hamilton told an offender that he regretted he was unable to "order capital punishment," and to a car thief in 1975 he said: "A great many people would not appear in the dock if they had corporal punishment when they were younger. It's a great pity the courts no longer have the power to order capital punishment," the judge complained. "The best form of psychiatric treatment is administered not to the head but to the backside."[39] It was believed at the time that King-Hamilton was also in favor of flogging, but that may have been just a law clerk rumor running around the Inns of Court.[40] During the weeklong trial, King-Hamilton had said that blasphemy included "any attack on Christ which has in it some irreverence," an incredibly broad definition that should have sobered the Pythons as they moved their film forward. He didn't call for corporal punishment for the *Gay News* editors, but he did sentence them to prison time and fines.

And since running an empire took time and energy, the Romans didn't handle all these executions, as a matter of course. Many condemned *noxii* became a product of trade and entertainment: "The Roman imperial treasury could sell the *noxii* to a sponsor who in turn was responsible for the executions."[41] It might be that in the provinces the executions were handled closer to the institution, meaning Pilate's soldiers would have carried out these sentences.[42] The Pythons don't exploit this historical tidbit.

BEN: "Nail 'em up I say!"—The curmudgeonly journalist Claud Cockburn responded to a report on "attitudes of the youth" in eleven countries that was published in 1977. The report concluded, according to Cockburn's summary of the *Sunday Telegraph*'s coverage, that the youth seemed to be more conservative than not, and "the so-called generation gap is much narrower than we are often led to suppose." They even seem to be in favor of the return of capital punishment by hanging, so Cockburn argues for a return of hanging, and that such hangings should be "easily accessible to huge streams of family cars," and continues:

> An imaginative Government, in tune with youthful thinking, should have no difficulty in erecting scaffolds and gibbets at convenient sites on the country's principal motorways. . . . It will. . . be desirable that hangings be timed and sited so that the young families can eat their sandwiches, drink from their thermos etc., watch a man or woman being killed, and still have time to get on to beauty spot or beach. . . . It is surely obvious that to be effective, hanging must be no sort of hole-and-corner namby-pamby business, but conducted in full view of the maximum public.[43]

Ben would have agreed completely. Eckstein notes that if the masses aren't really willing to be "liberated," revolution gets trickier.[44] Citizens like Ben are obviously attached to the Roman way of life, and even with a dedicated revolutionary like Brian before him, he won't be swayed. Eckstein accounts for this "inertia": "More likely than not [the masses'] opposition to the terrorists will cause them to cling more closely to the already existing state structures."[45]

BEN: "It's taught me to respect the Romans"—The PFJ and Brian haven't learned this lesson. We don't ever know what crime Ben has been accused of or charged with, but he is certain that the Romans have done right by him and even his nation, and he's grateful. This is an echo of the obsequious response offered by Stig O'Tracey (Idle) when quizzed about his treatment by the Piranha brothers:[46]

> Interviewer (Jones): But the police have film of Dinsdale actually nailing your head to the floor.
>
> Stig: Oh yeah, well, he did do that, yeah.
>
> Interviewer: Why?

> Stig: Well he had to, didn't he? I mean, be fair, there was nothing else he could do. I mean, I had transgressed the unwritten law.
>
> Interviewer: What had you done?
>
> Stig: Er, well he never told me that. But he gave me his word that it was the case, and that's good enough for me with old Dinsy. I mean, he didn't want to nail me to the floor, I had to insist. He wanted to let me off. There's nothing Dinsdale wouldn't do for you.[47]

Another man (Chapman) *isn't* unhappy that Dinsdale nailed his head to a floor and screwed his pelvis to a cake stand, while Stig's wife (Chapman) is able to *deny* having her head nailed to a coffee table (which we see nailed to her head). These grateful victims are clear precursors to Ben, the ideal Roman prisoner, as Wiedemann points out, speaking specifically of captured opponents:

> The marginal position of such captives in Roman eyes is clear. Defeated military opponents were enemies of the Romans who had refused to accept the benefits of subjection to Roman order. The Romans notoriously convinced themselves that no one might legitimately oppose their rule: to fight Rome was to rebel. Such rebels had forfeited any right to a place in Roman society.[48]

In this Ben also sounds like the ideal British subject, at least according to Labour MP Douglas Jay. In his somewhat infamous book *The Socialist Case*,[49] Jay would describe the proper relationship between the common man and his (Labour) government: "In the case of nutrition and health, just as in the case of education, the gentleman in Whitehall really does know better what is good for people than the people know themselves." This would become, to Conservative pundits, "The man in Whitehall knows best," and a rallying cry for the opposition.[50] And where would this *nem. con.* consideration for a government have come from, for the Pythons? Likely, their own childhoods. The ubiquitous voice and presence of the government during the war had become something of a comfort for most of the British public, and the necessary rationing of finite resources had placed the British man and woman in an abject position in relation to the various ministries of the government—depending on ration cards and travel permissions—a "meekness" that was likely difficult to shake in the postwar years.[51] Those in government keen on the socialist version of Britain's future saw a continuation of this masochistic relationship as necessary, and no one should or could legitimately oppose this march into a new world. Ultimately, redistribution of wealth and the dismantling of the class system was going to be a long and painful process, so pliable, long-suffering citizens were a must.

Ben has now accepted the Romans and their notorious legitimacy, and seems fairly happy in his chains.[52] Wiedemann goes on to describe these rebels and the PFJ fairly well, as both "had excluded themselves from the community of

civilized peoples."[53] The PFJ hide in Matthias's and then Mandy's house and plan furtively, jumping at every door knock, subject to arrest upon discovery. Wiedemann goes on to mention that the only possible way these types survived was if the Romans offered them slavery—"whole peoples as well as individual soldiers"—as the "only escape from the death" they all deserved.[54] In the end, Reg and what remains of the PFJ choose their own version of this clemency—they put their revolutionary plans on the back burner, leave Brian safely on the cross, and remain subjects of the Roman Empire.

But Josephus points out rather curtly that the one thing Judas and his Zealot followers would not accept was a continuation of their current condition. These rebels' unwillingness to acknowledge the status quo, Roman rule, seems to have perplexed philo-Romans like Josephus and even most of the Jewish ruling class. Like Xerxes, sympathizers found value in the peace that Roman order delivered. Ben has embraced suffering—his version of peace—and now enjoys his masochistic relationship with his jailers and the empire. There seems to be pleasure in these hardships. Ben is willing to suffer in his imprisonment; the Zealots were willing to suffer to *throw off* their bondage, which seemed to frighten many, including Josephus, who wrote:

> They have an inviolable attachment to liberty, and say that God is to be their only Ruler and Lord. They also do not value dying any kinds of death,[55] nor indeed do they heed the deaths of their relations and friends, nor can any such fear make them call any man lord. And since this immovable resolution of theirs is well known to a great many, I shall speak no further about that matter; nor am I afraid that any thing I have said of them should be disbelieved, but rather fear, that what I have said is beneath the resolution they show when they undergo pain. And it was in Gessius Florus's time that the nation began to grow mad with this distemper, who was our procurator, and who occasioned the Jews to go wild with it by the abuse of his authority, and to make them revolt from the Romans.[56]

Josephus saw these unbending characters (Judas, Saddok, their followers) and their "pernicious influence" as the reason Jerusalem would be destroyed in 70.[57]

BEN: ". . .you'll never get anywhere in this life unless you're prepared to do a fair day's work, for a fair day's . . ."—Ben sounds like a reproving parent or headmaster here, but there are also two quite specific sources for this phraseology. In yet another influence from *I'm All Right Jack*, company director Tracepurcel (Dennis Price) delivers a purposely inflammatory talk to his malingering, strike-prone workers, calling on them to eliminate their "slackness," aspire to "greater efficiency," and finally, "do an honest day's work for a fair day's pay—for a change." He tells his workers that what they lack is "honesty, hard work, and a sense of duty." They don't want to hear it any more than Brian wants to listen to similar reprovings from Ben. But it's also not unlike

King Agrippa's speech to the leading Jerusalemites on the eve of open revolt. Agrippa had listened to the various complaints of "his" people, and, according to Josephus, tried to walk a line between condemning the procurator's actions and chiding the Jews for their actions of rebellion:

> Your first occasion is, the accusations you have to make against your procurators: *now here you ought to be submissive to those in authority, and not give them any provocation*: but when you reproach men greatly for small offences, you excite those whom you reproach to be your adversaries; for this will only make them leave off hurting you privately, and with some degree of modesty, and to lay what you have waste openly. *Now nothing so much damps the force of strokes as bearing them with patience*; and the quietness of those who are injured diverts the injurious persons from afflicting. But let us take it for granted that the Roman ministers are injurious to you, and are incurably severe; yet are they not all the Romans who thus injure you; nor hath Caesar, against whom you are going to make war, injured you: it is not by their command that any wicked governor is sent to you; for they who are in the west cannot see those that are in the east; nor indeed is it easy for them there even to hear what is done in these parts. Now it is absurd to make war with a great many for the sake of one; to do so with such mighty people for a small cause; and this when these people are not able to know of what you complain: nay, such crimes as we complain of may soon be corrected, for the same procurator will not continue for ever; and probable it is that the successors will come with more moderate inclinations.[58]

Agrippa (again, via Josephus) then goes on to remind the Jews of the invincibility of the Roman Empire, of the benefits to be had under the protection of its wing, and that it's very nearly ungrateful to not embrace their Roman rulers: "Moreover, ten thousand other nations there are, who had greater reason than we to claim their entire liberty, and yet do submit. You are the only people who think it a disgrace to be servants to those to whom all the world hath submitted. . . . Will you not carefully reflect upon the Roman empire?"[59] Agrippa is even careful to remind, like Ben, that he himself also shares in the empire, its benefits and challenges. He uses "we" four times in (this translation of) the speech, and "our" and "us" twice (though "you" and "your" he uses dozens of times, yes). Agrippa concludes:

> I call to witness your sanctuary, and the holy angels of God, and this country common to us all, that I have not kept back anything that is for your preservation; and if you will follow that advice which you ought to do, you will have that peace which will be common to you and to me; but if you indulge your passions, you will run those hazards which I shall be free from.[60]

Again, it's not certain how much of this is Agrippa, and how much is Josephus, but the sentiment from either would be similar. Ben isn't, certainly, "free from" the consequences of some indulgence; he will be hanging in his cell, jeering at the crucifixion party (he wants to taste this version of Roman justice, too), as the film ends.

The character “Spike” will later attempt to deliver this type of stirring speech as the various followers of Brian race after him into the hills. He raises his hands in a prophetic kind of way, but only gets as far as “Stop! Stop I say! Let us pray. Yea, he cometh to us like the seeds of the grave . . .” before the multitude run or just wander off after Brian. Agrippa’s speech goes on, uninterrupted, for more than three thousand five hundred words.[61]

CENTURION: “I think he wants to know which way up you want to be crucified”—This actually sounds very much like the Pilate described by most historians, with the exception of Josephus, who painted a more complicated and complimentary picture of the prefect. This was no surprise, since by this time Josephus was Flavius Josephus, a Roman “convert” living and working in Rome.

As we’ve seen already, the preferred Jewish method of capital punishment tended to be stoning.[62] Roman death sentences for the common man could be by crucifixion, wild animals, strangulation, or immolation. Roman crucifixions were reportedly carried out on at least three types of “crosses.” One type looked like a capital “T,” another like a lowercase “t,” and the third simply any cross-shaped tree.[63] For the first two, the central post often remained in the ground,[64] the victim carried the *patibulum* (crossbar) to the place of execution, and then both the crossbar and the victim were hauled up into place. The Pythons have chosen to emulate the crosses used in most of the big-screen biblical epics, most especially *King of Kings*. Brian and his “crucifixion party” carry their full crosses to the place of execution where, interestingly, there are many empty crosses already in place—this looks more cinematic than a barren hill. Upside-down crucifixions have actually been reported, as well. The Apostle Peter has traditionally been credited with requesting an upside-down crucifixion, seeing himself as unworthy to be compared with his Lord in this way. According to Eusebius (c. 260–340), the Christian martyr Blandina (c. 162–177) was crucified head-down “as bait for wild beasts,” bringing together both threats Pilate will later make in relation to Brian and the sniggering Praetorian guard.[65]

Additionally, Josephus reports that the “which way” question in relation to crucifixion took on new meaning when Titus allowed his armies to vent their rage on rebellious Jews. The troops “nailed those they caught, one after one way, and another after another, to the crosses, by way of jest”—meaning every manner of contortion was possible (whatever likely elicited a laugh) on these hundreds of crosses.[66]

BEN: “Terrific race the Romans . . . terrific”—Ben isn’t an isolated voice, actually, according to Levine: “As a result of the Roman conquest, a new

constellation of leadership appeared in Judea that viewed the *pax Romana* as a positive force and pursued a policy of full cooperation with the conqueror."[67] These were not the Hasmoneans but "a marginal group" from Idumaea, headed by "Antipater, his son Herod, and their descendants."[68] Ben is in good company, allying himself with the leading family of Judea.

Perhaps, though, Ben is experiencing what psychologist Erich Fromm called "flight from freedom," wherein "an insecure nation frightened by war and crime and hallucinatory abandon[69] feels more secure under the firm hand of a mean man," trading freedom for security.[70] Fromm was trying to explain the appeal of a leader like Hitler to the average German in the Weimar period, but it works for a Ben character, too, who is part of a population recovering from Hasmonean infighting and looking to the steadying hand that the Roman Empire proffered in 63 BC.[71] Judea had asked Rome for a change to provincial status—they asked for the Romans (in the figure of Pompey) to protect them from Hasmonean internecine wars. Ben is clearly "pro-Roman" and therefore an enemy to those chafing against Roman rule, but he's not "notable," he's probably not the wealthy, landed type that later sicarii would have targeted for assassination, plundering, *etc.*[72] The Herodians and others bent over backwards to try and help the Romans successfully put down the Zealots and banditry in general in 67–68, and there were many villagers (especially those of means) in Judea who either fled the villages and cities or actively assisted the Romans as they moved from place to place, cleaning up insurrection around the region before encircling Jerusalem.[73]

But Ben might be operating at a more realistic level than Brian, admitting that revolution is a costly and painful endeavor, and echoing many first-century Jews in Jerusalem. Even safely incarcerated, Ben just might possess "a shrewd appreciation of what revolt would cost in bloodshed and material loss . . . [and] counsel[s] a passive acceptance of injustice, and consequent national and religious degradation," Brandon writes. "Such a policy was adopted by some Jews, of whom Josephus was a well-known example; but Josephus has generally been despised by Jew and Christian alike as unpatriotic and mean."[74] Ben seems ambivalent about being despised or loved, and only marks his behavior by the standards of his Roman jailers.

In this near-lachrymosity Ben himself sounds like Josephus, of course, who found many laudable aspects of the Roman way of life, and who "pretends not to have flattered the Romans, though he is distinctly partial to them."[75] Historians since have approached Josephus's works with care, never certain which stories

are self-serving, which are more factual, and which are factually self-serving. As an example, the Josephus work *Wars of the Jews* bears Titus's imprimatur, so it might easily be called "official propaganda."[76] The fact that Josephus at first fights but then joins the Romans, even adopting Vespasian's family name, perhaps renders him more obsequious than his voluminous writings are wont to betray.

Following are a handful of passages from Josephus, giving the reader an idea of how Ben-like this Jewish fighter-cum-historian-cum-Roman-citizen really was. (Reading these and hearing Ben's voice is an interesting experience):

- *Josephus describes the manner in which Roman soldiers bivouac together*: When they have thus secured themselves, they live together by companies, with quietness and decency, as are all their other affairs managed with good order and security.[77]

- *Josephus describes the Roman legions' planning and foresight*: But when they are to fight, they leave nothing without forecast, nor to be done off-hand, but counsel is ever first taken before any work is begun, and what hath been there resolved upon is put in execution presently; for which reason they seldom commit any errors; and if they have been mistaken at any time, they easily correct those mistakes. They also esteem any errors they commit upon taking counsel beforehand to be better than such rash success as is owing to fortune only; because such a fortuitous advantage tempts them to be inconsiderate, while consultation, though it may sometimes fail of success, hath this good in it, that it makes men more careful hereafter; but for the advantages that arise from chance, they are not owing to him that gains them; and as to what melancholy accidents happen unexpectedly, there is this comfort in them, that they had however taken the best consultations they could to prevent them. Now they so manage their preparatory exercises of their weapons, that not the bodies of the soldiers only, but their souls may also become stronger.[78]

- *Josephus concludes his laudatory "digression" on the Roman army's acumen*: Nor can we find any examples where they have been conquered in battle, when they came to a close fight, either by the multitude of the enemies, or by their stratagems, or by the difficulties in the places they

were in; no, nor by fortune neither, for their victories have been surer to them than fortune could have granted them. In a case, therefore, where counsel still goes before action, and where, after taking the best advice, that advice is followed by so active an army, what wonder is it that Euphrates on the east, the ocean on the west, the most fertile regions of Libya on the south, and the Danube and the Rhine on the north, are the limits of this empire? One might well say that the Roman possessions are not inferior to the Romans themselves.

This account I have given the reader, *not so much with the intention of commending the Romans, as of comforting those that have been conquered by them, and for the deterring others from attempting innovations under their government*. This discourse of the Roman military conduct may also perhaps be of use to such of the curious as are ignorant of it, and yet have a mind to know it. I return now from this digression.[79]

Much earlier than these events, during the second century BC, the Jews signed and re-signed treaties with Rome, sought and concluded by Judas Maccabaeus (*fl*. 167–160 BC). Over the following several decades, Smallwood notes, the Romans failed to deliver much beyond lip service to the Jews, Rome's actions always ending with an issued "remonstrance" to Jewish antagonists. Ben-like, the Jews were for some reason satisfied: "Nevertheless [the Jews] clearly felt that even this was valuable (or else they were incurable optimists), for they renewed the treaty several times."[80] Ben can be an incurable optimist, and he can also be seeing what Brian and others couldn't, certainly that his relationship with the Romans—like Josephus's just a few years later—can be characterized as "very fair." Josephus's admittedly self-serving prayer is eloquent but does him no favors, in the eyes of history: "I willingly surrender to the Romans and consent to live; but I take thee to witness that I go, not as a traitor . . . but as thy minister."[81] Brandon concludes: "The reaction of his fellow Jews was very natural: they tried to kill him on this and other occasions."[82] Brian treats Ben as a bit mad, and not as a threat; as a Roman sympathizer, however, it's likely safer for Ben to be in manacles than on the streets with the other "lucky bastards" headed for crucifixion.

And finally, several decades later than the events depicted, in the years leading up to the revolt in 66, there were clearly two active but distinct Jewish groups: those "loyal to Rome in general and hostile only to Florus" (the rather venal

procurator, *fl*. 64–66), and those set on ridding Judea of Roman invaders entirely, the sicarii and its sympathizers. The first and likely more numerous (or at least more visible) party were allied with "the moderate, philo-Roman party," according to Smallwood, with the nationalist cause being aggressively pushed by the more violent sicarii.[83] Ben is clearly much more philo-Roman than sicarii (though we never are told what he's done to merit incarceration), while the PFJ see themselves as extremist dagger-men, with no love lost for the "bloody Romans." Neither Ben nor the PFJ seem terribly effective in promoting their views, being Pythonesque characters, certainly.

Notes

1. Waugh, *FCY*, 8 February 1974.
2. A Christmas special recorded 2 December 1956.
3. Pölönen, “Plebeians and Repression of Crime in the Roman Empire,” 219.
4. Cook, “Crucifixion as Spectacle,” 76.
5. See Deuteronomy 25:9, and Gaskill, “The ‘Ceremony of the Shoe.’”
6. Smith, *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, 240–41.
7. “Simon bar Giora,” JVL.
8. Cook, “Envisioning Crucifixion,” 268.
9. Cook, “Envisioning Crucifixion,” 268
10. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 171.
11. Quoted by Demaris, Dr. Hubbard is the author of *The Skyjacker—His Flights of Fantasy* (Macmillan, 1971); he became a minor celebrity during the 1970s for his behavioral studies of the skyjacker, as well as interviews with skyjackers.
12. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 171–72.
13. Richard, *WWAR*, 177. Perhaps Livy was referring to deaths the nobility could perhaps expect—a quick beheading or the “honor” of suicide.
14. Josephus, *WJ*, 2.5.2 (Whiston, 474).
15. *WJ*, 2.12.6 (Whiston, 482).
16. *WJ*, 2.13.2 (Whiston, 482–83).
17. *WJ*, 2.14.9 (Whiston, 485).
18. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 69; also 75–77.
19. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 81–82.
20. Brendon, *DFBE*, 152–53.
21. *DFBE*, 153.
22. The “historical” Jesus as opposed to, say, Jesus, the Son of God. In the doubting Thomas 1970s, it was easier to defend a conspiratorial Jesus (*The Passover Plot*) than a divine Jesus. Cupitt and Armstrong, *Who Was Jesus?* 56–57.
23. The dead on the crosses are seen early, Ben mentions death by crucifixion, Pilate mentions it, the Centurion threatens it, Matthias dismisses it, Nisus Wettus and the jailers seem to *only* know crucifixion as a Roman punishment, and Judith announces that the Romans are going to “crucify” Brian, not just execute him. It’s all very specific.
24. Rosenblatt reminds us that the Roman Tacitus and the philo-Roman/Jewish scholar Josephus mention the frequency of Roman execution by crucifixion (Rosenblatt, “The Crucifixion of Jesus,” 316).
25. Brandon, “Josephus: Renegade or Patriot?,” 835.
26. Brandon, “Josephus: Renegade or Patriot?,” 835. See the entry “Zealots” in *JE* for more on these “freedom fighters” or “brigands.”
27. Levine, *Jerusalem*, 157.
28. Richard, *WWAR*, 43.
29. Quoted in *WWAR*, 44. See the entries earlier in the scene “The PFJ Plan Their Raid” for more on just what the Romans had done by the time of Christ.
30. Quoted in *WWAR*, 44.
31. *The Roman Empire in the First Century*, a.t.
32. *WWAR*, 237–38.
33. The Murder (Abolition of Death Penalty) Act was made permanent in 1969.
34. Jenkins’s manner of working these changes involved support for Private Member’s Bills as they came through Parliament. This bill came from Labour MP Sydney Silverman.
35. “Tory MPs Back Fresh Death Penalty Call,” *Times*, 20 March 1973: 3.

36. “Colonel in Search of an Ultimate Deterrent,” *Times*, 31 March 1973: 14.
37. “Colonel in Search,” *Times*, 31 March 1973: 14.
38. *ATW*, 1.15.203; *MPFC: UC* 1.240–51.
39. *Private Eye*, 22 July 1977: 17.
40. “Hamilton Diabolical,” *Private Eye*, 22 July 1977: 17–18.
41. Cook, “Crucifixion as Spectacle,” 79.
42. Incidentally, the men tasked with actually nailing victims to the crosses in *Brian* are dressed like the jailers seen earlier, not soldiers, meaning they’re likely just local employees.
43. *Private Eye*, 14 October 1977: 13.
44. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, for example, it wouldn’t take long living with the uncertainties of the quasi-capitalist new world before (especially older) Russians were pining for the certainties of the Soviet era (“Why Do So Many People Miss the Soviet Union?” *Washington Post* 21 December 2016).
45. Eckstein, “Terror as a Weapon,” 74.
46. Ep. 14, *Flying Circus*, “The Piranha Brothers.” Based on the real-life Kray brothers, East End criminals committed to long prison sentences for underworld murders. *MPFC: UC*, 1.221–39.
47. *ATW*, 1.14.187.
48. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 103.
49. Reprinted in 1946, the book was first published in 1937. This quote is found on page 317. See also Toye’s “‘The Gentleman in Whitehall’ Reconsidered.”
50. Bogdanor, “The Character of the Postwar Period,” a.t. This unflattering quotation would be denied emphatically by Jay himself in 1950.
51. See the entry for “rabbit fish” in *MPFC: UC*, 2.47 for more on the wartime relationship between the British citizen and his/her government. Also, peruse the many entries for “World War II” in the index of that same book set.
52. The recent American film *Rolling Thunder* dealt with a returning Vietnam prisoner of war (William Devane) who can’t adjust to life outside of his POW existence, finding comfort only when he is reenacting the dependable, torturous conditions of his Hanoi prison time.
53. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 103.
54. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 103.
55. Remember Matthias’s dictum: “Crucifixion’s a doddle.”
56. Josephus, *AJ*, 18.1.6 (Whiston, 377).
57. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 34.
58. *WJ*, 2.16.4 (Whiston, 487–88).
59. *WJ*, 2.16.4 (Whiston, 488).
60. *WJ*, 2.16.4 (Whiston, 490).
61. *WJ*, 2.16.4 (Whiston, 486–90).
62. This would be for religious reasons, generally. Josephus reports that the Hasmonean king Alexander Jannaeus crucified eight hundred rebellious Pharisaical Jews in about 87 BC, also slaughtering the rebels’ wives and children (*WJ* 1.4.6 [Whiston, 433]).
63. There is also evidence that in some instances the victim could have been tied or nailed to an upright post alone, and likely a tall, thin tree could serve the same purpose. See Tzaferis, “Crucifixion—The Archaeological Evidence.”
64. Many scholars believe that given the scarcity of wood in the area of Jerusalem, the building of dozens and then hundreds of crosses seems unlikely. (When the Romans encircled Jerusalem in the siege of 68–70, the building of siege engines was slowed by the lack of nearby trees.) The upright post (stipe) that remained in place appears to be the most likely answer to this scarcity, as well as tying a victim’s hands and arms to the *patibulum*, rather than driving nails into the wood over and over again. See Zias and Sekeles, “The Crucified Man from Giv‘at ha-Mivtar.”
65. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 82. Blandina lived through the crucifixion, and was further

tortured before death.

66. *WJ*, 5.11.1 (Whiston, 563).

67. Levine, *Jerusalem*, 154.

68. Levine, *Jerusalem*, 154.

69. Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*. Ben's "hallucinatory abandon" seems firmly in place as he "pines for" Roman corporal punishment, and Brian asks to be removed from the shared cell.

70. Jenkins, *Anatomy of Decline*, 50.

71. That firm hand will soon be glimpsed in Pilate's throne room, where the fair hand of Rome sits atop a Roman standard. Alleged revolutionary Francis has already argued (and others in the PFJ agreed) that the Romans were likely the "only ones who could" maintain order considering the rabble of Judea. At some level, then, the PFJ themselves have tickets on the "flight from freedom," and, by the end of the film, they leave Brian on the cross and board that flight happily.

72. Horsley, "The Sicarii," 441.

73. See Horsley's "The Zealots," passim.

74. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 25.

75. *JE*, "Josephus, Flavius."

76. Brandon, "Josephus: Renegade or Patriot," 834.

77. *WJ*, 3.5.3 (Whiston, 505).

78. *WJ*, 3.5.7 (Whiston, 506).

79. *WJ*, 3.5.8 (Whiston, 506); italics added.

80. Smallwood, *JURR*, 7.

81. *WJ*, 3.8.3 (Whiston, 515). Quoted in Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 25n2.

82. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 25n2.

83. *JURR*, 290–91.

SCENE THIRTEEN

IN THE COURT OF PONTIUS PILATE

***PILATE'S AUDIENCE CHAMBER . . . BIG AND IMPRESSIVE, ALTHOUGH A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF REDECORATING IS UNDERWAY*—**THE PORTION OF PILATE'S PALACE WHERE PILATE ACTED "IN THE CAPACITY OF JUDGE, WAS CALLED THE PRÆTORIUM."[1] THE GUARDS IN HERE ARE THEN, BY DEFINITION, PRAETORIAN GUARDS, MENTIONED LATER AS PILATE BERATES HIS MEN FOR SNICKERING. THIS SET IS AT LEAST PARTLY MODELED AFTER THE LARGER, MORE ELABORATELY LIT AND DECORATED THRONE ROOM OF PILATE AS SEEN IN *BEN-HUR*—THE THRONE, THE DAIS, EVEN THE COLUMNS ARE IN PLACE, THOUGH HERE THEY'RE ALL ABOUT ONE-HALF SCALE OR SO.

This construction work in progress (on the walls and floors) is likely an indication that Pilate is just visiting, and the palace (which was Herod's originally) is being brought up to his standards of decoration and comfort. Richard points out that it was these regional governors who actually oversaw nearly directly the large-scale improvements to their prefects, including "the construction of major highways, bridges, tunnels, forts, walls, canals, and even markets and baths."[2] Pilate's central administrative palace would have been in Caesarea, a larger port city, at this time, where the Sanhedrin representatives trekked to complain about the Roman insignia breach, and where Pilate would undertake the building of the Tiberium. The Passover celebration, mentioned by the Centurion later, is the likely reason Pilate's household and an important Roman like Biggus are in Jerusalem all together, as Smallwood writes, "The presence of both Pilate and a number of Herodian princes in Jerusalem suggests that this episode [Pilate's initial balking at the removal of aniconic shields from his Jerusalem residence], like those of the standards and the aqueduct, occurred at a festival."[3] Pontius Pilate was hand selected by Sejanus and ultimately the emperor Tiberius as prefect administering Judea, including Jerusalem, replacing Valerius Gratus, who had served in the position for eleven years. Pilate ruled from 26 to 36. (Herod Antipas was another Rome-appointed procurator from this same time, but over Galilee.)[4]

This same setup—an interview with a ruler while construction work is underway—is another historical borrow for the Pythons. Gaius (Caligula) had already let it be known to horrified Jewish leaders that he was thinking of adding an enormous statue of himself, as Zeus/Jupiter, *inside* the Temple at Jerusalem, so his penchant for renovation was certain.[5] Just weeks before his death, and when his madness seemed to be in full bloom, the emperor Gaius gave audience to a Jewish embassy from Alexandria. The Alexandrian prefect, Flaccus, had allowed the Greek population free reign in their treatment of Jews, which first involved ghettoization and then advanced to harassment, torture, and finally murder. This flew in the face of Rome's demands that the Dispersed Jews be granted protected status across the empire. (Flaccus would eventually be arrested and executed for maladministration, according to Philo.) The Jewish entourage waited and waited, and were finally admitted for an audience in late September, 40. They laid out their complaint, described the horrors, and reminded the emperor of their status granted in perpetuity by Rome, then waited for his answer. Philo records that Gaius—"a ruthless tyrant with a menacing frown on his despotic brow"—*rambled about proposed renovations to the mansions and*

gardens rather than the matter at hand. The emperor later seemed fascinated by the Jews' unwillingness to eat pork, and couldn't understand why these "god-haters" did not treat him as a god, as well.[6] Gaius would be dead just a few months later, and Claudius would reset the *status ante quo* sometime in early 41.[7]

The camera pans across the large room here, revealing the usual attention to historical detail and design the Pythons earlier employed to create the believable Middle Ages world of *Holy Grail*. The visible painted frescoes (likely researched and then produced by Gilliam and his crew) are borrowed from known sources, and will be described in the order each appears as the camera moves. The heart of the scene "begins" when the camera rests on Pilate standing before his throne, and Brian is being "thwown" to the floor; prior to that moment, the camera pans across the set: ***throne dais backdrop***—A painted triptych is visible behind Pilate and the throne, with versions of three recognizable "Second Style" frescoes, all from Pompeii. The first is borrowed from the Villa of the Mysteries series,[8] and features men sharing a drink from an urn. It's not a surprise to see these large murals around Pilate's room, even though the juxtaposition is a historical anachronism.[9] On 23 November 1976, the Royal Academy in London hosted the exhibition *Pompeii AD79*. The exhibition featured "huge colour photographs, of the great mural from the Villa of the Mysteries, the finest of all surviving Pompeian paintings," according to contemporary news coverage of the show.[10] This same week, the Pythons would meet together in London to discuss scenes for their upcoming Holy Land movie, as well as take in a handful of biblical epic films for inspiration.[11] Rather than photo versions of the murals, it looks as if Gilliam and his team painted their own versions[12] of the large images, carefully replicating the famous Pompeian red backgrounds, a color further employed in some of Pilate's furnishings. And even though this well-publicized museum display would have raised Pompeii's visibility in the eyes of the general public, it isn't likely that the frescoes' inclusion in *Life of Brian*—a film ostensibly set in 33—would have struck many as anachronistic. As they had in *Holy Grail*—announcing a tenth-century setting but using thirteenth-century costumes and fourteenth-century castles, for example—the Pythons (like Shakespeare) telescope time(s) to serve the purpose of setting and historical mood; for them, historical fidelity might actually detract from their version of the medieval or ancient world.[13] The employment of such anachronisms have become hallmarks, tropes of the Python world. Gilliam and his crew would have found elements that "looked" Roman and could be at home

in a Roman-held city like Jerusalem, even though, as we'll see, these props, costumes, and sets and set decorations could be taken out of their context (like the Pompeian frescoes), or out of another time (the Dürer-like rhinoceros-and-obelisk statue). Together, they resemble as much as anything Piranesi's *Appian Way*,[14] so a cluttered bricolage of historical objects and fantasy, a fetishized detritus of the Roman *cultus* world, biblical epics, and the Pythons' imagination.

Serious excavations at Pompeii wouldn't begin until the mid-eighteenth century, and archaeologists wouldn't begin work on this villa until the early twentieth century. And since the Villa of Mysteries, for example, was built in about 65–50 BC, admirers of the style and images like Pilate (or Herod) *could* have seen them on a visit to Pompeii and copied them, meaning they are not necessarily anachronistic, just out of place in Jerusalem. All the Roman-type villa amenities expected—a bath-house, hypocaust, even an altar—were found in a dig at Horvat 'Eleq south of Haifa, Israel, along with "Pompeian Red Ware cooking vessels," meaning the trade across the empire spread both wares and influences far and wide.[15]

The middle panel—directly behind the throne—is a reverse image from *The Dalliance of Mars and Venus* (Ares and Aphrodite) series, from the House of Punished Love in Pompeii.

The third panel is a version of Maenad in orgiastic dance and fear of the bride/initiate, another Pompeii fresco. This fresco is part of the Villa of the Mysteries, hall of the megalograph ("life-size paintings").[16]

Two standards—There is a brace of standards (or *signum*) on either side of this dais. These standards would have indicated which century, cohort, or legion was which, in battle and wherever the unit was garrisoned. The standards could bear the images of animals, the hand of Rome (*manus*),[17] the eagle, a flag, *philarae* (disks), and even likenesses of the emperor. The first one we see is topped with the manus and *SPQR*, meaning "The Senate and People of Rome" have promulgated and awarded this unit. The standards here *might* bear images of the emperor (the largish gold disks at the middle of either staff), which would have been in silver or gold, but it's difficult to see clearly. These last were the types of military and religious items that Pilate brought into Jerusalem in about 26 under the cover of darkness. As the images were part of the worshipped Roman *cultus*, and there were likenesses on the images, the high priests of Jerusalem demanded they be removed. Pilate initially refused, setting off a near-riot among his Jewish subjects.[18] It's likely that an orthodox Jew would have thought himself (or been ruled) unclean by simply being in this same room with the iconic images,

especially so close to the temple. Trajan's Column in Rome depicts soldiers carrying standards that look very much like these.

column—There are both Doric and Ionic columns in this setting. The first columns behind Pilate's throne are fluted Ionic columns, each with a frieze and architrave on top, and above each of those can be glimpsed busts.[19] The bust at the far right appears to be an image of Augustus, in robes, and the one to its left may be Augustus in the dress of a Centurion. This attention to architectural detail is significant in the Python world given their penchant not only for arcane knowledge but for the showing off of that knowledge. In *Flying Circus*, Welsh coal miners can argue about classical architecture just after a disagreement over the Treaty of Utrecht has almost led to a punch-up: *A fourth miner runs up.*

> Fourth Miner (Ian Davidson): Hey gaffer can you settle something? Morgan here says you find the abacus between triglyphs in the frieze section of the entablature of classical Greek Doric temples.
>
> Foreman (Idle): You bloody fool, Morgan, that's the metope. The abacus is between the architrave and aechinus in the capital.
>
> Morgan (Gilliam): You stinking liar![20]

The production team for *Life of Brian* would have gone to great lengths to project historical verisimilitude, knowing that the anachronistic and undercutting humor works all the better against such an authentic backdrop. A very "real" version of the early Middle Ages set the table for the silliness and anachronisms in *Holy Grail*; a similarly serious version of first-century Jerusalem prepares the viewer for another such juxtaposition. Though describing *Holy Grail*, both films fit neatly into this mode: "The film is polymorphic and heteroglossic: it is an example of its subgenre as well as a genre-transgressing work that threatens the integrity of the [biblical] film. It can operate as an authentic-looking [biblical] film . . . and by virtue of its authenticity (its authentic 'look' thanks to careful production design) it effectively parodies that same genre."[21] *Life of Brian* will almost always look like a biblical epic—especially like the very recent *Jesus of Nazareth*—allowing for more complex parody and reflexivity.

columned doorway/window—The inscription above the doorway (on the frieze)—"PILATVS IVDAEOS REGET OK"—reads more like graffito than a monumental inscription, and a bowdlerized English-Latin version, at that. It could be interpreted as "Pilate Rules Judea—Got It?" [22] ("OK" not being a Latin term or abbreviation.) It wouldn't be a surprise to find fractured English in a Python world, remembering the French sentries in *Holy Grail*, and the "Dirty Hungarian Phrasebook" and the man suffering from Thripshaw's Disease in *Flying Circus*. But there's subtly more to this mangled inscription.

This is more precisely a reference to a much more contemporary story: The 1975 graffiti image—"George Davis Is Innocent OK"—found scrawled on a brick wall in Salmon Lane, London, and which appeared in newspapers and on news broadcasts of the time.[23] Even with a fairly solid alibi, Davis had been arrested for allegedly participating in a robbery that resulted in the wounding of a police officer. In March 1975 he was sentenced to twenty years in prison, and the slogans bearing his name began appearing across England—Tower Bridge Road, on the walls of the Headingley Cricket ground, on bridge spans, and even on a banner hung from atop St. Paul's Cathedral. The Who lead singer Roger Daltrey sported a "George Davis Is Innocent" T-shirt in a December 1975 concert performance, and Davis's brothers-in-law protested nude at the Victoria Park boating lake. Davis would be freed in 1976 (after support from Home Secretary Jenkins, as well), when it was determined that evidence against him wasn't truly sufficient.[24] He wouldn't be officially found innocent until 2011.[25]

Private Eye is in on the reference, too—meaning the slogan has officially entered the public lexicon—and mentions a wall near the "Ellen Wilkinson Estate" with "MUGGERS RULE—OK?" scrawled across it.[26] A few months later, it's "Jim Rules—OK?" when *Private Eye* responds to the Lib-Lab pact reached in March 1977. This minor power-sharing agreement kept "Jim" Callaghan and Labour in No. 10 for a further eighteen months, until the pact officially collapsed, and a new election was called.[27] By April of this same year *Private Eye* cartoonist Ed McHenry offers the graffitied meta-slogan "OK RULES, OK!"[28]

This combination of period Latin and more colloquial English is Pythonesque, to be sure, but this kind of conflation was also at the heart of a long-running and well-publicized disagreement between scholars in relation to the Dead Sea Scrolls. In the heady rush to examine and create scholarly articles (and make judgments) about these scrolls in the 1950s and 1960s, archaeologists and their anxious publicists made claims about the scrolls' ages, authorship, readership, and connections between them and both the Jewish faith and emerging Christianity of the latter part of the Second Temple period. Initial examinations of the scrolls were conducted in absolute secrecy, with announcements about discoveries seeping out slowly over a period of years, irritating many in the academic community. When select images of the scrolls and scholarly articles (primarily from archaeologists and theologians) began to circulate, the consensus seemed to confirm that the scrolls dated to between the years 1 and 68 or so, and represented invaluable additions to extant written material from first-century

Palestine. This initial enthusiasm was tempered by some, including Solomon Zeitlin, a Jewish historian who argued for years that the Dead Sea scrolls were *not* created in the first century. He describes the fracas as he saw it: Shortly after the finding of the Scrolls was made known it was heralded that they would revolutionize our knowledge of Judaism and the beginnings of Christianity. To propagate these views all media of publicity were employed,—press reviews, radio and television, media not characterized by the dignity of true scholarship. The Hebrew Scrolls became a sensation. The matter was no longer one for scholars. Persons with no scholarly equipment jumped on the band wagon, published their opinions in the popular press and over night became authorities on the Dead Sea Scrolls.[29]

(This is very similar to the carnivalesque atmosphere surrounding the Cadbury-Camelot dig in the late 1960s in England.[30]) Zeitlin's claims were based on word/symbol usage and phraseology of the original Hebrew text, and he identified many examples of words and edits in the scrolls that, he asserted, did not come into vogue among Hebrew scribes until hundreds of years later, even into the Middle Ages.[31] The clashes between academic points of view appeared on the BBC, in newspapers, and dozens of journal articles. The Pythons may well have been commenting on this dustup and one closer to home—the Silbury Dig—in their *Flying Circus* Ep. 21, "Archaeology Today," where rival archaeologists (one jealous of the other based on his height) fight to the death over their findings and archaeological credentials.[32] Zeitlin would write in 1964:

In numerous essays I have maintained that the expressions and terms employed in the Scrolls militate against their antiquity . . . [and t]he physical signs used in the Scrolls, parentheses, connecting lines between two words and ellipses indicating that a word or words had been omitted, which also militate against the antiquity of the Scrolls, have never been referred to by the professors.[33]

In the Pythons' inscription, the "expressions and terms employed in the [inscription *do*] militate against [its] antiquity," and quite purposefully. Zeitlin would conclude his 1964 essay by bemoaning the "paradox" of such "medieval minds" existing and running the world in his more enlightened "atomic age"—a fun mixed metaphor itself.[34]

It was 1961 before any *monumental* inscribed evidence of Pilate's rule in Judea could be proven. The building constructed by Pilate in Caesarea, known as the Tiberieum (dedicated to Tiberius), featured the inscription "CAESARIENS. TIBERIEVM PONTIVS PILATVS PRAEFECTVS IVDAEAE DEDIT" ("Pontius Pilate, Praefectus of Iudaea bestowed a Tiberieum upon the People of

Caesarea").[35] This was also the first indication that Pilate was known as a prefect, not a procurator.

half-finished fresco—In the background just behind Pilate is yet another Pompeian fresco, this one featuring a pre- (or post-) coital couple, the woman astride the man. Only the upper portion of the fresco is visible in the movie scene. This one looks to be a slightly altered version of a coupling scene from the Great Lupanar, and now part of the National Archaeological Museum in Naples collection.

The door opens, the CENTURION and some SOLDIERS carry BRIAN in—Certainly Brian is a prisoner, so being either shackled or manhandled in this way is to be expected, especially en route to an audience with the representative of Rome. Being brought before a judge of reportedly vicious temperament should have Brian in fear of corporal punishment. If he is a conscientious Jew, however, Brian might feel he is in *spiritual* peril here, as well. Emmerich notes that Jewish priests would have to have been dragged into this place, just like Brian. Stone seats placed at the edge of the forum in Pilate's palace were more than just for decoration or relaxation: It was at these seats that the Jewish priests stopped, in order not to defile themselves by entering the tribunal of Pilate, a line traced on the pavement of the court indicating the precise boundary beyond which they could not pass without incurring defilement. . . . The marble staircase ascended by persons going to the governor's palace led likewise to an uncovered terrace, and it was from this terrace that Pilate gave audience to the priests and Pharisees, when they brought forward their accusations against Jesus. They all stood before him in the forum, and refused to advance further than the stone seats before mentioned.[36]

Wherever this understood line might have been in the film's version of Pilate's palace, Brian has clearly been carried across it, and he is now defiled. As this is the latter portion of the Second Temple period,[37] it's very likely that this defilement—which means an impurity has been acquired, and demands a purification action—would have been in full force, and Brian answerable to the priests. The fact that the Pythons have clearly, purposely avoided many (or any) direct references to the more rigorous, religious aspects of the Jews in Jerusalem in the first century—the temple, the Sanhedrin, Passover, the cultus, even "the Sabbath"—means they're not considering Brian's spiritual but physical well-being as he faces Pilate.[38]

frescoes on either side of doorway—Behind the entering Centurion (Cleese) is a decorated doorway bordered by two large, red-backed frescoes. The fresco to

our left is another from the Villa of the Mysteries, featuring the character playing a lyre. Gilliam has reproduced these figures out of context (which he's done often creating animations for *Flying Circus* and *Holy Grail*), since the winged figure just glimpseable left of the lyre-player is from another portion of the long fresco. In the original work, the reaching figure (whose arm is glimpsed) is actually reaching for the winged figure, not the lyre player.

On the right side of the doorway appears to be a fairly traditional satyr and nymph scene. It is not part of the Villa of Mysteries fresco collection, as the column behind the action is fluted, a type not found in the Villa of Mysteries. It may be inspired by the William-Adolphe Bouguereau *Study for Nymphs and Satyr* series from the later nineteenth century, and/or another erotic mosaic featuring a satyr and nymph found in the House of the Faun in Pompeii.

The doorway itself is framed by a patterned border borrowed directly from the labyrinth fret border found around the top edge of the frescoes in the Villa of the Mysteries. These were likely created from a book owned or borrowed by Gilliam. A very similar pattern was found as part of an elaborate mosaic floor from the Herodian period, uncovered during a 1969–1971 archaeological dig in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem.[39]

tile man—There is a worker carefully placing and tamping down tiny tiles for the floor mosaic, which appears to be a version of an erotic scene from the House of the Centenary in Pompeii. Surviving versions of these elaborate floors (and walls and even ceilings) have been uncovered in many villas the Romans erected, including those in Britain.[40] Roman mosaic remains were found near Fishbourne, then Lincoln (dug in 1976), Dewlish (1975 and 1976), and Wetherby (1977), while package trips to Cyprus and Sicily promised tours of Roman villas complete with mosaic tile floors during this same period.[41]

CENTURION: "Only one survivor, sir"—Francis obviously survived, as well, but managed to escape, perhaps without notice, while the CFG were obliterated. This "one survivor" is actually quite important, especially when considering the latitude allowed for Roman Empire regional governors in meting out punishments. Over and over in the historical records (as well as the plays and fictional accounts of the period) Roman leaders are restricted by Roman law, especially before an official condemnation has been issued. Imprisonment and torture of alleged criminals was often justified as the means necessary to search for criminal accomplices, torture eliciting the names of conspirators, it was hoped, so that the emperor and empire could be protected from further attack. According to Pölönen, "in the case of Roman citizens the torture of convicted

criminals to make them reveal accomplices was traditionally the only legal form of torture known to the Romans."[42] In Brian's case, the Centurion has already admitted that all Brian's associates—at least those in the hypocaust—are already dead, meaning Brian could or even should be spared torture. The search for shadowy outside conspirators, of course, is likely motive enough for a regional governor to apply physical torture to even a non-condemned man. (And Pilate's reputation was for violence and suffering, not work-to-rule lawfulness.) Pölönen notes that even in the face of strict Roman law, there are many recorded instances of Roman authorities inflicting severe torture and eventual death in the pursuit of conspirators, turning "dictatorship into tyranny."[43]

As for more recent survivors of terror attacks, JRA terrorist Kozo Okamoto—trained by the PFLP—survived the deadly Lod bombing attack in Tel Aviv in 1972 and was arrested and interrogated. He was imprisoned in Israel, and his supporters even tried to bargain him out in 1973 with further kidnappings, but the Israelis refused. Okamoto wasn't released until 1985.[44]

In what might be the clearest case of outside influences affecting the film, the "only survivor" of the Symbionese Liberation Army—as constituted on the day Patty Hearst was kidnapped—was Hearst herself. Most of the SLA died in a shootout with police in May 1974, but Hearst and two companions remained on the loose. After her arrest in September 1975, it was Hearst alone who was put on trial in January 1976 for bank robbery, the surveillance images of which had become internationally famed. Hearst and her lawyers always maintained that she was a drugged and coerced hostage, not a willing participant in any of the SLA's activities. Hearst was also summarily convicted, and sentenced to seven years in prison.[45]

PILATE: "Thwow him to the floor"—This is more complicated than just a silly speech pattern, though there's plenty of that. First, the script has been written to take into account the speech impediment of Pilate. This is unusual for the Pythons. In *Flying Circus* wild Chinese and Hungarian accents and over-the-top regional British accents were performed, and often, but rarely part of the script as typed out. This means that this part of the script was likely completed with an after-market in mind—the printed script as it would appear in a *Life of Brian* book.[46] This idea—a fearsome ruler with a risible accent—was an early goer with all the Pythons as they put the script together. Palin mentions this "r"-challenged character as early as December 1977, with all troupe members high on the idea.[47]

This characterization is at least partly modeled on two very visible leaders of the day—both of whom enjoyed long political careers; both of whom endured jibes and barbs about the way they talked: Roy Jenkins and Margaret Thatcher.

The most obvious candidate for the Pythons' mocking was Labour mandarin Jenkins, home secretary, then president of the European Commission as *Life of Brian* was being written. Born and raised in Wales in a coal-mining family, Jenkins's accent changed as he mingled at Balliol College, Oxford, and in the upper echelons of British life; a reviewer of a Jenkins biography described him as "essentially a Whig who enjoyed life too much for the Left-wing puritans."[48] As an adult public figure, his speech sounded very much like Pilate's: he'd say "wationally" for "rationally," "countwy" for "country" and "awound" for "around."[49] *Private Eye* was obviously in on the joke, calling him "Woy Jenkins" (and "Smoothiechops"), mentioning him in a November 1976 "Grovel" titbit: Piers Paul Read, the talented young Yorkshire novelist, recently bearded Smoothiechops at a party to tell him the glad tidings that he was a convert to Socialism. "I've joined the Labour Party!" cried the man of letters. "How vewy surpwising!" Smoothie replied. "If I were you, young man, I would have done the pwecise opposite."[50]

In his own column, Auberon Waugh would describe Jenkins as having "various speech deformities."[51] There is even a terrific surviving bit of footage from a 1968 appearance on *University Forum*, where a studio audience of "wowdy webels" shout mercilessly at Jenkins about his Labour government's lack of socialist commitment, presaging Pilate on the balcony in *Brian* ten years later. Jenkins's friend and colleague Shirley Williams describes his speech and mannerisms in a familiar way, when thinking of Palin's performance of Pilate: "Roy is in some ways a shy man, and he's partly overcome the shyness by building up this façade, and style of, a very characteristic style of speaking, of mannerisms, of the way he uses his hands, like the turning bird cage." Williams concludes: "That becomes a barrier between him and other people.[52] Proving their fascination with pronunciation, the Pythons also offered the "Teach Yourself Heath" tutorial on *Monty Python's Previous Record* in 1972, offering accurate Heath-like word and letter pronunciations. Our Pilate struggles to communicate with his guards and with the Centurion. Jenkins's good friend and fellow Welsh MP Leo Abse would say that when returning to Pontypool and interacting with Welsh constituents, he felt like he was "acting as an interpreter between Jenkins and his own people."[53]

The second influence is more complicated, but no less significant. Minister and then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, raised in middle-class Grantham, also changed her accent. Her voice was characterized as "shrill," "hectoring"—her accent "cut glass"—throughout most of her pre-No. 10 career. PM Wilson would tell his adviser Donoughue that her voice was simply "terrible."[54] In the years leading up to the 1979 General Election, she took extensive voice coaching lessons to "lower her pitch and develop a calm, authoritative tone."[55] Over and over again in newspaper stories, news broadcasts, and political diaries from both sides of the aisle, Thatcher's "ghastly accent" had been used as evidence demonstrating her weakness, her unattractiveness (as a female and a politician), and even her falseness.[56] A parliamentary correspondent—allegedly an unbiased source of reportage—waxed poetic as front bench Opposition member Thatcher attacked sitting PM Callaghan over a capital gains tax question: "By this time she was in full stride, her impeccable accent beginning to hammer on Labour ears like some devilish Roedean hammer."[57] Even the articles that treated her more fairly couldn't avoid the de rigueur subjects—her appearance, her manner, and, of course, the way she talked: She has changed since she took over the leadership. The Cartland perm has gone, her hair is soft and wings over her ears in a traditional Tory, Macmillanish way. The voice has changed too, deeper, richer and deliberate, flowing on without an ah or um like Carnation milk pouring out of a tin. Not a trace of the Lincolnshire accent of her childhood remains.[58]

Roy Jenkins's accent was mentioned, but rarely; very few mentions of Margaret Thatcher could avoid the topic. The Pythons had spent the better part of the previous decade listening to both Jenkins (as home secretary) and Thatcher (as a rare frontbench female Tory), time enough for a character like Pilate and his affectation to be created.

Pilate's impediment is not just a display of silliness, but also the Python trope of miscommunication. He can't speak directly or effectively to his own (allegedly) Roman guard,[59] nor to the "wapscallion" Brian, nor later to the jeering Jewish "wabble." In the 1960s–1970s—the decades of political assassinations, race riots, anticolonialism, student marches in Europe and the United States, and a deepening of the Vietnam conflict—no buttoned-down politician, male or female, was likely to get any better treatment.

But Pilate's character, according to most sources remotely historical, was quite different from the Pythons' version: "According to Philo . . . [Pilate's] administration was characterized by corruption, violence, robberies, ill treatment

of the people, and *continuous executions without even the form of a trial*. His very first act nearly caused a general insurrection."[60] Josephus, an apologist for the Jews but clearly not in the business of offending Romans, paints a less bloodthirsty picture of this prefect, though by no means creating a hagiography. Pilate's several offers to the mob condemning Jesus weren't accepted, and Pilate punished Jesus and released him to be crucified. This act of attempted leniency led to Pilate's sanctification by several faiths, complicating the portrait of Pilate for generations. Still, later historians agree that Pilate's disposition was by most measures nasty, mercurial, and retributive, his oppressions leading to an explosion of anti-Roman sentiment and activity: "The capture of a brigand who had ravaged the country for twenty years in or soon after 54 . . . is further evidence that it was as a reaction to Pilate's rule that brigandage became endemic."[61] Beyond the small and ineffective PFJ, however, there is little evidence of revolt against Pilate or the Romans in *Life of Brian*.

CENTURION: "What sir?"—There is no indication that the historical Pilate suffered from any speech defect or tic. The historical record for Pilate is so slim, however, that nothing can be ruled out. The future emperor Claudius (10 BC–AD 54) suffered from lasting effects of a childhood illness, to the point that when the purge was instituted before and after the death of Tiberius he, Claudius, was spared, likely being seen as no real threat. A noticeable speech impediment might have been just the thing that saved him.

PILATE: "Now . . . what is your name, Jew?"—Here, Pilate is using "Jew" as a catch-all epithet, likely because he assumes only a non-Roman would be capable of such a crime, and that no Roman would be brought before him in chains. His usage of the term is accurate, though, when it's understood how "Jews" was used in the Gospels. Zeitlin points out that the term appears in the Bible primarily when the audience was thought to be Christian-Gentile, not Jewish-Christian. He notes that Matthew, Mark, and Luke appear to have been aimed at Jewish-Christians based on terminology, for example, while Mark (writing from Rome) may have also had "not only the Jews of the Diaspora but the Gentiles as well" in mind.[62] He sees the Gospel of John directed at Gentile-Christians, those outside of the Jewish community and perhaps unfamiliar with the Jewish lexicon and eschatology: That the Gospel according to John was written not for the Jewish-Christians but for the Gentile-Christians may be proved by his usage of the word . . . Jews. The name Jews is used in John over sixty times, while in the Synoptic Gospels the expression Jews is mentioned only

in connection with the trial of Jesus, or when the Jewish people were referred to by Gentiles.[63]

Zeitlin goes on to say that in Matthew, the term Jews is used by the wise men, who came from the East to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He that was born King of the Jews?" Here the word Jews is used because it came from the lips of Gentiles. In the same manner is to be explained the use of the word Jews in the Gospel according to Luke: "And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant." The name "Jews" is quite appropriate here, since it was used by a Gentile, while in the Gospel according to John the term "Jews" is constantly used. When the Feast of Passover or the Feast of Tabernacles are mentioned there, they are linked with the word Jews, as "Jews' Passover" or "the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles."' The term "Jews' Passover" is never used in the Synoptic Gospels, simply Passover, or the Feast of the Unleavened Bread.[64]

So Pilate's usage of the term, even though it's uttered as if it were an invective, is actually wholly appropriate for this encounter between a Jew and a Gentile.

The Ayatollah Khomeini had railed against the Shah of Iran in 1963, asking publicly whether the Shah might actually be a "Jew" or an "infidel," certainly using Jew in a racially pejorative sense. Like many oppressed in the postwar period, it was the specter of the Shah's toadying relationship with the over-reaching United States that angered clerics like Khomeini. The "Jew" slur meant that, like the hated Israelis (more precisely, Zionists), the Shah was in the pocket of a postcolonial power, a puppet for Western policy and culture.[65]

Also, Pilate's immediate identification (by name) of Brian as a "Jew" might be a bit odd, given the fact that most of Pilate's subjects would have been Jews, unless he's using it as a kind of slur, a display of the prefect's built-in suspicion of and prejudice against all Jews. This will be glimpsed in prerevolutionary Russia, where Jews accounted for a disproportionately high percentage of those involved in "political crimes" against the tsar, according to Burleigh.[66] It also may be that Pilate is simply reminding the cowering man before him that he is *not* a Roman, and therefore an Other, with few rights in the Roman Empire. The conception of Pilate in the media of the 1960s and 1970s is also important. In 1961, at about the same time that news of the "Pilate stone" inscription was being discussed, the former Nazi who had fled to South America, Adolph Eichmann, was captured in Argentina by Mossad agents and returned to Israel for trial. During his trial, Eichmann attempted to explain away his culpability,

saying he had only been following orders, and that he was "harnessed" into service and unable to turn left or right. In June 1961 Eichmann even compared himself to our prefect, in that he disagreed with Hitler's plans and even argued against them, but in the end was unable to avoid participation: "I sought a final solution of the Jewish problem which would be decent, feasible, and workable . . . but when the elite, the veritable popes of the regime, cast the die, there was nothing for me to do but to conform. . . . I had a satisfaction like Pilate and then I felt free of any guilt."[67] The Pilate reference in relation to the massacre of millions of Jews played well in the newspapers of the day, and was reprinted often. It didn't help Eichmann, though. He was hanged for his crimes in 1962.

Interest in Pilate was renewed in 1963 when a letter purportedly written by Pilate to Tiberius was uncovered in Liverpool, of all places. The letter caused a sensation in that it tells of Pilate's wholehearted attempts to save Jesus from crucifixion, even asking for reinforcements to his garrison to suppress the revolt that would occur when he pardoned or simply whipped Jesus. The Vatican would eventually call the letter a "fake," though it was assumed to have been written sometime in the fourth or fifth century.[68] Authorities did admit that the information contained in the letter, though not corroborable, wasn't necessarily fake or inaccurate.

Lastly, the metaphorical (and often hyperbolical) use of "Pontius Pilate," especially the "washing hands" trope to avoid responsibility, is language heard in the political sphere hundreds of times over the years, and from all major political players. It was said *by* Enoch Powell, it was said *about* Harold Wilson, it was used to describe government action *and* inaction. In January 1971 the general secretary of the Transport and General Worker's Union (TGWU), Jack Jones,[69] rather famously invoked the name of the maligned prefect: "It is no good the Chancellor of the Exchequer [Anthony Barber] standing aside like Pontius Pilate washing his hands while 750,000 working people are crucified by unemployment."[70] This kind of inflamed rhetoric played well in pubs, trade union halls, and to television cameras.

PILATE: "No, no, spiwit . . . bwavado . . . a touch of dewwing-do"—The script is careful to include words that feature "r" sounds for Pilate to mispronounce. "Derring-do" is actually not only a fourteenth-century creation, but a phrase mistaken from the first after Chaucer offered it, and then Lydgate and Spenser picked it up and used it inaccurately.[71]

In the very recent *The Mysteries* (1977) play cycle created by Tony Harrison, Herod's son is depicted as having a pronounced stutter, making communications

with his father particularly challenging.[72]

CENTURION *(still not really understanding)*: "Ah. About eleven, sir"—In *Flying Circus* all manner of miscommunication is presented, a Python hobbyhorse borrowed from the Goons and the Modernists. There are characters who can't pronounce the letter "c," who can only speak the beginnings, middles, or ends of words, who insert the wrong word at the wrong time, who are insulting with every other sentence, who misread adverts as sexual come-ons, who speak in a roundabout way, who shout everything, who speak in anagrams or spoonerisms or Shakespearean jabber, and even a character who speaks so boringly that the studio camera can't stay focused on him. Miscommunication plays a crucial role in the Pythons' oeuvre.

PILATE: "So you dare to waid us?"—This is the only hint as to why Brian is being held, even though the PFJ's *attentat* had failed so miserably as to be almost absurd, and would have been even more silly had the scenes featuring the gargantuan wife of Pilate remained. There is also no interrogation that we see, or any indication that Brian has given details of their plan.

An overthrow challenge to an emperor or regional governor was less likely in these kinds of events than an attempted attack on the *person*, as Pölönen points out: "All the evidence indicates that the Emperors were more concerned about threats to their lives than potential challenges to their constitutional position."[73] This is likely due to the Roman bureaucratic apparatus being so intricate and vast—it was too large to fail, and a single death, even of an emperor, couldn't foul the smooth-running mechanism. Pilate directs Brian and the PFJ's "raid" at himself, and not his authority or position. Brian has dared to assume the right to attack the palace, the right to steal Pilate's property, his wife, actions that Roman leaders dealt with summarily: Caligula paraded a criminal whose hands had been amputated through the city with a placard stating what his crime had been. The physical pain inflicted on the criminal was also intended to degrade him. An evildoer may be perceived as someone who arrogates to himself certain rights which he does not have (rights to appropriate property belonging to another, for example, or the right to inflict harm on another person). In a society based on status differentiation, such an arrogation of rights is perceived as claiming a status to which the accused has no claim. His action thus overturns the proper hierarchy of statuses public recognition of which is essential if society is to function smoothly. The public humiliation of the criminal re-establishes social order by cancelling the criminal's exercise of rights which he did not have.[74]

Brian has dared to arrogate rights to himself that aren't available to him, and Pilate will reset the order of Roman society in Jerusalem via a very public humiliation.

This "dare" was also present in the language William Beveridge would use when describing the structure and effectiveness of what he wanted to call the "social service state," but others (especially opponents) termed the "Welfare State," a pejorative appellation that has stuck. Beveridge's ally in these socialist designs was Nye Bevan, who would use terms that, taken out of context, disturbed many. According to Bogdanor, Bevan told a gathering of the Fabian Society that he "wanted to create a new kind of authoritarian society—and that shocked people."[75] Stopping there, as many Conservatives did, it sounds as if a new fascistic menace lay on Labour's horizon. Not so, at least in Beveridge and Bevan's vision, which instead relied on "some very optimistic assumptions about human beings."[76] Bevan was drawing on "fellowship" and the Dunkirk spirit that had seen Britain through the war, his authoritarian society one wherein "the authority of moral purpose is freely undertaken" by all classes and for the common good, a move away from capitalism, away from "fear and acquisition."[77] (These last terms, of course, describe the Roman Empire at its apex, especially in the eyes of Reg and the PFJ.) But what of the outliers? Those who would "dare" separate themselves from the social service system could be dealt with: Beveridge did admit that there would be some people who just could not work under the system, so you would have public assistance for those people, and that would be means-tested out of taxation. There would be a small number of people—what he called "inadequates"—who would not be able to work or help society, and that would be funded out of taxation, and therefore means-tested, but this was a residual element. He said to a delegation of trade unionists, "There are not many people who will not behave properly." Again, you may think that was optimistic. "*There are not many people who will not behave properly, but those who do not behave properly have got to be made to do so.*" So, there would be a stigma attached, in those days, to getting what he called "public assistance," and Beveridge thought that no irreducible class of the feckless and lazy people who didn't want to work, independent of the "inadequates"—everyone, he thought, wanted to work.[78]

In the case of shirkers who refused to contribute to and share in the benefits of the new system, Bevan and Beveridge weren't talking about prison or crucifixion, but metaphora. Improper behavior would be shamed and stigmatized by the balance of the population who admitted to and agreed on the benefits of

the system. Reg, the PFJ, and Brian are treated as "inadequates" by Pilate and his forces—they "dare" to buck the functioning system—and so Brian is given literal stigmata on a cross, separated from the society he won't embrace. Along with other inadequates (Jews, Samaritans, Mr. Frisbee III), he is an effective negative example of Rome's systemic power to the rest of the population.

CENTURION: "And throw him to the floor, sir?"—The proper chain of events is now in place, and the Centurion wants to make sure he acknowledges the structure Pilate demands. He's also restating to ensure he understands Pilate's language, a wise move given Pilate's reported (and later displayed) temper. Many characters in the Python world have to discover the rules of the exchange before a successful transaction/communication can even begin, as in the "Buying a Bed" sketch from *Flying Circus* Ep. 8.[79]

PILATE: ". . . Jewish wapscallion"—"Rapscallion" is a seventeenth-century term, but it's really here because it begins with an "r." It's used in *The Goon Show* episode "House of Teeth," as well.

BRIAN: "I'm not Jewish . . . I'm a Roman!"—This *civis romanus sum* moment is an understandable turnabout. Very recently Brian was claiming angrily to be as Jewish as anyone, a "Red Sea pedestrian" and the like. Now, faced with a Roman judge, Brian wants his Roman blood taken into consideration. There were some Roman communities outside of Rome granted the "right of *conubium*, where the child of a Roman father and provincial mother was considered a Roman."[80] This might have some validity with the centurion who assaulted Mandy, though a province like Judea wouldn't likely be included in the citizenship deal. And even if it did, and Brian could be considered for citizenship, the fact that he's committed a crime could mean its immediate revocation.

But this is likely a purposeful allusion to the Apostle Paul's call to his Roman captors recorded in Acts 22: "And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?"[81] The chief captain interviewing Paul had bought his own freedom, but Paul argues he himself is a free born Roman. The soldiers and the chief leave Paul, afraid that they've broken the law by binding a Roman citizen. So there's a reason that Pilate pulls up and seriously inquires about Brian's parentage—an actual Roman citizen's rights could have already been violated with his arrest and incarceration.

This plea/ploy actually *could* have been more effective, at least in delaying corporal punishment, than the Pythons allow. Roman law was quite precise, as

Janne Pölönen points out: “Modern scholarly tradition has established that two fundamental rules regulated the use of torture in ancient Rome: torture must not be applied to Roman citizens or to slaves against their owners.”[82] Pölönen goes on to admit that it’s perhaps not so simple: It is commonly thought that during the Republic these principles were breached but exceptionally, whereas under the Empire their violation became ever more frequent as the extraordinary *cognitiones* invaded the criminal procedure. Expansion of torture has been associated with the political interests of imperial regime inaugurated by Augustus that took increasingly inquisitive and harsh measures against those convicted, or even suspected, of threatening the well-being of the Emperors and the Empire. The torture spread slowly but gradually to investigation of wider range of crimes, until the generalization of its use at the latest under the Severan emperors.

> The progress of torture during the first two centuries of the Empire is not, however, without contradiction, as scholars note the legal doctrine prohibiting the torture of freemen was duly maintained. Yet it is often taken for granted that at least the underprivileged inhabitants of the Roman Empire, the so-called *humiliores* in the legal jargon, in practice, if not in theory, lost protection against torture.[83]

And since the Pythons have decided to set their tale in Jerusalem, and in about the year 33, this qualifies as a time of the Roman Empire and not the Republic, meaning miscarriages of even Roman justice were quite possible. It wouldn’t be until well later, in 212, that the Constitution of Caracalla declared *all* free men in the empire could be considered Roman citizens, so Brian has to hope that his claim to be Nortius’s son carries some weight with Pilate.[84]

Cook mentions that a known Roman citizen, one Gavius, was wrongly flogged and then crucified by the ex-governor of Sicily, Verres, according to Cicero’s stern reprimand: Gavius of Consa, a citizen and merchant, had been imprisoned in Verres’ stone quarries. On escaping he reviled Verres in Messina, not realizing the danger he was in. “Suddenly he [Verres] ordered him to be snatched (from custody) into the middle of the forum, to be stripped and bound, and that rods be prepared.” “He ordered him to be flogged vehemently all over his body. A Roman citizen was beaten with rods in the middle of the forum of Messina, members of the jury.” In the midst of the cracking of the blows the only sound heard was “I am a Roman citizen.” The *lex Julia de vi publica* (the Julian law on public violence) protected Roman citizens from torture (before conviction and appeal). Verres had falsely condemned Gavius as a spy.[85]

But the power of a provincial Roman governor could trump any of this. In 177 Christians were being thrown to the beasts in arenas in Lyons and Vienne, and at

least one victim, Attalus, claimed to be a Roman citizen to save himself. He was immediately "returned to prison" to await the emperor's ruling. After Marcus Aurelius's response, the non-citizens were thrown to the wild beasts, and Attalus was legally beheaded.[86] And as Wiedemann reminds us: "Outside Italy, the authority of a Roman governor within his province was so absolute that no one could effectively challenge his decision to punish anyone in any way he decided, whatever the formal legal rights of the accused."[87] The Roman governor in Spain, Galba (3 BC–AD 69), is said to have responded to a prisoner set for crucifixion claiming Roman citizenship, like Brian, that he should be "hung on a higher cross than other criminals."[88] It seems that the Centurion's macabre joke about which way Brian wanted to be crucified wasn't strange for the period at all.

Akin to Brian's hope for exception are the so-called "Manchester Martyrs." These were Irish Fenians charged in 1867 with the murder of a police officer during a rescue of one of their own. They were fighting against an occupying force, the British, and were summarily indicted, found guilty, and executed. One member, Edward O'Meagher Condon, was given a reprieve because he could claim American citizenship, and the British wanted to "avoid diplomatic complications with the U.S."[89] There was no other empire the Romans likely feared in the year 33, so Brian can only hope his Roman rights can be enacted.

PILATE: "So your father was a <u>Wo</u>man. Who was he?"—Pilate has assumed, rightly, just what Brian is—a bastard son of a Roman soldier and a Jewish mother—why he would conclude this, except for narrative convenience, isn't made clear. Perhaps Brian's appearance—his nose?—led Pilate to assume his parentage, meaning appearances mattered: In ancient Rome, as elsewhere, not only did the body help to define essential identities such as those based on gender and age, but the presentation of the body through aspects such as dress, adornment and gesture could further codify the individual. . . . Appearance could evoke respect, sympathy or revulsion. Public presentation and self-image were crucial aspects of how the identity of the living was both constructed and perceived.[90]

Ultimately, given what Brian is accused of, and the fact that he's not high-born, even if he were part-Roman, means there's little chance he'll escape a summary execution.

BRIAN: "He was a centurion in the Jerusalem Garrison"—As it turns out, this was no guarantee that Nortius was actually of Roman stock. His name is Roman, but could have been adopted, like "Josephus Flavius." Pilate's men

housed in the Antonia Fortress would have most likely been a mixture of Syrian and Samaritan, "recruited locally for imperial service," according to Maier.[91] Only a handful of Pilate's household would have accompanied him all the way from Rome.

BRIAN: "Nortius Maximus"—For some reason this is spelled "Nortius" in the printed script and not "Naughtius" (and just *pronounced* "Nortius"), which fits the silliness. This is a *Carry On*–type name, a silly music hall borrow. The *Carry On* franchise began in 1958. The Goons paved the way, here, however, beginning in 1951. Announcer Wallace Greenslade's Roman name in an episode set in Roman Britain history—"Pliny the Elder"—is "Stomachus Grossus" (Greenslade was quite fat), Neddie is a "Charlius Britannicus" known as "Caractacus Seagoon," while Moriarty is "Brutus Moriartus." Caesar and the Roman army have come to Britain in 49 BC, and eventually take several characters back to Rome as Colosseum slave combatants. Later in the episode, a "Sparatacus of Protugal" is mentioned, as well.[92] In *Carry on Cleo* (1964) there is a "Senna Pod";[93] in Frankie Howerd's *Up Pompeii* (1971) there was "Ludicrus Sextus," "Ammonia," "Pussus Gloria," "Mucus," "Castor Oilus," "Bilius," "Erotica," "Biggius," "Boobia," "Odius," "Prodigious," "Plumpa," and "Noxious."

PILATE: "I have a vewwy gweat fwend in Wome . . ."—It's likely that both Pilate and Biggus are visiting in Jerusalem for the Passover celebration, as Pilate normally would have been in Caesarea, where he kept his household and headquarters.[94]

As hinted at earlier, Pontius Pilate is something of an enigma, historically. Maier points out that there are only seven separate texts that discuss the Judean prefect, with four of those being the New Testament Gospels, along with mentions in Josephus and Philo. "Of these seven writings," Maier notes, "one is hostile to Pilate [Philo], while the other six range from slightly critical to favorable."[95] The Pythons lean closer to Philo's description of a man capable of much cruelty; Philo writes of the "briberies, the insults, the robberies, the outrages and wanton injuries, the executions without trial constantly repeated, the ceaseless and supremely grievous cruelty."[96] Everything beyond Philo is less condemnatory.

PILATE: "Biggus Dickus"—An expected schoolyard Roman name, akin to those mentioned above in the *Carry On* and *Up, Pompeii* predecessors. The existence of so many Roman priapic statues, frescoes, and graffiti likely made

such a name less odd during this period. It's also clear that since Biggus has a lisp, his name (and dialogue) had to have plenty of "ess" sounds.

PILATE: "You will find yourself in gladiator school vewwy quickly . . ."—There were actually very active gladiator schools—*Ludi gladiatora*—in Rome and in a number of larger cities in the empire. These schools were both privately and publicly owned, and provided bodyguards for their masters as well as entertainment for the paying customers of the amphitheaters and colossea. The Thracian gladiator Spartacus was trained in a *ludus* in the Capua, Italy, area, for example. This was also perhaps a crushing insult, since Juvenal in his *Satires* tells us that such depravities outstripped even the despised job of an actor: "There is only one lower depth, the gladiator's school."[97]

They both try to stop giggling—This is "corpsing," and it's something the Pythons often tried to do to each other during live stage shows. In *Holy Grail*, during the "She's a Witch" scene, Cleese purposely held off delivering the line "Because she's made of wood?" just to force the others into laughter. It worked. Idle tries to cover his corpsing with the blade of a scythe in front of his mouth.[98]

PILATE: "Take him away! I want him fighting wabid, wild animals within a week!"—The alliteration is designed to undercut Pilate's threatening nature, creating a sing-song effect to his pronouncements. As this soldier sniggers, it seems that Pilate immediately designates him as *servitus poenae*, or "slavery of the punishment," meaning the soldier is now no better than a slave and can be treated as such.[99] This likely Roman citizen (he is a Roman soldier, and part of the Praetorian Guard) did have certain significant rights, which even Pilate should have to acknowledge: In principle, a Roman citizen had a right to halt torture and capital punishment after his condemnation by means of an appeal to the Emperor under the *lex Iulia de vi*. This recourse to the Emperor was, however, soon restricted as the number of citizens in the provinces increased and the official repression of crime called for concessions. The right of appeal was altogether denied to stage performers, persons with earlier criminal record, those who confessed, those who resisted summons, *and those who committed something against the public order*. The denial of appeals authorized the derogation of plebeians' citizen rights.[100]

It seems that both Brian and this giggling soldier have flouted the public order, at the very least, and deserve punishment by the letter of the law. And perhaps by a slight exaggeration, both have committed the crime *maiestas*, meaning their acts have contributed to "the diminution of the majesty of the Roman people."

The *maiestas* charge became popular in regard to many forms of treason and revolt.[101]

Sentencing to the arena was a common punishment for soldiers who misbehaved, though. Mannix notes that Flamma was likely an insubordinate Roman soldier who was condemned to fight in the gladiator arena, where he became a cult hero.[102] But non-soldiers and non-slaves could also find themselves facing the toothy or tusked end of a wild animal; judges could sentence men convicted of "robbery, murder, sacrilege or mutiny" to fight in the arena. High arena turnover (meaning the deaths of combatants) increased vacancies steadily: "The demand for gladiators far exceeded the supply. In the law courts, 'sentenced to the arena' was the commonest of all verdicts."[103] It's not unusual at all, then, to see a soldier condemned to death by animal for giggling. Fighting wild animals was a newer twist on the gladiatorial pitch, and became very popular: "By the time the Colosseum was built . . . dangerous animals such as lions, leopards, wild boars and tigers were introduced and gladiators sent out to kill them," Mannix writes. "Augustus had a bandit named Selurus dropped into a cage of wild beasts and this sight made such a hit that the execution of condemned prisoners by wild animals became a regular part of the shows."[104] The games provided in the film offer no hint of wild beast entertainments.

PILATE: ". . . wabid, wild animals . . ."—As for the condition of these arena animals, great care was actually taken to make sure they were housed, trained, and fed well until they were needed in a fight. This was just good business. The Emperor Claudius was known for micromanaging his games, and would even throw the workers of games machinery to the beasts if their equipment broke down.[105] The trainers of unwilling or ineffective animals could likely share that fate. The area below the sand of the Colosseum that housed animals was far more comfortable than where slaves and other combatants were held, including running fresh water.[106] *Bestiarii* like Carpophorus were known to meticulously train their carnivores (leopards, tigers, lions) to favor human flesh, and have them ready to attack as soon as the Emperor signaled the beginning of the event. A rabid animal would have been dangerous to everyone—intended victim and animal handler alike—so healthy animals were prized. In the regional circuses, the smaller venue likely meant reduced attention to such details, and tatty men and "scrofulous" animals could be found.[107]

PILATE: ". . . the common soldiewy"—As mentioned earlier, Pilate would have surrounded himself with carefully picked bodyguards and perhaps a

“cwack legion” from Gaul or Thrace, or the like. The common Roman soldier could come from across the empire, and by this period were expected to serve twenty-year terms. The somewhat unusual term “soldiery” is used several times in the Whiston translation of *Josephus* (1960), though it’s likely used for Pilate because it has a useful “r” that can be rendered a “w.”

revealed fresco—A new portion of the background fresco series is revealed as Pilate moves toward his sniggering guards. Also from the lengthy Bacchanalian fresco sequence found at the Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii, this panel features a reversed version of a young woman grasping her shawl, which billows behind her. Gilliam would often reverse original images as needed for the new layouts he planned—in the *Holy Grail* sequence featuring the monk/scribe disturbed by the “Bloody weather,” and throughout *Flying Circus*, including a Flemish baroque painting in the first series’ title sequence, a Battle of Trafalgar print (Ep. 11), a Civil War–era military leader (Ep. 14), a seventeenth-century Jan Vredeman de Vries print (Eps. 15 and 19), Union Civil War encampment, artillery battery, and Union personnel photos (also Ep. 15), and a Civil War train (Ep. 22).[108]

PILATE: “Incontinentia Buttocks”—Yet another joke name meant to appeal to the seventh-grader in all of us. No guard snickers, interestingly, when hearing “Incontinentia,” which seems to indicate the so-named cannot control her bowels; it’s only when “Buttocks” is appended that giggling breaks out.

PILATE: “Call yourselves Pwaetowian guards. Silence!”—Specially trained “Praetorian” guards had been used for many years by Roman emperors. These tended to be hand-picked guards, meaning Pilate would likely have had a hand in selecting those working so close to him. Just two years before this scene is (allegedly) set, the Praetorian guards serving Tiberius in Rome had nearly been sicced on their own emperor by Sejanus, prefect of the imperial bodyguard, who was arrested and executed in 31.[109] Our Pilate may have had reason, then, to distrust his seemingly most loyal soldiers.

PILATE: “You cwowd of cwacking up cweeps”—Pilate is purposely sounding more and more like Elmer Fudd all the time, a Warner Bros. character voiced by Arthur Q. Bryant. His alliteration and speech impediment mean he won’t be taken seriously again in the film, except when he sends “Bwian” off for crucifixion, and then tries to spare him. He’s never taken seriously by the Jews.

PILATE: “Blow your noses and seize him! Oh my bum”—“Bum” is one of the terms that the Interviewer (Cleese) doesn’t want to say as he interviews a

man with three buttocks in Ep. 2 of *Flying Circus*.[110] It was also one of the words that, by Ep. 17, was allegedly forbidden for utterance by the BBC.[111]

Brian performs a cartoony escape here, and is able to rejoin Judith and their Peoples' Front of Judea comrades, ostensibly to carry on the work of ridding Judea of the Romans. In this he is very much like a number of later terrorists, including Osamu Maruoka. Maruoka became the de facto leader of his JRA cadre during the hijacking of Japan Air Lines flight 404 in July 1973 after the accidental death (by grenade) of their female leader. The plane was successfully commandeered to Libya, then blown up on the tarmac. Maruoka was arrested by Libyan authorities, a trial was promised, but he was later quietly "released without trial" by the sympathetic Qaddafi government, escaping, essentially, from his imperialist enemies' justice. Free to keep fighting the revolutionary cause, Maruoka in 1977 would assist in the hijacking of JAL flight 472, forcing the plane to eventually fly to Algeria.[112] Demands included a ransom and the release of JRA prisoners, both of which the Japanese government met.[113] Maruoka would be free for another ten years, when he was arrested trying to enter Japan in 1987. He would die in prison in 2011.

As serious as all these hijackings were, the sheer number of them across the 1960s reached absurd proportions, meaning the subject could understandably become sardonic and then satirized. Airlines flying routes toward the southeastern United States even provided their pilots landing instructions for Havana's airport.[114] A Ronald Giles political cartoon from September 1969 tweaks the hijackers' penchant of targeting valuable hostages for their prisoner release demands. The panel depicts an "X Channel Air 'Ops" plane being unloaded of its passengers, who look to be frumpy working-class types from well outside of civilized London somewhere. One dismayed terrorist says to another: "This lot won't fetch much on the hijack exchange, Gonzalez."[115]

Notes

1. Emmerich, *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ*.

2. Richard, *WWAR*, 57. This is also precisely what Palin (as Herbert's father), was doing to Swamp Castle when Launcelot came slashing through—he was renovating. See the entry for ". . . have all this knocked through" in Larsen, *BAFHG*, 392–95.

3. Smallwood, *JURR*, 166.

4. Brandon provides a very readable overview of these events in "Pontius Pilate in History and Legend," *History Today* 18.8 (1968): 523–30.

5. In the face of violent Jewish opposition relayed to him by his very brave Syrian legate Petronius, Gaius would eventually rescind this order. See Philo and companions' response to this proposed outrage in Colson's translation of *Embassy to Gaius*, 97–99.

6. Philo, *The Embassy to Gaius*, 175–77; italics added. See also *JURR*, 244–45.

7. Smallwood, "Jews and Romans in the Early Empire, Part I" 239.

8. The large, peristyle court in the Pompeii villa is known as "The Initiation Chamber," as it is thought to depict an initiation rite sequence, specifically for a young maiden, in well-preserved frescoes adorning its walls. (*Sala di Grande Dipinto*, Scene VI in the *Villa de Misteri*.) 9. The frescoes were likely painted sometime in the mid-to late first century BC, according to Seaford, "The Mysteries of Dionysos at Pompeii," then buried for centuries in 79, perhaps forty years after Pilate's death. Photographic versions of some of these frescoes were available in the book accompanying the exhibition.

10. Paul Overy, "A Stroll Round Pompeii," *Times*, 23 November 1976: 11.

11. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 352.

12. In Ep. 25 of *Flying Circus*, Gilliam and the production team for the BBC created a "large Titian canvas" for the beginning of the "Art Gallery Strike" sketch. The mocked-up version of the Titian is the first remade picture seen, followed by a Landseer called *Nothing at Bay* by the auctioneer (Larsen, *MPFC: UC*, 1.382–83 and 378, respectively).

13. Shakespeare created ahistorical characters like Falstaff around which his historical figures and events could revolve. See Larsen, *MPSERD*, especially chapter 3. Brian serves this function to a certain extent in this film, while the mythical Arthur tries to navigate the overlapping worlds (historical England, mythological England, and 1970s England) in *Holy Grail*.

14. Gilliam is well aware of these influences. He uses Piranesi's work throughout the title and credit sequence at the beginning of the film, as well as images from across the ancient world.

15. Magness, *Stone and Dung*, 12.

16. See Dal Masio, *Pompeii: The Art of Loving*, 63, 67.

17. Incidentally, this open hand symbol was a prominent part of both the UDA and UVF ultra-Loyalist paramilitary groups' insignia in Northern Ireland.

18. Both Philo and Josephus report this sacrilege.

19. This mixing of columnar types isn't unusual—the Theater of Marcellus boasts Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian columns, respectively, on its three tiers (*WWAR*, 65).

20. *ATW*, 2.26.30.

21. *BAFHG*, xix.

22. Perhaps better: "Pilate shall govern the Jews," according to Dr. Roger Macfarlane who, like, the Centurion, mentions the significance of tense ("Translate it with a future tense and you're nearly right") in a proper translation.

23. As of 2011, that graffiti was still visible. The *Daily Mail* ran a clever headline in 1978—when Davis had been put back in jail for *another* armed robbery—reading "George Davis Is Guilty OK" (25 July 1978: 16–17).

24. Davis had maintained all along that he had been miles away driving his minicab. He even passed a lie detector test supporting that alibi. Davis would be re-arrested for another robbery months later.

25. “George Davis IS Innocent,” *Daily Mail*, 24 May 2011.

26. *Private Eye*, 30 April 1976: 13, in the “Gnome Bicentennial Exhibition” advertisement.

27. *Private Eye*, 1 April 1977: 14.

28. *Private Eye*, 15 April 1977: 7; *PE* cartoonist John Kent would run a series during the Thatcher administration called “Maggie Rules OK.”

29. Zeitlin, “History, Historians,” 99.

30. Mentioned later as Brian’s followers argue over the holiness of a shoe, a sandal, or a gourd.

31. See Zeitlin’s “The Idolatry of the Dead Sea Scrolls” and “History, Historians and the Dead Sea Scrolls.” Zeitlin writes of being a “voice in the wilderness” across this span of years, seeing himself as one of the few cautious voices in the otherwise circuslike world of the Dead Sea scrolls.

32. See *MPFC: UC*, 1.327–38 for notes to Ep. 21, as well as *ATW*, 1.279–82 for the script pages. The Silbury Dig had been completed, rather on a down note, in 1969, just before the Pythons began writing the second series of the show (*MPFC: UC*, 1.336).

33. Zeitlin, “History, Historians,” 100.

34. Zeitlin, “History, Historians,” 116. Prof. Zeitlin would die in 1976. In the 1990s, the Dead Sea scrolls themselves were finally scientifically tested (via carbon dating), and the findings would have perplexed the emphatic Zeitlin. The “newest” scroll (“4Q258”) seems to have been created no later than about 300, and almost all of the others were at least 100 and as many as 700 years *older* than this newest scroll. To be fair, during Zeitlin’s lifetime, only the woolen wrappings around some of the scrolls had been agedated, meaning the jury *should have* still been out as to the antiquity of the scrolls.

35. Special thanks to my helpful colleague Dr. Roger Macfarlane for accurate Latin translations throughout, and for noting that “there is only one attestation of the term ‘Tiberieum’ in all extant Latin . . . in the inscription from the Tiberieum at Caesarea” (e-mail correspondence with the author, 19 October 2016). For the first scholarly report on these findings, see Lifshitz’s “Inscriptions latines de Césarée (Caesarea Palaestinae).”

36. Emmerich, *The Dolorous Passion*, 180.

37. The Second Temple Period is considered to end with the sacking of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple by Roman forces in 70.

38. None of the surviving drafts of the script feature significant “Jewish” religiosity.

39. Yadin, *Jerusalem Revealed*, 40.

40. In fall 1975, it was reported that forty Roman villas had been identified in the Cotswolds alone. See “Cotswolds: Iron Age and Roman Remains,” *Times*, 13 October 1975: 14.

41. “Lincoln: Signs of a Pre-Conquest Revival,” *Times*, 22 January 1976: 16; “[Dewlish] Roman Pavement,” *Times*, 17 July 1976: 2; “[Yorkshire] Villa Site: Remains from Three Epochs,” *Times*, 13 August 1977: 14; “There Are Tigers in Cyprus,” *Times*, 29 January 1977: 11; “The Sicilian Sun IS Waiting for You,” *Times*, 21 November 1975: III.

42. Pölönen, “Plebeians and Repression of Crime,” 219.

43. Pölönen, “Plebeians and Repression of Crime,” 224.

44. Burleigh, *BRT*, 162.

45. Hearst’s sentence was eventually commuted by President Jimmy Carter.

46. This same is true for portions of the *Holy Grail* script, which are word-for-word typed from the film as finished, not a draft version of the script. See *BAFHG* for more.

47. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 356. Originally, this had been a centurion, but quickly became Pilate.

48. “Roy Jenkins: Politics, Parties, and Guilt-Free Adultery,” *Telegraph*, 13 March 2014.

49. This being said, it should be noted that Jenkins’s accent isn’t unlike Terry Jones’s northern Welsh accent, where an “r” can slip into a “w” quite easily, and often. Perhaps, then, Palin’s performance was also an unacknowledged tribute to his writing partner of many years.

50. *Private Eye*, 12 November 1976: 5. In a July *Private Eye* comic panel (by John Kent) Jenkins is also featured, there saying “sewies” for “series,” “pewils” for “perils,” “democwacy” for “democracy,” and

"countwy" for "country" (23 July 1976: 15). Jenkins's speech pattern appears in comic panels in myriad newspapers across the years, from many artists. See the University of Kent's British Cartoon Archive.

51. Waugh, *FCY*, 24 March 1976.

52. Cockerell, *Roy Jenkins: A Very Social Democrat*, 1996; a.t.

53. These quotes are from the Michael Cockerell film *Roy Jenkins: A Very Social Democrat*.

54. Donoughue, *DSD*, 2.356.

55. "From 'Shrill' Housewife to Downing Street: the Changing Voice of Margaret Thatcher," *Telegraph*, 25 November 2014.

56. "The Lessons Mrs T Will Have to Learn," *Sunday Times*, 28 June 1970: 9; see also Alan Watkins, "The Tory Style," *Sunday Times*, 25 October 1970: 61. As part of Heath's government from June 1970, Thatcher was much more in the public eye, as well as its crosshairs.

57. "A Woman Scorns Jobs Levy," *Times*, 6 May 1966: 14. The speech was called "a minor triumph" for Thatcher, though her gender and appearance and voice continued to be necessary identifiers. Enoch Powell had allegedly once described her simply as the woman "with those hats and that accent" ("The Times Diary," *Times*, 11 September 1974: 14). (The following day Powell would write to PHS denying this statement ["The Times Diary," *Times*, 12 September 1974: 18].) PHS apologized.

58. "Jilly Cooper Talks to . . . Margaret Thatcher," *Sunday Times*, 12 December 1976: 4.

59. Only a small number of guards closest to the prefect or procurator would necessarily be Roman, the balance from trusted neighboring provinces or countries, making the possibility of miscommunication even more likely. Herod, for example, was gifted (by Augustus) "a bodyguard of four-hundred Gauls," and there also may have been Thracians and Germans serving him. Plenty of languages, plenty of accents, and plenty of opportunity for miscommunication (Levine, *Jerusalem*, 172).

60. "Pontius Pilate," *JE*; italics added.

61. *JURR*, 164–65n71.

62. Zeitlin, "Crucifixion of Jesus Re-Examined," 348.

63. Zeitlin, "Crucifixion of Jesus Re-Examined," 349.

64. Zeitlin, "Crucifixion of Jesus Re-Examined," 349–50; see the original Zeitlin article (1941) for several in-text citations not included here.

65. Caryl, *Strange Rebels*, 48. Khomeini saw Zionist plots everywhere, it seems, attaching the term to myriad actions of the Shah's government over the years (88). During his exile, Khomeini would use donated "religious taxes" to help support the PLO in its fight against Israel (91).

66. *BRT*, 58.

67. "Eichmann 'Felt Like Pilate Free of Any Guilt,'" *Times*, 27 June 1961: 10.

68. "Faked Letter May Be Correct," *Times*, 5 October 1963: 7.

69. Jack Jones is discussed in *BAFHG*, as one of the types referenced by the Pythons as they created the pleasantly pugnacious Dennis the Peasant character. See *BAFHG*, 119–20.

70. "'Cut Bank Rate to Save Jobs' Appeal," *Times*, 20 January 1971: 2.

71. See the *OED* under "derring do."

72. The play premiered on Easter Sunday in 1977 at the National Theatre.

73. Pölönen, "Plebeians and Repression of Crime," 225n12.

74. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 70–71.

75. Bogdanor, "The Character of the Postwar Period," a.t.

76. Bogdanor, "The Character of the Postwar Period," a.t.

77. Bogdanor, "The Character of the Postwar Period," a.t.

78. Bogdanor, "Character of the Postwar Period," a.t.; italics added.

79. *MPFC: UC*, 1.127–42.

80. Wasson, "Roman Citizenship" (http://www.ancient.eu/article/859/). Later, after the collapse of the Easter Uprising, combatant Eamon de Valera—later president of Ireland—escaped execution "perhaps because of his . . . American citizenship" (Brendon, *DFBE*, 309).

81. Acts 22:25.

82. Pölönen, “Plebeians and Repression of Crime,” 217.
83. Pölönen, “Plebeians and Repression of Crime,” 217–18.
84. Radin, *The Jews Among the Greeks and Romans*, 361–62.
85. Cook, “Envisioning Crucifixion, 268.
86. Bauman, *Human Rights in Ancient Rome*, 125.
87. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 68.
88. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 68. Galba would be emperor for about seven months, in 68–69.
89. *BRT*, 6.
90. Hope, “Contempt and Respect,” 104.
91. Maier, *Pontius Pilate*, 63–64.
92. “The Histories of Pliny the Elder” was first broadcast 28 March 1957.
93. A plant used to make laxatives, the Goons have an entire episode dedicated to this gag, “The End, or Confessions of a Secret Senna Pod Drinker” (22 March 1955).
94. See *JURR*, 163.
95. Maier, *Pontius Pilate*, 353.
96. Quoted in Maier, *Pontius Pilate*, 353.
97. Juvenal, *Satire 8*.
98. Mentioned in the audio track recorded by the surviving Pythons, as included on the *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* DVD.
99. See Lawrence, “Servi Poenae,” in Rodriguez’s *The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery*, 1.7, 577–78.
100. Pölönen, “Plebeians and Repression of Crime,” 256; italics added.
101. See *JURR*, 169; and “maiestas” in the *Oxford Dictionary of the Classical World*.
102. Mannix, *TAD*, 21–32.
103. *TAD*, 91.
104. *TAD*, 47.
105. Bauman, *Human Rights in Ancient Rome*, 124.
106. *TAD*, 84.
107. Toner, *The Day Commodus Killed a Rhino*, 48–50.
108. *BAFHG* 363; also 500, 509, and 516. For additional mentions of manipulated images in *Flying Circus*, see *MPFC: UC*, 1.5, 173, 222, 240–41, 290, and 344.
109. *JURR*, 166–67.
110. *ATW*, 1.2.17–18.
111. *ATW*, 1.17.231; also, *MPFC: UC*, 1.264–77.
112. “Skyjack Led by Lod ‘Killer’,” *Telegraph*, 5 October 1977: 19.
113. See Farrell’s “Legacy of Violence” chapter in *BRJ*.
114. *BRT*, 153.
115. Found in the 7 September 1969 *Sunday Express*. See the BCA.

SCENE FOURTEEN THE SPACE MOVIE INTERRUPTION *SUDDENLY BRIAN EMERGES AT THE TOP OF THE TOWER . . .*—AN ILLUSION ALREADY EMPLOYED IN *HOLY GRAIL*. WHEN THE OBSTREPEROUS FRENCH SENTRY (CLEESE) SHOUTS DOWN INSULTS AT ARTHUR AND HIS KNIGHTS, HE APPEARS TO BE STANDING ON THE HIGH PARAPET OF THE CASTLE. IN FACT, THE FILM CREW HAVE BUILT A MOCK-PARAPET THAT WAS THEN MOUNTED A FEW FEET ABOVE THE GROUND, AND PLACED THE CAMERA, ANGLED UP, AT ITS BASE. THE TOP OF THE TOWER BRIAN LEAPS FROM IS LIKELY BUILT IN A SIMILAR FASHION.

. . . a passing space ship careers underneath him . . . animated Star Wars type space fight—The ship is yellow, perhaps a nod to either George Lucas's favored deuce coupe seen in *American Graffiti* or a bulbous New York Checker cab—both bright yellow. None of the models in *Star Wars* were this color. This sequence is the most "out there" section of the film, a complete rupture in the depicted time period, one that can't be papered over like those in *Holy Grail* where bits of the tenth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries often shared the screen. Gilliam will do this again on the following film, *Meaning of Life*, there creating a section initially intended to mesh with the rest of the narrative—*The Crimson Permanent Assurance*—but eventually dubbed a "supporting feature" that has to be quashed.

As discussed earlier, *Star Wars* and the Luke character exerted a profound influence on the life journey created for Brian, and perhaps Gilliam is saying that even a period film set at the time of Christ isn't safe from the intrusion of the blockbuster space saga.

Private Eye had lampooned the epic television event *Jesus of Nazareth*, quoting the movie's screenwriter, "famous British novelist Anthony Bargess," who defends his choice in "rewriting the story in modern terms," including the inclusion of the "surprise ending where Jesus goes off to Sirius in a UFO."[1] The *Sunday Times* Business News editor Kenneth Fleet inadvertently also put *Star Wars* and the Middle East together for a New Year's Day editorial in 1978. His first wish for the new year: "The star newly risen in the east may not explode[2] but herald a settled peace between Israel and Egypt, better still between Jew and

Arab. Israel's energy and intelligence, allied with the human and mineral resources of the Arab world, would transform the Middle East into one of the great growth areas of the world."[3] Josephus describes his own miraculous, familiar escape from the Romans during the siege of Jotapata, in 67: And now the Romans searched for Josephus, both out of the hatred they bore him, and because their general was very desirous to have him taken; for he reckoned that if he were once taken, the greatest part of the war would be over. They then searched among the dead, and looked into the most concealed recesses of the city; but as the city was first taken, *he was assisted by a certain supernatural providence; for he withdrew himself from the enemy when he was in the midst of them, and leaped into a certain deep pit*.[4]

This siege was led by Vespasian, whom the Pythons mention earlier in *Flying Circus* Ep. 24.[5]

The proximity of a messianic figure to an alien one isn't reserved for the satirical pages of *Private Eye*. Bishop Robinson's *Honest to God* facetiously refers to the Incarnation of God not only as "God dressed up—like Father Christmas," but that a "traditional" Christian view of God "leaves the impression that God took a space-trip and arrived on this planet in the form of a man."[6] A "jammy bastard" moment, indeed.

. . . and by pure chance BRIAN lands in the cockpit . . .—This narrative intrusion by another narrative has happened before in the Python world, and will happen again, in *The Meaning of Life*. During the run of *Flying Circus*, the epic Viking saga of Ep. 27 can never get a head of steam—other narrative elements continue to break in, including appearances by the saga's narrator, two Pepperpots looking for Jean-Paul Sartre, and the business people of North Malden.[7] In *Meaning of Life*, when a boardroom of American corporate executives are discussing the meaning of life and the wearing of more hats, the earlier-seen "supporting feature" makes an unwelcome appearance, only to be waylaid by the film itself: Voice Over: We interrupt this film to apologise for this unwarranted attack by the supporting feature. Luckily, we have been prepared for this eventuality, and are now taking steps to remedy it.

Outside in the street, an enormous glass skyscraper falls and crushes the pirate ship building flat.

Voice Over: Thank you.

A crash ends this *Star Wars*–type intrusion into the Holy Land film, and the first-century chase can continue. Remember also, in *Holy Grail*, the voice-over narrator for Scene 24 is eventually bashed on the head, ending his intrusion, the

sudden death of the animator allowed Arthur and his knights to escape the cartoon beast, and the arrival of uniformed policemen ended the film entirely.

In similar contemporary news, in late December 1977 the Soviet satellite Kosmos 954 was struggling to maintain its programmed orbital trajectory, and by the new year it was quietly announced that the nuclear-powered satellite would fall back to Earth. In late January 1978 the satellite reentered the atmosphere and broke apart, scattering itself (including a chunk of uranium-235) across northern Canada. A small percentage of the satellite was recovered over the next year.[8] The Canadian government would eventually present a bill to the USSR for the recovery efforts, comprising £2.5 million of the total £6 million allegedly spent trying to find the satellite's radioactive core.[9] *Private Eye* carried a newswire story clipped from the *Evening Standard* referring to the falling Russian object, while the American TV show *Saturday Night Live* offered a sketch in January 1978[10] about the falling satellite's radiation creating mutant, marauding lobster creatures. In this same episode Bill Murray sings what will become his famous, "Nick Winters'" lounge version of the theme song to *Star Wars*, both events—the crashing Soviet satellite and the *Star Wars* reference—setting the tone nicely for Gilliam's falling (and Lucasian-yellow) alien ship.

. . . plunging back to earth at the foot of the tower . . .—The backdrop here is a mocked-up version of Jerusalem, not unlike the backdrop used in *Flying Circus* Ep. 7 during the "Science Fiction Sketch."[11] This is a composite image of bits of spires, mosque domes, and city walls from both Monastir, where the Pythons were shooting, and Jerusalem. The tower Brian jumps from is supposed to be the Ribat, looking over the rest of the city.

BRIAN staggers out from the wreckage—The prop ship resembles the ships designed for the 1936 *Flash Gordon* and 1939 *Buck Rogers* serials starring Buster Crabbe. The model created by Gilliam also looks similar to the mid-1930s toy ship created to promote the *Buck Rogers* radio show, and a poster for the 1936 Flash Gordon film *Rocket Ship* displays a bulbous, bright yellow rocket very similar to this one. Gilliam also adds race car sounds to the scene—screeching tires and brakes, a revving engine—furthering the silliness of the sequence. (The car sounds nudge the ship closer to the *American Graffiti* deuce coupe, as well.) The script calls for the attacking ship to be destroyed by Brian's ship, but this does not happen; only Brian's ship is shot down.

PASSER-BY (Charles Knode): "You jammy bastard"—A recent colloquialism meaning someone who is very lucky or fortunate. Knode has already appeared in the film as one of the begging lepers.

Notes

1. One of the film's screenwriters had been Anthony *Burgess*, author of *A Clockwork Orange*. The "Sirius" reference is to the recently released book *The Sirius Mystery* by Robert Temple, which looks at amphibian alien visitation to Earth.
2. Likely referring to both the Star of David and the Death Star.
3. "*Star Wars* & Polish Jokes," *Sunday Times*, 1 January 1978: 13.
4. Josephus, *WJ*, 3.8.1 (Whiston, 514); italics added.
5. Larsen, *MPFC: UC*, 1.369.
6. "Mixed Thoughts on Religion from Under a Mitre," *Times*, 4 April 1963: 17. Robinson has been mentioned earlier in regard to Gregory's "not to be taken literally" comment during the Sermon on the Mount.
7. See the entries for Ep. 27, specifically those for "Njorl's Saga" and "Mrs Premise and Mrs Conclusion," in *MPFC: UC* 2.3–19.
8. "Soviet Nuclear Satellite Crashes in Canada," *Times*, 25 January 1978: 1.
9. "Cosmos Debris Bill," *Telegraph*, 24 January 1979: 5.
10. Listed as season three, episode 10, and hosted by comedian Robert Klein. Michael Palin will host *SNL* in April 1978; followed by *Star Wars* alum Carrie Fisher in November 1978, Eric Idle in December 1978, and Palin again in January and May 1979, all before *Life of Brian* was completed. Idle had already appeared as host of *SNL* in 1976 and 1977.
11. *MPFC: UC*, 1.121.

SCENE FIFTEEN

STREET PREACHERS AND HAGGLING ***BRIAN RUNS OFF TOWARDS THE CROWDED MARKET SQUARE . . . INSIDE THE SOUKH . . .***—THIS MARKET SET WAS GILLIAM'S PRIDE AND JOY ACCORDING TO PALIN. PALIN MENTIONS THAT THE EX-LEPER SCENES WERE, FOR EXAMPLE, BEING SHOT SO FAST THAT GILLIAM WAS CONCERNED NONE OF HIS CREW'S HARD WORK WAS GOING TO BE SEEN. GILLIAM LAMENTS THIS A BIT, AS WELL, CALLING HIMSELF THE FILM'S "RESIGNER" AS OPPOSED TO "DESIGNER," HE FELT LIKE HE HAD TO GIVE UP SO MUCH.[1]

. . . many strangely bearded and oddly dressed PROPHETS . . .—These are only named in the printed script, and are known in order as the "Blood & Thunder Prophet" (Gilliam), the "False Prophet" (Charles McKeown), and the "Boring Prophet" (Palin).

Once again the Pythons have homaged *I'm All Right Jack*. In the scene where a crowd has gathered outside Stan's aunt's home, protesting the strike and praising

Stan, a self-styled prophet wearing a placard marches through the shot, declaring: ". . .and the children of Babylon are destroyed, and become an abomination in the eyes of lasciviousness." His placard reads: "The day of wrath is at hand." There were many in Britain across this era of inflamed union activity who believed that doomsday would inevitably follow in the wake of such societal disruption. (Things would get much worse by the mid-to-late-1970s, when work stoppages and strike days missed often brought Britain to a halt.) The words and phrases appearing over and over again in newspaper columns included "anarchy," "ungovernable," and a bewailing of the "bloody-minded" moments of "mounting chaos" as labor and the economy soured.[2]

The first century seems to teem with this kind of prophetic figure and especially in the region of Jerusalem, the Holy City. The Romans might have been in charge, but they looked away from religious fervor when it didn't impinge on civic order. John the Baptist was perhaps the prototype for these strange prophets and was described quite favorably (in stark contrast to other period "messiahs") by Josephus,[3] as Goldberg describes: One wonders what the difference is between John and the men whom Josephus disparages as "deceivers" . . . and "enchanters" . . . such as Theudas and the Egyptian. It isn't simply that John did not represent a direct threat to Rome—Josephus always stresses the folly of those who do oppose Rome—as many of the others also seemed apolitical. All of these, including John, seemed to be killed solely because they had a large following, which in itself was seen as a threat to those in power: there was room for only one crowd and only one leader. We are left to conclude that Josephus himself was touched favorably by the philosophy of John, just as many of his countrymen were. While he was probably working from a source that was itself positive toward John, his choice of that source would have reflected his own attitude.[4]

In 1974, on a Belfast campaign platform for Tory outlier Enoch Powell, the Rev. Paisley even mentioned that he saw himself as a modern-day John the Baptist. (In this same speech, he also compared the current government of the Republic of Ireland to the communist, guerrilla government of North Vietnam.[5]) There were a number of such figures in the first century, according to Kotker. Paul crisscrossed Asia Minor, Greece, and the Holy Land preaching eternal life with belief in Christ, preaching in synagogues and on the streets, and founding Christian churches. The promise of a salvation into eternal bliss had many guises, though. There were Persians preaching of the god Mithras, Egyptian priests presenting Isis cults, and "missionaries of the Greek goddess Demeter"

offering “mysteries” in a cave near Eleusis.[6] Around 44, according to Smallwood, there emerged “a series of impostors who added to the general unrest by posing as messiahs and attracting large followings with their promises of signs and wonders and deliverance from oppression.”[7] One of these, appearing in and around Jerusalem, was Theudas, mentioned by Goldberg above, who promised Jesus-like miracles, according to Josephus: Now it came to pass, that while Fadus was procurator of Judea,[8] that a certain magician whose name was Theudas, persuaded a great part of the people to take their effects with them, and follow him to the river Jordan; for he told them he was a prophet, and that he would, by his own command, divide the river, and afford them an easy passage over it; and many were deluded by his words. However, Fadus did not permit them to make any advantage of his wild attempt, but sent a troop of horsemen out against them; who falling upon them unexpectedly, slew many of them, and took many of them alive. They also took Theudas alive, and cut off his head, and carried it to Jerusalem.[9]

Like Pilate, Marcellus, Marullus, and Agrippa before him, Fadus walked the tightrope between controlling and antagonizing his Jewish subjects. The “Egyptian prophet,” also mentioned by Goldberg earlier, allegedly led a *sicarii* revolt according to Josephus, and was clearly seen as a threat to Rome, which John the Baptist never was.[10]

This locus of speechifying could also be found in the London of the Pythons’ time, at Parliament Square. This tacitly approved area for peaceful protest and demonstration was in the news in May 1974 when an IRA bomb exploded there, injuring eleven.

A STRANGE FIGURE . . . two severed hands on a pole . . . —This is who the printed script calls the “Blood & Thunder Prophet,” a mud-caked man of the wilderness, played by Gilliam; Palin calls him “gargoylical.”[11] The “severed hands on a pole” could simply be a grisly version of the carved hand, the *manus*, placed atop many Roman standards, and seen earlier in Pilate’s chambers.

There were plenty of modern prophets the Pythons could have chosen as inspiration for these biblical-era figures, many quite close to home. Northern Ireland provides two such figures. Seen by many in the press as a cross between a seventeenth-century “religious fanatic” and an American televangelist, the Reverend Ian Paisley raged *against* the pope and popery and *for* a Protestant Ireland from the mid-1950s onward.[12] He was called a “blood-and-thunder Evangelical” and an “Old Testament figure” many times, his public speaking was so renowned, and unfiltered.[13] On the death of Pope John XXIII, for

example, Paisley said: “This Romish man of sin is now in hell!”[14] He called John Paul the “scarlet woman of Rome,” was certain that alcohol was “the devil’s buttermilk,” and he regularly called “down the curse of God” on anyone who wanted to stretch “hands across the border.”[15] It was Paisley who was instrumental in undermining the Sunningdale Agreement in 1974, which led to many more deaths before accepting a very similar agreement in 1998. He alternately sounded like the Blood & Thunder and the False prophet as he denounced the evil practices of men: “How base and despicable God’s people become! Did you ever notice that? How base and despicable the people of God can become when they’re covered with the sin of unbelief!”[16]

In February 1969 Paisley was campaigning in Belfast, covered by Philip Howard for the *Times* and a photographer from *Paris Match*, “who [had] been following ‘the circus Paislee.’” Howard describes a “blood and thunder” moment, one with all the theatricality and noise of our snarling prophet: The small grinning boy clashes his cymbals as vehemently as if he is banging together the heads of the Pope, Captain Terence O’Neill, the B.B.C. and the conspiratorial, Romanist-infiltrated press. . . . Here . . . a considerable crowd of voters huddle together, to have their hearts warmed by the Demon King of the election, the Rev. Ian Paisley . . . [who] thunders for 50 minutes, from the back of a Land Rover, roaring out great guts of rhetoric. O’Neill is a traitor, a tyrant, a viper who wants to bring back the darkness of priestcraft, to make everyone kiss the big toe of Old Red-Socks (the Pope). “The press is against me. The TV is against me. The Old Devil is against me. But we believe that the God who was with us at the Battle of the Boyne will intervene. No surrender.”[17]

Politician Leo Abse[18] writes of both Paisley and Powell, two of the loudest voices of the day, bringing “Jerusalem” and modern-day Britain together: We can no more annihilate our aggression than we can rid ourselves of the toxic waste of a fast-breeder reactor. The buried aggression seeps through: and so we have the Church Militant. The pacifism of Christianity unhappily leads not to the New Jerusalem but to Belfast. And in the environment of Ulster the Reverend Ian Paisley and Enoch Powell can in their pulpits preach doctrines which guarantee the continuation of the admixture of race and religion which is destroying the province.

> The danger of their doctrines is, of course, their terrible exclusiveness. They are envious of the claims of the chosen people whose Book they read, and overcome their jealousy by usurping the Jews and either explicitly or gnomically present themselves as the new elect, undeterred by the catastrophe that the Jews, by hubris, brought down upon themselves. Their creeds . . . have a long and sometimes ugly tradition: the ideal of the superior Holy People, the true Israel, separate, scrupulously protecting its

> identity through adherence to the Law, always brought with it the corollary of intolerance to foreigners and prohibitions against marrying out of the community. The Nehemiahs and Ezras of Judaic literature are the source books of our contemporary chauvinistic Christian preachers and politicians.[19]

In February 1969 a Gerald Scarfe exhibition at the Grosvenor Gallery featured scathing likenesses, coincidentally, of both Paisley and the Pope.[20]

In the other pews of this argument was Bernadette Devlin, equally vocal and equally certain that her point of view—a united Catholic Ireland as the true Ireland—would win the day. She was a witness to both the Battle of Bogside and Bloody Sunday, and was elected to Parliament in 1969. For her maiden speech, Devlin spoke directly about the situation in Ireland, a breach of protocol, it seems, but one she admitted and embraced. In this portion of her speech, she is taking to task Lord Chichester-Clark—MP for Londonderry since 1960, and Prime Minister of Ireland from May 1969—asking how well he understood Ireland: The hon. Member for Londonderry said that he stood in Bogside. I wonder whether he could name the streets through which he walked in the Bogside so that we might establish just how well acquainted he became with the area. I had never hoped to see the day when I might agree with someone who represents the bigoted and sectarian Unionist Party, which uses a deliberate policy of dividing the people in order to keep the ruling minority in power and to keep the oppressed people of Ulster oppressed. I never thought that I should see the day when I should agree with any phrase uttered by the representative of such a party, but the hon. Gentleman summed up the situation "to a t." He referred to stark, human misery. That is what I saw in Bogside. It has not been there just for one night. It has been there for 50 years—and that same stark human misery is to be found in the Protestant Fountain area, which the hon. Gentleman would claim to represent. . . . The people of Northern Ireland have been forced into this situation. I was in the Bogside on the same evening as the hon. Member for Londonderry. I assure you, Mr. Speaker—and I make no apology for the fact—that I was not strutting around with my hands behind my back examining the area and saying "tut-tut" every time a policeman had his head scratched. I was going around building barricades because I knew that it was not safe.[21]

These kinds of exchanges continue to this day. Demaris concludes of Devlin: "She shares with Paisley, however, a major portion of the blame for the polarization of opinion on both sides that has led to so much bloodshed in Ireland."[22]

Blood & Thunder Prophet—The phrase itself is drawn from Colley Cibber's play *Love's Last Shift* (1696), and has been heard in over-the-top football punditry and from opera critics describing particularly effusive productions. In 1965 Granada television was producing two Thomas Middleton plays, *The Changeling* (1622) and *Women Beware Women* (c. 1624), "under the general heading BLOOD AND THUNDER," according to the *Spectator* (appearing in the "Not by Shakespeare" column).[23] These are primarily prophets of the eschatological harbingers, those who "see" the last days and the torments of death and hell. (Josephus railed against these types.) When Brian takes his place alongside them, he attempts a more Christ-like, beatific tone, and that, coupled with the open-endedness of his preaching, gains him followers almost immediately.

B & T Prophet: ". . . ride forth on a serpent's back . . ."—These are cobbled together from across the Old Testament, generally, but also Revelations. For example, Isaiah 27:1: "In that day the LORD with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that *is* in the sea."

B & T Prophet: ". . . eyes shall be red with the blood of living creatures . . ."—There are more than three times as many mentions of "blood" in the Old Testament as in the New Testament. Blood can be a part of purification, as in the Blood of the Lamb, or more punitive, as in those with spotted garments. In Revelations, the "woman . . .[is] drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus." (17:6). In Ezekiel, Jerusalem has become the harlot, and is "polluted" in her own blood (16:6), which may be what this prophet's on about. The "whore of Babylon" character appears in dozens of woodcuts, and is often associated with the Roman Catholic Church and the pope, as in a vivid illustration from the 1545 edition of the Luther Bible.[24] The Pythons are pulling from the more hyperbolic portions of the scriptures for both the Blood & Thunder and the False prophets.

(draft) **B & T Prophet: ". . . the hill of excitement . . . a great rubbing of parts . . ."**—This sexualized language is from condemnatory sections of the Bible, too, with connections to later English literature, and thence to the Pythons. The "earthy" poetry of Sidney and Spenser come to mind, first as the Pythons sexualized the hymn *Jerusalem* in *Flying Circus* Ep. 4: The glossing of "England's Mountains Green" as overtly sexual becomes much easier here, especially if "a man's life" is meant to include copulation . . . . "Mountains" can be either (or both) the female's breasts or pubic area. See Sidney's *Astrophil and*

Stella and his object of lustful affection's "Cupid's hill." Also, cf. the Gardens of Adonis in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, where the "stately Mount" is just one erotic section of this highly sexualized landscape.[25]

The "sweet gum" and "precious dew" in the "pleasant arbour" is Sidney at his most salacious, most Ovidian. The potential for "rubbing of parts" on this "hill of excitement" seems highly denunciable by this pelvis-thrusting prophet. These "secret parts" of the daughters of Zion are to be discovered by the Lord because they are "haughty," "wanton," and "mincing" (Isaiah 3:17).

FALSE PROPHET—Played here by Charles McKeown, but there's no reason or indication to believe he's any more or less truthful than any of the other street preachers here. This may have been a reflection of the Pythons' study as they prepared the film, perhaps accessing Josephus and his denunciations of false prophets like the Egyptian, discussed earlier.

FALSE PROPHET: ". . . a nine-bladed sword . . ."—There are sharp, two-edged swords in the scriptures, swords becoming ploughshares, and many references to death, justice, and suffering by sword, but none with multiple blades. In Revelations are beasts with seven heads and ten horns, which is likely where this mixed reference began. In Ep. 23 of *Flying Circus*, *Albrecht Dürer's Apocalypse of St. John, The Dragon with the Seven Heads* is used by Gilliam as part of a mail delivery animation.[26]

FALSE PROPHET: ". . . which he will wield on all wretched sinners . . ."—This prophet is properly fixated on numbers, as Arthur was in *Holy Grail*, but he's also nearly quoting from Isaiah 3, where Judah and Jerusalem are castigated by the Lord: 9 . . .they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves.

> 10 Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.
>
> 11 Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him. . . .
>
> 24 And it shall come to pass, that instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well set hair baldness; and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth; and burning instead of beauty.
>
> 25 Thy men shall fall by the sword, and thy mighty in the war.
>
> 26 And her gates shall lament and mourn; and she being desolate shall sit upon the ground.

(One of Brian's followers later will want to be healed of his "bald patch," perhaps believing it's a curse from on high.) This prophet perhaps most resembles John the Baptist. John had retreated away from cities and into the wilderness, preaching in the desert about the wretchedness of sin and the fact that when the Messiah did finally come, judgment came with him. He is

mentioned by Josephus and in the Bible, and for good reason: John was a stirring preacher. With his unkempt beard and his rough clothes, his face weathered and tanned by years of exposure to the desert sun, he must also have been a striking figure. And his uncompromising and stern command "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" helped him gather a devoted following in the years around A.D. 25. *To the Jews he was another of that line of fiery prophets who had long preached in Jerusalem and in the countryside of Palestine*. As others before had done, he called on the people to follow the ethical teachings of the Torah as well as its ritual prescriptions.[27]

We have our own line of prophets here, calling to repentance, or just condemning.

FALSE PROPHET: ". . . and that includes you sir"—This specificity, this personal touch, is mentioned as a key component for the particularly effective public speaker, according to Murray Sayle, covering Rev. Paisley for the *Sunday Times*: Whatever one thinks of his doctrine, Paisley is a master orator. He is the only speaker I have heard who comes close to Fidel Castro. Their techniques are oddly similar, probably as old as the art of mob oratory itself: an almost schoolmasterly exposition broken by asides, savage humour, endless repetition of key phrases, picturesque abuse, and above all a total absorption in the changing moods of the audience.[28]

Brian will borrow the touch in a moment, when he effectively addresses one man in his audience, and the man happily thanks him.

FALSE PROPHET: ". . . the horns shall be on the head . . ."—The beast in Revelations has ten horns on its head, but a cuckold is also horned. In Daniel, he describes the dream beasts he's seen, including a fourth, ten-horned beast with "great iron teeth."[29] By verse twenty, he's explaining that the fourth beast is actually a fourth kingdom on Earth, and the ten horns are ten kings. In Revelations, creatures are multiple-headed, multiple-horned, and multiple-crowned—the bewildering array of creatures and sights in the apocalyptic works isn't really exaggerated by our prophets here. The cuckolded husband has typically been depicted wearing horns, but he is most often laughed at, not feared or even pitied.[30] The leader of the Knights Who Say Ni in *Holy Grail* is also wearing horns on his helm, as did Tim, but they're both also more ridiculous than feared.

BORING PROPHET: ". . . rumours of things going astray . . ."—The Children of Israel regularly went astray, as do the Lord's "sheep," with Jesus being the Good Shepherd who will find them. The "great confusion" this prophet

mentions may simply be the dense works he's referencing, including Daniel, Revelations, and especially Isaiah, who offered: "But the cormorant and the bittern shall possess it; the owl also and the raven shall dwell in it: and he shall stretch out upon it the line of confusion, and the stones of emptiness."[31] Jeremiah was also certain that his enemies would be smitten with "everlasting confusion" and they "will not prosper."[32] The Second Coming may have been imminent for many during this period, or it may have been well in the future, but eschatological writings often mention the confusing, tumultuous days leading up to Christ's triumphal return. Following this line of prophets we have encountered prurience, fear and shame, and now spiritual bewilderment—all things Brian will encounter on his short journey to the cross.

". . . little things with the sort of raffia work base . . ."—He's waxing Goonish here. The Goons often list things absolutely necessary to carry out a particular task—retrofitting the Albert Memorial into a rocket ship, for example, or the crucial gear needed to reach Shangri-La or scale Everest—including two of the "one thin thing with lumps on," and one of the "one long thin object with no fixed abode."[33] Palin notes that he simply talked and talked here, spinning pseudo-scriptural nonsense so that they could choose from minutes of footage as they edited.[34]

Palin's quiet, rambling preacher version might be based on Peter Cook's popular E. L. Wisty character, who was himself based on a high butler Cook had known while at Radley.[35] One of the odd, droning stories this man delivered to Cook involved—coincidentally, for our purposes—a "Bee of Ephesus" that flew around the crucified Christ.[36] See also the Pythons' ramblings of pseud-talk in *Meaning of Life* church sermon ("And spotteth twice they the camels before the third hour . . ."), in *Holy Grail* with the reading monk (". . . and sloths, and carp, and anchovies . . ."), and in *Flying Circus* where Idle is in the dock, spouting faux-Shakespeare (". . . or wakes the drowsy apricot betides . . .").[37] This kind of obscurant, reference-laden, and frowsy speech comes from the Modernists (Eliot, Joyce), from the Goons, and has been a hallmark of the Pythonesque from the beginning.

BORING PROPHET: ". . . shall lose his friend's hammer and the young shall not know where lieth the things possessed by their fathers . . ."—There was a "prophet" during this period who spoke of sacred, secret things buried by Moses on Mount Gerizim. This Samaritan prophet convinced thousands to follow him to the sacred mountain in 36, but Pilate sent troops to head off the crowd, leading to an all-out battle (many of the Samaritans were armed) and the

eventual execution of the Samaritan leadership.[38] This was the incident that led to Pilate's recall to Rome, and perhaps to the termination of his prefecture that same year.[39] The Boring Prophet isn't calling anyone to anything, so he's likely no threat to Rome or the Sanhedrin.

BORING PROPHET (OS): "It is written in the Book of Cyril . . ."—There are a number of apocryphal texts, those not included in the Bible, for example, but still considered scriptural to many. Cyril was a bishop of Jerusalem, in the fourth century, but there was also critic Cyril Connolly, already mentioned in the Python song "Eric the Half-a-Bee," and even Cyril Smith, the largish Liberal MP for Rochdale mentioned in *Flying Circus* Ep. 45.[40]

HARRY: "Oh. Twenty shekels"—Even if a talent was worth 3,000 shekels, 20 shekels seems like a rather high price for a false beard. Remember, though, the Ex-leper asked for a talent earlier, before settling for half a denarii.

HARRY: "We're supposed to haggle"—Here Idle seems to be playing Harry like a "spiv," a shonky character who appears in his element during but especially after the war in Britain, when rationing was firmly in place. Harry is selling a beard to a man, which is likely not illegal to Rome or in violation of Sanhedrin laws, except that Brian clearly tells Harry that it's for "the wife." With it, the wife will likely participate, against Jewish law and custom, in a religio-judicial ceremony not meant for women. Harry is abetting the flouting of the law, at the least. In postwar Britain, the spiv flourished when sub-legal trade became available and even oddly fashionable, when rationed (or exotic) food items might only be had through black market means. In Parliament there were groans about the "spiv economy," one that flowed almost without notice beneath the actual, heavily taxed economy, siphoning money from the state's coffers and lining the pockets of bookmakers and black marketeers.[41] The government even tried to have these spivs and "drones" (an idler, a non-worker) registered with the (Labour government) authorities so that their time and energies could be better managed by the state—sent to the mines alongside Polish former POWS, for example. It came to be known as "The Spivs and Drones Order."[42] The Socialist Party of Great Britain looked askance at both the Labour government's windy attacks on these "parasites" and the ill-defined spivs themselves: It has been said that the Spiv is at least a rebel. Some people have even sentimentalised him as a kind of revolt against the conditions imposed by the nature of capitalist exploitation. The Spiv's own anti-Government and anti-authoritarian outlook might seem to lend colour to this view. The Spiv, however, generally lacks the class loyalty and class sentiment that goes to the making of the class-conscious

social revolutionary. The zeal and selfless devotion of the socialist, with his illimitable vista of a world based on production for use and the Brotherhood of Man, lights no fires in the mind and imagination of the Spiv. A good time and plenty of fun at the expense of others gravely limits his social horizon. Pleasure and "the easy way" becomes basic to his existence. His mode of life constitutes a form of social parasitism which conflicts with the healthy social instincts of the vast majority of workers.[43]

After much talk in the press and in Parliament, not much changed until the economy stabilized, desirable food became more available, and the spiv fascination petered out naturally. In his memoirs published in 1971, Lord Butler opined that with the cessation of state controls over food and the sales of goods and importation by the mid-1950s, characters like Harry disappeared, practically overnight.[44] Harry isn't an idler, certainly, since he sells both rocks for stonings and beards for disguises, and he doesn't seem to be gouging (another complaint from the Socialist Party assessment), but he does seem to be making his living on the Jewish authority system's teat, benefiting from what observant Jews *need* to participate in an approved, even sacred act like a stoning. Perhaps Harry has just positioned himself perfectly, in a business sense, with goods that he knows practicing Jews need and want. This has a first-century Jerusalem iteration, as well. The moneychangers and sellers of temple cult material (like those who sold animals for sacrifice, who baked shewbread, made incense, weaved and knitted for the temple curtain, and so on) made cultic participation—mandatory on some levels—more possible for many Jews.[45] If the Pythons had decided to include the religious aspects of Jewish life in the film, then people like Harry would have sold doves to the poorest Jews, who couldn't afford "more expensive animals such as sheep."[46] However proper his capitalist intentions and practices, Harry and these purveyors were the types, among others, that Jesus forcibly cleared from the temple as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels. In *Life of Brian*, the merchants tend to be more backdrop and set dressing than characters, not unlike the vaguely defined villagers digging for filth, attending a deadly wedding, or carrying a witch for execution in *Holy Grail*.

But is this capitalist go-getter and his milieu simply a distraction from the Jews' awful lives of servitude to Rome? Later, supporters of the Baader-Meinhof group and the student unrest in Europe after 1968 thought as much in relation to postwar Germany: "The so-called economic miracle was invented as a distraction to stop us thinking about our Fascist past. Consumerism put the lid back on history. We were no longer meant to know what our past meant."[47] In

our case, is it to distract the people of Jerusalem from dwelling on the fact that they are ruled by Romans? The PFJ might think so.

BURT appears, he is very big—This is John Case again, his only surviving appearance in the film. He was cast to play Pilate's wife who, in earlier drafts, physically fought off the PFJ during their "waid."

On the night that a vote of confidence was called for in the House, 28 March 1979, it was reported by Donoughue that one of the hoped-for votes the government did not get was from the Irishman Frank Maguire, who seemed to respond to a similar, Burt-like looming influence: "I saw Stan Orme, who told me that he had done everything to get [Gerry] Fitt[48] and Maguire into the lobbies [to cast a vote], but nothing would move them." Donoughue continued: "Maguire's wife had come with him—along with two sinister Republican 'heavies'—and they forbade him to vote."[49] Fitt and his family had already been intimidated by the IRA, when sympathisers broke in, one night in 1976, as the Fitts were getting ready for bed. They were fended off by Gerry, in his underwear and waving a Browning automatic, issued officially to him during the period of the power sharing executive. But no amount of protection could stop the Fitt home being a target to Loyalists and the IRA.[50]

The possible threat from the IRA against, ostensibly, one of its own was one of those threads woven daily through British newspapers and evening news stories.[51]

Burt is also clearly Harry's employee, meaning Harry is one of Keith Joseph's anointed ones. Harry is an entrepreneur who sells rocks for stonings, enriches the economy with gourds, and offers beards for women who want to participate in the Jewish male religious world. With the Tories in opposition from 1974, Joseph found himself in the wilderness, but using particularly interesting language, this prophet[52] preached a consistently conservative message to local constituencies and Party conferences and in the House of Lords: Through constant repetition of his favourite themes, he hoped that he could still exert some influence over "the climate of opinion." The entrepreneur was praised on numerous occasions, and the scarcity of these *market place gladiators* was bemoaned in speech after speech. . . . He made several attempts to encapsulate the work of the entrepreneur—"the character who works the magic, the Aladdin who creates the jobs."[53]

Harry would have been an ideal figure for Joseph.

HARRY: "Haggle properly"—This is a long-standing stereotype also affixed to the Scots, being thrifty and always ready to bargain. The Goons mention

Bluebottle's Scottish uncle who hides him in a "brown paper parcel" under the seat of a bus so that he doesn't have to pay the boy's fare; Neddie's Scottish uncle "Laird McGool" invites Neddie in to warm himself by a "roaring candle"; and in "Robin Hood," a Jewish character (Sellers) tells Robin Seagoon—who's been told a thousand "splonders" is needed to save him from the Sheriff—to "offer him nine-fifty and take a chance."[54] Karl Marx called haggling "the language of the Jews," according to Gilman: The Jew as moneychanger is the prototypical Jew, who speaks a language of commerce which is deceptive but which remains immutable. The mask of the Jew may shift. He may articulate his deeds in English, German, or French, but these national languages are mere camouflage for the language by which he dupes his prey, the language and rhetoric of the Jews, "haggling." And this remains constant.[55]

There were several very public hagglings going on in this period. As already discussed, the Callaghan administration attempted to keep the trade unions on board through 1976–1978, hoping for a stable economy more favorable for a successful election. The unions refused to "haggle properly," pay increases were demanded and then granted, destroying the government's attempted curbs on inflationary activity. During the IMF loan crisis in 1976, the Americans and the IMF refused to "haggle properly," as well, holding the British government to onerous reductions on spending before the loan was granted. The haggling would change dramatically once the Thatcher years kicked in, when the unions were no longer as welcome at the policy-making table.

BRIAN: "Tell me what to say <u>Please</u>!"—This is a marvelous portmanteau Pythonism: miscommunication as part of a financial transaction. Brian is desperate to buy a beard as a disguise, and he even has sufficient money for the purchase, but he doesn't understand the "Jewish" language necessary to complete the transaction. This is because, textually, the transaction itself is the comedy bit, not a setup for a following scene or pay-off. (Think of the back-and-forth between the king of Swamp Castle and the guards watching Herbert in *Holy Grail* as an earlier example.) This two-minute bit has its own internal language and pace that must be learned by Brian for the scene to end, which means it's also slightly disconnected from the rest of the film, a kind of pause in the narrative flow.[56] But it's also about as Pythonesque as a scene can be. In Ep. 23 of *Flying Circus*, a French film is being reviewed, and the reviewer notes that the film is about the "breakdown in communication in our modern society": In a nutshell, this defines *Flying Circus*. There are very few examples in the series of a successful communication or transaction. In most cases, the message is

misunderstood, delivered improperly, or perceived incorrectly. . . . The communication issue is key for the Pythons, and is based on the recent interest in semantics and semiotics, the growing awareness that meaning isn't just "there," it is imbued by and for society/culture, and that meaning can and does fluctuate depending on context. The separation of a word from its "meaning" allows for new meanings and even multiple meanings to be temporarily affixed to a word—there now exists the possibility of "wiggle room" in the world of language. Modernist authors like Joyce, Stein, Pound, Woolf, and Eliot pushed this separation, this slippage, this interchangeability, and the Pythons came along at just the right time to explore that new ambiguity in the television format.[57]

The Pythons are exploring communication in transactions here, as well, and Brian will eventually have to run away, just short of completing the deal for the free gourd (though he keeps the gourd).

Again, the headlines offered plenty of painful haggling for the Pythons to cull through, including a sticking point when the government held firm at a 4.5 percent offer but the unions demanded a flat 5 percent in 1976. Chancellor Healey and the unions went back and forth, with PM Callaghan refusing to back down.[58] After more than a month of this, the government capitulated, and the unions got their 5 percent. At this moment, many in the government likely saw "TUC" as just another terror group acronym. And just two years later, the explosion of pay demands that eventually crippled the economy and sank the Labour government started at 5 percent, then rapidly became 10, 13, and eventually 22 percent for road haulage drivers, the government having no clue what the unions would ask for next.[59] That was "the red flag to the inflationary bull," Jenkins concludes.[60]

HARRY gives BRIAN a gourd—These gourds were plentiful in the region, and quite prominent, as it turns out. The colocynth is an architectural inspiration in both the Solomonic temple and the Tel Dan gate.[61] Gourds figure into a story involving Elisha in 2 Kings. There, a stew containing poisonous wild gourds was prepared for Elisha's "company of minor prophets," and Elisha added flour to dilute the poisonous effect, rendering it harmless.[62]

HARRY: "Yes but it's *worth* ten"—What's economic peace worth? This was being asked by Labour insiders during the latter days of the Callaghan administration. As mentioned, the government had agreed that inflation could be dealt with if pay rises stayed at or lower than 5 percent. Reg Birch and the like were having none of it. The government ended up surrendering more than 20 percent pay rises to the trades, and the "Labour Go Home" writing was on the

wall. Opposition leader Thatcher tolled the bell in her 1978 Party Conference speech, damning the self-interested bargaining: Now, you, the trade union leaders, have great power. . . . But look at the position of your members today and compare it with the position of workers in other free countries. Can you really say, can anyone say, you have used your powers well? . . . You want higher wages, better pensions, shorter hours, more government spending, more investment, more-more-more. But where is this "more" to come from? There is no more. There can be, but there will not be, unless we produce it. . . . And here, let me say to trade union leaders, you are often your own worst enemies. Why isn't there more? Because too often restrictive practices rob you of the one thing you have to sell—your productivity.[63]
Thatcher would ride this horse to a General Election victory in May 1979.

HARRY: "Seventeen. My last word. I won't take a penny less . . ."—Harry of course ends up sealing the deal seconds later at sixteen shekels, down from his original asking price of twenty. He has already told Brian that "it's worth" ten shekels, but that he paid twelve shekels (or it cost him twelve shekels to manufacture it). The point is the haggling unfixes the value from the commodity, and in the flurry a rather arbitrary (and in this case lower) price is agreed upon. This kind of exchange is found throughout the run of *The Goon Show*. In "The Mystery of the Marie Celeste," for example, a reward for information starts at £5,000 and ends up, when it trickles down to Bluebottle, at "seventeen and ninepence."[64]

HARRY: "Ah, well there's one born every minute"—Famous quote *attributed* to nineteenth-century circus impresario P. T. Barnum.

Notes

1. Gilliam, *Gilliamesque*, 182.
2. “Why Are We All So Bloody-Minded?” *Times*, 25 August 1970: 9.
3. Josephus, *AJ*, 18.5.1 (Whiston, 382).
4. See Goldberg, “The Popularity of John the Baptist.”
5. “Mr Powell Shows His Unity with Ulster,” *Times*, 30 September 1974: 4.
6. Kotker, *HLTJ*, 98. These cave mysteries remain mysterious; adherents were “sworn to secrecy,” and kept that oath (99).
7. Smallwood, *JURR*, 257.
8. Circa 45 or 46, according to Whiston. Cuspius Fadus followed Agrippa I as procurator of Judea, ruling 44–46 (*JURR*, 257–62).
9. *AJ* 20.5.1 (Whiston, 418).
10. See Acts 21:37–38, where Paul is mistaken for the dangerous Egyptian; also, *AJ*, 20.8.6 (Whiston, 422), and *WJ* 2.13.5 (Whiston, 483).
11. Palin, *Diaries 1979–1979*, 494.
12. Donoughue calls him “the awful Paisley” (*DSD* 2.165). Fascinating, too, that following the hung parliament outcome in the June 2017 general election, the Conservatives under Theresa May reached out to and brought into bed Paisley’s party, the Democratic Unionist Party, securing a coalition government.
13. “O’Neill Carries Fight to His Enemies,” *Sunday Telegraph*, 16 February 1969: 1.
14. “The Sayings of Ian Paisley,” *Belfast Telegraph*, 12 September 2014.
15. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 293.
16. From a sermon delivered 1 March 1968.
17. “Third Force Emerges as Paisley Thunders,” *Times*, 21 February 1969: 3.
18. Waugh called Abse a “socialist MP” with an interest in “pretty serving boys” (*FCY*, 15 December 1974).
19. “Spong and British Politics,” *Spectator*, 21 October 1977: 12.
20. Paul Grinke, “Stuffed Dummies,” *Spectator*, 13 February 1969: 21.
21. The entire Commons exchange is available via Hansard at http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1969/apr/22/northern-ireland#S5CV0782P0_19690422_HOC_271.
22. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 294.
23. “Not by Shakespeare,” *Spectator*, 1 January 1965: 12.
24. Probably based on an original Lucas Cranach the Elder illustration.
25. Larsen, *MPFC: UC*, 1.71.
26. *MPFC: UC*, 1.350.
27. Kotker, *HLTJ*, 50; italics added. John’s is an example of transcending the “it’s written that’s why” school of belief (mentioned by Mandy); he reminds his followers of the importance of the spirit *and* the letter of the law.
28. “Inside the Mind of Ian Paisley,” *Sunday Times*, 9 February 1969: 13.
29. Daniel 7:7–8.
30. Larsen, *BAFHG*, 450.
31. Isaiah 34:11.
32. Jeremiah 20:11.
33. “The Albert Memorial,” 23 March 1958; “Shangri-La Again,” 8 November 1955.
34. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 494.
35. Thompson, *Peter Cook*, 24–25, 175–77.
36. See Wendy Cook’s *So Farewell Then* (2006), and Thompson’s *Peter Cook* (1997).

37. Cleese delivers this sermon in *Meaning of Life*, Palin is reading from the *Book of Armaments* before they blow up the rabbit in *Holy Grail*, and a prisoner, Mr. Larch (Idle), has lapsed into an "Olivier impression" in Ep. 3 of *Flying Circus* (*ATW*, 1.3.29; *MPFC: UC*, 1.50–62).

38. Brandon, "Pontius Pilate in History and Legend," 528.

39. The Syrian legate, Vitellius, essentially sacked Pilate before his trip to Rome, and Tiberius passed away just before Pilate arrived in Rome for his audience. The demonstrable record for Pilate disappears at this rather crucial juncture.

40. Auberon Waugh called Connolly "our Greatest Living Englishman," tongue in cheek; "Eric the Half-a-Bee" appeared on *Monty Python's Previous Record* album.

41. "Tax Structure Monstrous," *Times*, 19 July 1947: 4.

42. This became the Regulation of Employment Order 1947, and was enacted in December 1947, though to middling success. See also Thomas, *Villain's Paradise*.

43. *Socialist Standard*, October 1947.

44. "The Choice between Genteel Bankruptcy and Floating the Pound," *Times*, 20 May 1971: 12. Rab Butler had been Chancellor of the Exchequer 1951–1955.

45. Jeremias, *JTJ*, 25–27.

46. Safrai, *The Economy of Roman Palestine*, 100.

47. Dieter Kunzelmann, student leader, Kommune Eins, from *Baader-Meinhof: In Love with Terror* (BBC, 2002).

48. Fitt would be targeted by the IRA later, as well, when his family home in Antrim was burned to the ground in 1983.

49. *DSD*, 472.

50. Anne McHardy, *Guardian*, 26 August 2005.

51. This is discussed in more detail in Arnold Kemp's *Confusion to Our Enemies* (2012).

52. Marr actually calls Joseph an "Old Testament prophet denouncing his tribe" (*HMB*, 355). Wilson would call Tony Benn "an Old Testament prophet without a beard" (*Financial Times*, 12 May 1975: 30). Many of these raging, fire-and-brimstone types seemed to be on the Left, and often predicting doom under Tory policies.

53. Denham and Garnett, *Keith Joseph*, 420; italics added. See also Bogdanor's version of this quote found in "Thatcherism, 1979–1990."

54. "Emperor of the Universe," 3 January 1957; "The Treasure in the Lake," 28 February 1956; "Robin Hood," 2 December 1956.

55. "Karl Marx and the Secret Language of the Jews," 35. Found in Jessop and Wheatley, *Karl Marx's Social and Political Thought*, *Vol. Veo*. Marx is depicted several times in earlier Python work (*MPFC: UC*, 1.378–79).

56. This is one of those sketches that could play as well on an album as on film. Visuals aren't necessary for the humor to come through, a tribute to the *Goon Show*'s influence.

57. *MPFC: UC*, 1.350.

58. Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun*, 468–69.

59. Jenkins, *Mrs. Thatcher's Revolution*, 21–22.

60. Jenkins, *Mrs. Thatcher's Revolution*, 22.

61. King and Stager, *LBI*, 81.

62. *LBI*, 82; 2 Kings 4:40–41.

63. Conservative Party Conference speech, 13 October 1978 (margaretthatcher.org).

64. 16 November 1954.

SCENE SIXTEEN
HIDING WITH THE PFJ

STAN is striking the names of the dead REVOLUTIONARIES from his list—Stan appears to be using a wooden writing board, likely coated with beeswax. These types of "books" had been in use for hundreds of years by this point, from as early as 1300 BC.[1] The fact that Stan, at least, can read and write sets these men apart from many in this period.

FRANCIS: "Habbakuk"—Actually "Habakkuk," it is one of the smaller books nearer the end of the Old Testament. It was Habakkuk who broke through the tile floor earlier. This starts a list of "probationary martyrs" to the PFJ's cause—Daniel, Job, Joshua, Judges, and Brian—and is just like the listing of dead knights after the first assault on the Killer Rabbit in *Holy Grail*, where it's announced that Uther, Gorlois, Urien, Ector, and Bors were killed by the rabbit. (None of these characters had appeared before, some having fallen prey to script revisions as the project moved forward.[2])

Midway between Job and Habakkuk, the Book of Daniel's language and apocalyptic imagery fueled some of the wild prophets earlier. Daniel was a captive in Babylon. In the KJV, the Book of Job appears eleven books after Judges (the older, wealthy Job seeming an odd choice here). Joshua was the leader of the children of Israel after Moses's time, actually leading them into the Promised Land. Being a spy for Moses, as well, means he fits here. Joshua and Judges are listed in the correct order for the traditional Christian version of the Old Testament, though Judges isn't a personal name like Joshua. Judges is the name of the book that records the activities of people like Othniel, Deborah, and Jephthah, as well as Samson. In the draft version, a "Daryl called Andy" was also killed in the raid.

REG: ". . . probationary martyrs to the cause"—Perhaps this is the inevitable result of the restive relationship between most actual terror groups' "philosophy of the bomb" and those more like the Pythons' PFJ, where the "philosophy of the permissive society" precludes any of the well-known tit-for-tat brinksmanship enacted whenever, for example, the Japanese Red Army took hostages and made demands, and the Japanese government bowed to those

demands.[3] Like the Labour Party after Attlee's administration, the gradual abandonment of the quest for a socialist Utopia or even the "good society" for all Britain changed Labour from fiery revolutionary zealot to a milder, less threatening seeker (and then provider) of consensus.[4] In the film, saving Brian from the cross would be an act of escalation, which would draw out the Romans against the PFJ, which would demand a new act of terror, and so on. Antagonizing a sitting government is challenge enough: "It was far more difficult," Laqueur concludes, "to survive the backlash of a military dictatorship."[5] The Roman Empire represented the pinnacle of such dictatorships. Reg, Francis, and Stan-Loretta seem ready to abandon *propagande par le fait*, and fall comfortably back into the safer *propagande par mot*, their version of "consensus" (the version where they survive). In this they've also clearly agreed to change their conception of Brian's acts and purpose, from revolutionary leader to martyr. This "readjustment" of expectations is an echo of those disciples around Jesus after his crucifixion, according to Brandon:

> Now, since current Messianic belief did not envisage the death and resurrection of the Messiah, the disciples had to readjust their ideas concerning Jesus to the new situation that confronted them. Before his crucifixion they had recognised him as the Messiah who would redeem Israel. . . . His death at the hands of the Romans . . . was a shocking contradiction of their hopes. If Jesus were the Messiah, he had died without accomplishing his mission. The conviction, stemming from their Resurrection experiences, that he was alive again, still left them with the problem of the unfulfilment of their expectations of him. The evidence of the New Testament documents shows that the readjustment of their faith took the form of a revised version of Jesus' Messianic role.[6]

Jesus would henceforth be adjusted into a "martyr for Israel" as well as a "Messiah for Israel" who would later "return, with supernatural power and glory, to redeem Israel from oppression."[7] Brian's role as "Chosen One" now means chosen for glorious, functional martyrdom, not messianic leadership to overthrow the Roman oppressors. Versions of "martyr to the cause" were printed quite often in period newspapers and heard on news broadcasts in the 1960s and 1970s, especially as myriad revolutionary causes heated up around the globe. In China, it was Li Ta-ch'ao, a "nationalist who believed in self-reliance," an early figure in Mao's assault on ancient China;[8] in Northern Ireland it was Frank Stagg, a Provisional IRA member who died in 1976 as a result of a hunger strike;[9] and the question was being asked by journalist Eric Marsden at Easter 1972 whether Jesus Christ was martyr, messiah, or both.[10]

REG: "Thank you, Loretta. On the nod"—Meaning there is general agreement that doesn't merit discussion; this is a bit of parliamentary procedure. Later, when Brian is on the cross, the PFJ actually hand-vote when agreeing to

sing to him. There was also a Kenneth Rose column in the *Telegraph* called "On the Nod," which, yes, looked at *affaires du parlement*.

REG: "Let's not be down-hearted!"—Reg continues to keep the upper lip stiff in the face of this admitted hecatomb, but not all revolutionary leaders were so upbeat. After being sentenced to life imprisonment for murder and attempted murder, Red Army Faction leader Andreas Baader was told by followers outside of prison to cease his hunger strike, that a new and devastating terrorist strike was being planned—those on the outside were going to continue the fight, essentially. Increased police monitoring and the sobering sentences that had been given to the group's leadership must have dampened the revolutionary enthusiasm, though, as a September 1977 letter from Baader indicates:

> To the rabble who call themselves the RAF: our patience with you has run out! What's up with you lot? We only want to read one thing from you: a statement that you have carried out the operation. If you don't take the initiative, we will take away your right to call yourself RAF![11]

Following this missive, the outside members gathered, discussed their situation, and green-lighted the kidnapping of Hans Martin Schleyer, a business executive. Schleyer was to be held as hostage until the German authorities released RAF members in prison. Schleyer was killed by the RAF in October 1977, just after his captors learned of the suicide deaths of Baader, Ensslin, and Jan-Carl Raspe, all at Stammheim Prison.

Elsewhere, the spirit of revolution was also clearly felt, and even being acted upon. In the simmering pot that was 1970s Afghanistan, "Islamic radicals" decided to attempt an overthrow of the country's first president, Daoud Khan, a reform-minded man. The results should read familiar:

> In 1975, [religious scholars and university students] tried to overthrow Daoud in a dilettantish coup attempt. His security forces made short work of the rebels. They styled themselves as a new kind of political movement that they called the "Islamic Society". . . organized according to the same cell structure used by underground communist groups. (Like the Iranians [and, seemingly, the PFJ]), they had learned much from the Marxists.) For the moment, though, that was little help to the militants. Most of them disappeared in Daoud's jails or execution cellars; the rest fled to Pakistan.[12]

A military-led coup (supported enthusiastically by the Soviets) would successfully unseat Daoud in April 1978; he died in the fighting.

REG: "One total catastrophe like this is just the beginning!"—If this incident isn't just terror-related, for the historically minded Pythons the best "catastrophe" involving English-accented troops would have likely been the Suez Crisis. For many, the Suez failure was the swan song for Britain's empire, the unsightly denouement to decades of flag-waving colonialism. In October

1956, just after Egypt's President Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, Israel invaded Egypt, supported in principle by both France and Britain. In November, British and French paratroopers joined the fray, resulting in Nasser blocking the canal with scuttled ships. The United States did not support the British in this affair, and it would eventually be revealed that the three aggressors had carefully planned the invasion to both re-seize control of the canal (built by the French and partly owned by the British) *and* end Nasser's rule.[13] Pressure from the United States and the international community (especially financial pressure from the United States) forced the invaders to withdraw; the canal had to be closed for four months to be cleared. At home, British protesters marched against the government, and the press were generally outraged by this sordid return to gunboat colonialism. Bernstein calls the raid a "catastrophe" and the resulting world tumult (including Britain's "allies'" attacks on the British financial system as punishment) a "fiasco," showing "how much Britain's world had been transformed."[14]

But then there were the terrorists, as well. Jenkins points out that the hoped-for socialist revolution in the 1960s Western world and Britain specifically, whispered and shouted about during the period of the Pythons' flourishing, never actually came to be:

> The events of 1968 in Britain were peaceful by the standards of those which took place in Paris, Berlin and Berkeley. There were big anti-Vietnam demonstrations in Grosvenor Square, one of them violent, and campus disturbances notably at the LSE and the newer plate-glass universities of Essex and Sussex, which the architects seemed to have designed for purposes of confrontation. The revolutionary project was well summed-up in the metaphor of masturbation with which Trevor Griffiths began his play *The Party*. *There was never the slightest prospect of socialist revolution in Britain between 1968 and 1979.*[15]

The beginnings of Fatah were also humble, for example. The hope in 1964 was that "apparently futile" attacks against Israel "would provoke a massive reaction" and bring international sympathy to the Palestinian cause.[16] *Life of Brian* may also simply be a historically cloaked version of what the young Pythons were witnessing in their Britain—cries of revolutionary sound and fury, ultimately signifying nothing.

And perhaps this failure is the PFJ's Entebbe moment? What starts as a glorious and promising revolutionary mission implodes in the face of overwhelming force—for the PFLP-EO at the Entebbe Airport it was grimly determined Israeli forces; for Brian and the PFJ, it's the Romans (and the bungling CFG). Terror expert Bowyer Bell had researched and written of the Irgun guerrilla campaign in British Palestine,[17] and in 1970 he published a book

on the history of the IRA, *The Secret Army*. In the latter he waxes quite Reg-like: "But Ireland desperately needed a glorious failure to awake the latent revolutionary tradition."[18] Describing the IRA bombing campaign of 1939–1940, Bell writes in very familiar terms, for us:

> For terror the IRA lacked, perhaps commendably, the instinct for the jugular. That the IRA did not want to murder in the streets and could not cut the sinews of order meant that the campaign was doomed to futility—spluttering on until hope and haven had been lost and the men interned, imprisoned or expelled. Prudent men, even with 10 times the personnel and equipment, would have thought the prospects dim, but with the scanty resources available even the optimistic should have drawn back.[19]

In the age of "[t]errorist groups . . . springing up like mushrooms" but then fizzling into the heat waves of the Middle Eastern deserts, inept combat missions were bound to happen. The first raid into Israel by the newly minted "Heroes of the Return" group "was a total failure," according to Demaris, and, as with Brian's mission with the PFJ, there was only one survivor.[20] The combined Arab armed forces that participated in the Six-Day War in 1967 limped home after a catastrophic incursion that eventually saw Israel not only protect herself but push back her enemies on all sides across the "administrated" territories.[21]

Dobson and Payne described Libyan strongman Qaddafi as similarly ineffective in 1977, even though he sponsored terrorism with great enthusiasm, seeming perhaps—like Reg—to appreciate at least the theatrical element of the endeavor:

> To understand Qaddafi . . . it is necessary to appreciate his romantic and fanatical ideas about Arab unity. He sees himself as a kind of Napoleon of the Arab world. . . . Yet he does not have the capacity to sustain his efforts and by trying to do so many things at once he fails to achieve his aims. Only sporadically are his aims translated into action, so that on the spur of the moment and in a fit of enthusiasm he decides on a course of action. The Libyan enthusiast has neither the time nor the intellectual capacity to follow through the consequences of his decisions.[22]

Through Brian the PFJ had achieved their first (and likely only) noteworthy success—the painting of the slogans on the palace wall, but even then, Reg is of two minds, flashing "*a brief look of alarm at FRANCIS*." Insurrectionary success brings the scrutiny of the mightiest empire on Earth, while simple ineffectiveness or base cowardice can be relatively safe.

REG: "Their glorious deaths shall unite us all—"—The pie-eyed self-deception practiced by many revolutionary groups—namely that their actions were not only justified but would trigger wide-ranging, permanent change in the world—was manifest in press releases and news reports across the 1960s and beyond. More somber accounts detailed the costs of such activities, settling this revolutionary fervor into the more torpid, miasmic strata of real life. Writing

about the “brief fame” of such terrorists, Robert Fisk notes that by late summer 1975 elements of the JRA, the PFLP, and the ELF had been hunted to ground to a single building in Tripoli, while a few notable others had been accepted into Beirut, where they were all relatively safe but unable to act out their anti-imperialist agenda. Many of their comrades weren’t so lucky:

> Israel, on the other hand, is holding an estimated 67 Arab guerrillas in prison. Japan still has 14 Red Army men behind bars. Israel still holds Kozo Okamoto, the lone terrorist survivor of the Lod airport massacre. Two of the Red Army extremists died at Lod. Five of the Arabs who held the Israeli hostages at Munich in September, 1972, died with the 11 Israelis. One of the five Baader-Meinhof terrorists died from wounds sustained during the West German embassy siege in Stockholm in April this year; his four colleagues were captured by the police. According to United State’s State Department figures, 520 people have been killed in incidents of international terrorism between 1968 and April this year. At least 50 of these are believed to have been terrorists.[23]

Reg hasn’t learned a lesson that, frankly, many political figures have also failed to learn over the generations. In 1979 and 1980 the Conservative government under Thatcher battled mightily with the leftovers of the Winter of Discontent, while attempting to reign in the powers of the trade unions and remake Britain’s economy. In opposition, the Labour Party, led by Michael Foot, gainsaid virtually every Tory move, especially those involving the economy—inflation, employment, manufacturing, and the usefulness of monetarist policies. Peter Jenkins marked the official end of postwar consensus politics in Britain, pointing out that Thatcher was trying to run the country from the far Right, and Labour was simply sniping back from further Left. Consensus had given way to “conviction”:

> Mrs Thatcher and Mr Foot both speak with the rhetoric of conviction. That will make them exciting opponents across the floor of the House of Commons and it will be fun to see who first gets the better of the other. But we should not be misled by this entertainment into thinking that “conviction politics” are a substitute for a firm basis of governmental authority[24] or that passion in advocacy is the same thing as strong or effective leadership.[25]

Reg has a passion, a conviction in his politics that clearly exceeds his mechanisms for achieving those political ends. He wants to get rid of Roman rule but proffers no alternative, and no real way to accomplish the change. There can be no consensus because Rome and especially Pilate (in the film) won’t consider it, nor do they need to.

They hide extremely badly—This scene is more cartoony than other parts of the film. Playing like a Warner Bros.’ cartoon or a Marx Brothers’ routine, the silly bit is reminiscent of the Pythons’ *How Not to Be Seen (Public Service Film No. 42)*, a filmed sketch from *Flying Circus* Ep. 24.[26]

A heavy imperious knocking on the door—This knocking is underscored by a foreboding musical flourish, just how *The Goon Show* created the illusion of a fully realized world using only sound.

CENTURION: ". . . you may be hiding one Brian of Nazareth . . ."—When hearing that the foretold son of Joseph had been found in Nazareth, the "Israelite" Nathanael resorts to what must have been a longstanding joke in the region: "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?"[27] There doesn't seem to be a pejorative slant to the town's name as mentioned here by the Centurion, though, so the joke may have missed the Pythons.[28] They don't find Brian this time; that will come later. The Centurion then had to return to the volatile Pilate *non est inventus*, which couldn't have been a pleasant experience.

This tableaux—furtive men hiding from the Roman authorities—is an echo of events depicted in Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth*. After Christ's death, and just before they learn of his resurrection, the remaining disciples are hiding in their garret, afraid of every knock at the door. This same scene will be an inspiration for a later *Life of Brian* scene, where Judith barges into the PFJ headquarters to announce Brian's execution.

A Brian-like figure in life comes to mind here. The former Black Power leader Michael X (born Michael de Freitas) was executed by hanging for murder in 1975 in Trinidad. Celebrities including John Lennon had campaigned for Michael X's release, including donating money and writing op-eds. A Privy Council plea was even attempted to stay his execution. No appeal was successful, and for good reason: he was clearly guilty of at least two murders, both former "disciples." In 1977 the book *False Messiah* emerged, offering a more complete picture of this revolutionary, who also happened to be a hustler, a pimp, a drug dealer, and a con man, before he was ever a murderer.[29] Brian is guilty of vandalism and attempting to kidnap Pilate's wife, and he's being punished for those crimes in an understandable way, for the time.

MATTHIAS: "My eyes are dim, I cannot see. . . . I'm just a poor old man . . ."—Matthias may be the most wily of all the PFJ, as he has already escaped Jewish religious justice by fleeing the stoning when it descended into chaos, he didn't have to go on the failed "waid," and here he will talk his way out of a Roman raid, partly because the Centurion ends up thinking he's just "weird." The last we see of him will be when he is puttering around what is alleged to be Mandy's kitchen as the PFJ plot their "rescue" of Brian.

The "poor old man" image was one much in the news and discussed in the Commons in the postwar period, and especially later, as the trade union activities

in the late 1970s made life quite miserable for many who depended on the state for their care and sustenance. The wildcat strike actions of the Winter of Discontent period were especially challenging to the elderly, since "local authorities"—who had assumed the responsibility for care of the older generation after the war—were hardest hit by localized strikes.[30] The newspapers and evening newscasts were filled with images of this chaos, thanks to the unions' "massive public sector strikes against incomes policy," according to Bogdanor. "Uncollected rubbish was left piled in the streets," Bogdanor continues, "cancer patients were sent home because the hospital porters were on strike, the dead were left unburied in Liverpool and had to be buried at sea."[31] Essential services at hospitals where, understandably, more elderly patients than younger would have been found, reduced food and orderly services to a miserly degree thanks to porter strikes.[32] Like Matthias, the elderly in Britain of the twentieth century "tended to live alone," they depended more on subsidized housing, public transportation, subsidized health care, home welfare visits, and just the daily availability of a meager means of existence—like "the shops" not only being open, but offering a few tins of affordable this and that—so these scattered but countrywide strikes and slowdowns were very nearly catastrophic.[33] The actions in and against hospitals was the last straw for many: "The Winter of Discontent really frightened people—a sort of breakdown of consent—and it even frightened people in the Labour Party," says Bogdanor, acknowledging Labour's historical reliance on the older vote.[34] "The elderly," Bernstein concludes, "were the largest single block of people below the poverty level" in Britain, even as late as the 1990s, and may have been most likely to vote for change, given the opportunity.[35] Bogdanor concludes:

> Labour Party people were deeply shocked that these antisocial actions could be carried out by people within the Labour movement, and the country was even more deeply shocked. It did not just affect the election of 1979 but elections right through to 1992. The Winter of Discontent became a deep folk memory, as important as the memory of the Jarrow Marches[36] and unemployment in the interwar years.[37] If you had to choose one factor to explain why the Conservatives and Margaret Thatcher were in power for eighteen years, I think that the fear of similar strikes was a key factor—a fear that, if you voted Labour, you would have the same all over again.[38]

As it turns out, this "poor old man" is surprisingly resilient, plucky, and self-sufficient. Matthias will *almost* disappear from the narrative after these scenes. He can be seen in the background of the later "Discussion" scene with the PFJ—when Judith interrupts to say Brian is being crucified—though this was likely

filmed when they filmed this searching scene. At any rate, there's no indication he is arrested or condemned, like Brian.

CENTURION: "Quiet! Silly person"—Again, Cleese's characters can often be flustered by prattling types, and his response tends to be to try and shut them up. During the run of *Flying Circus*, Chapman's "Colonel" character performed this same function, stopping scenes and calling for transitions when things became too "silly."

CENTURION: "Guards! Search the house"—The soldiers are likely only looking for Brian, and not other types of evidence, though they will find a spoon. In contemporary Britain, the Angry Brigade were able to evade police for more than a year, even as their twenty-five bombs targeted Scotland Yard, a British territorial army recruitment center, the BBC, a Biba boutique, and the homes of politicians and leaders of industry.[39] A police raid on a home where suspected sympathizers lived in August 1971 yielded not a spoon but an address book, and four of the gang were rounded up, signaling the beginning of the end of the Angry Brigade.[40] In summer 1972, when West German police raided a suspected Baader-Meinhof hideout in Stuttgart, their suspicions were confirmed when they found "[Andreas] Baader's favorite reading materials . . . Mickey Mouse comics."[41]

CENTURION: "You know what the punishment laid down by Roman law is for harbouring a known criminal"—"The Roman governor naturally had the power of life and death over the Jews in the case of political offences, a power which he exercised in many episodes recorded by Josephus."[42] The Jewish ruling body, the Sanhedrin, also had some influence over capital punishment, as the case of Christ indicates, but there is no trace of the Sanhedrin in the world of the film.

Ulpian wrote of the Romans' effective policing in the empire, touching on the "harbouring" element, as well:

> It is the mark of an efficient and conscientious governor to see to it that the province under his control is peaceful and quiet. This will not be difficult, if he acts diligently to search for wicked men and removes them from the province; he must search for the temple-robbers, brigands, kidnappers, thieves, *and punish anyone committing these offences, and suppress the people who harbour them, without whose aid a brigand cannot lie low for long*.[43]

Davies also writes:

> Bandits tended to flourish in Judaea; and there are many references to the use of Roman soldiers to hunt and capture them, and to search villages lest the villagers should be harbouring them, or their loot had been hidden there. The two criminals executed with Christ were brigands, captured in a security

operation by the Roman forces. Barabbas, too, was a terrorist who had been arrested after leading an insurrection and committing murder in Jerusalem; he was in military custody and awaiting execution.[44]

It's likely that all Jerusalemites of age knew the penalties for defying the Romans.

MATTHIAS: ". . . at least it gets you out in the open air"—This could be a sentiment from the prisoner Ben, who sees the positives in his situation. A switch from hanging upside down to hanging right-side up makes all the difference, and he's grateful for it. Ben and Matthias are much older than most others we meet; the older generation remembering the Jerusalem of pre-Roman improvement, perhaps? As the crucifixion party makes its way to their destination, Ben will be seen again, upside-down, but at a window, which he is likely grateful for.

CENTURION: "You're weird"—What's really at stake here is the fear and respect the occupying, ruling Roman force has counted on for decades to support their minority rule of Judea, and perhaps especially Jerusalem. Brian has poked a finger in the eye of Rome by defacing the prefect's palace walls, attempting the kidnap of a "royal" person, and escaping from Pilate's custody—all serious offenses, two at least carrying a death sentence. Anyone harboring such a felon is subject to public torture and death, as well. The gravity of the situation seems to have escaped Matthias completely, much to the Centurion's surprise. This supposed-to-be-cowering Jew isn't, and he's not even daunted by threats of public torture and execution. The Centurion responds by singling out Matthias as an anomic "weirdo," likely since he's afraid to admit the possibility that the Roman grip on the throats of the people of Judea might be slipping.

This concept would have been one ingrained in the Pythons, who grew up learning lessons about the British Empire—the vast swathes of pinkish-red (the "Queen's Dominions") on world maps and globes—and then watched as it ebbed and faded in their lifetimes. In the 1960s, the white minorities in African countries, including British colonial South Africa, Rhodesia, and Kenya trod this same tightrope—a handful of white settlers holding on to power over millions of oppressed natives. In *Life of Brian* it's a small band of (British-sounding) Jews trying to rid themselves of Roman colonizers; in India in 1857 it's the Great Revolt, where Indians take up arms against British colonialists, killing many and being killed in the thousands.[45] A century later, in Kenya of the Pythons' youth, it was the white English settlers defending themselves against Mau Mau insurgents who wanted the colonizers out and their country back.[46] These turnabouts result in clashes between settlers (colonizers) and activists (the

colonized) that can read quite Pythonesque, almost as odd as successfully hiding in a basket or behind an arras. The "domestic order" the English had so treasured in these colonized lands is the order the Romans expect, and which is being upset, to a small degree, by Brian and the PFJ. In 1953 Kenya, a white family was attacked in their front room by local "boys" wielding machetes; the white women calmly shot and killed three of the invaders, relating the story in low-key, matter of fact tones.[47] The Pythons had to craft their David v. Goliath narrative carefully and ironically, since as British citizens they had been by association affiliated with the colonizers and not the colonized. This is further complicated when they cast themselves into the roles of the oppressed (and the oppressors)—postmodern turnabouts that undercut themselves, and then turnabout again. India had finally been surrendered in 1947; in the 1950s and 1960s the British were slowly forced out of these African regions by "weirdos" who didn't want to be colonized anymore.

Horsley notes the real threat behind the *sicarii*'s program of targeted assassinations was just this "Matthias effect":

> The attack on the symbolic religiopolitical figures, such as the high priest, is particularly important with respect to the masses in a nascent revolutionary situation, for the Sicarii thus attacked the religiopolitical symbols which held the social structure together. The effect . . . was bound to be a lessening of the "habit of obedience" on which any government depends for its monopoly of power. With the breakdown of this habit of respect and obedience to symbols of power and authority, the government loses its monopoly of power.[48]

So the Centurion is concerned here that an indifferent subject is a dangerous one, something the British had been dealing with, in colonial terms, for many years.

MATTHIAS: "Big nose"—Matthias seems to be trailing his coat here, tweaking the Centurion for a fight, but getting a half-hearted response. This same Centurion will later warn Judith about smacking his helmet and threaten an obnoxious bystander with crucifixion. By the end of the film, this same Centurion will have helped in the interrogation of Brian, rearrested him, reminded Pilate that there is a "Bwian" who can be released, and then attempts to make good that release. He's actually a fairly well-intentioned, Whitehall-type civil servant, and responds pretty well to being insulted.

During the well-publicized trial of the Baader-Meinhof Gang across the spring and summer of 1975, those on trial not only refused to cooperate, they also regularly insulted the judges, the system, and the proceedings. On the twenty-sixth day of the trial the accused simply refused to take their seats:

> Chairman: "Defendants are standing. What is that supposed to mean?"

Raspe: “That we want to be excluded by you.”

Chairman: “. . . I would like to speak with the defendants for a moment. Do you have the wish to be excluded, or . . .”

Baader: “Exactly, yes . . . we shall not continue to take part in these proceedings.”

(Then a few similar exchanges between the Chairman and both Baader and Raspe.)

Meinhof and Ensslin: “Exclude us, also.”[49]

Baader would tell the chairman to “go ahead” and exclude all of them, calling him an “old monkey.” The following day, this same scenario was rehearsed, with the chairman deciding to not exclude the defendants if they chose to stand, so the defendants took their antagonism a step further. Baader spoke out of turn often, and when challenged he called the chairman “the archetype of a fascist,” and a “fascist pig,” leading to the following closing remarks:

Chairman: “Do you wish to behave in the same manner that you are behaving at this moment?”

Baader: “We do not wish to change our behavior. We want to be excluded, damn it.”

Chairman: “Do the other defendants go along with this declaration?”

Raspe: “Yes, of course.”

Meinhof: “Yes, you fascist pig.”

Chairman: “The defendants will be, according to a decree by the Senate, excluded from these proceedings for the rest of the week.”[50]

These defendants knew they were safe from at least immediate physical reprisals, given the challenges the German legal system faced in the wake of the Nazi era—the system had erred on the side of restraint and progressiveness to avoid charges of totalitarianism. “Even thirty years after the end of the Third Reich the new West German democracy is extremely sensitive to the shadows of the Nazi past,” writes Melvin Lasky in a 1975 profile of Ulrike Meinhof. “The rule of law must be protected for fear of charges of “*Gestapo*” methods and attitudes.”[51] Matthias, Judith, and the other suspect Jews did not have such assurances, though the Romans do knock on their hideout door. Matthias seems to understand that the Centurion does not have the authority to act unilaterally, so he taunts. Back in their cells, of course, the German defendants were out of the public eye and therefore vulnerable. After months of soundproof solitary confinement, constant bright lighting, and the rigors of hunger strikes and the trial itself, Meinhof, Baader, and Ensslin would all take their own lives.

During the period of emerging student protest across Europe there were multiple demonstrations, sit-ins, and occupations, most nonviolent. When those achieved no significant results, violence was often contemplated, especially as

the protests against the war in Vietnam increased, and group leaders (like Ensslin) began to see violence as the only act imperialists might notice.[52] During the attempted occupation of the Free University of Berlin in January 1969, students were keen to know just when the police *might* resort to the use of force:

> Rumors were passed up and down the stairs: "The police will only intervene when the glass doors to the government offices have been shattered." That was almost enough to kick them in. "The police will still not intervene if the glass doors are shattered." That gave rise to a peaceful alternative: the majority decided to give up occupying the place.[53]

In the Pythons' version of this world, spoken insults like "Big nose" from an old man, as well as annoying slaps on the helmet from a small woman don't merit corporal reactions, but that avenue is available. Toward the end of the film, as the Centurion is racing to save Brian from crucifixion, he pushes a vendor, who then snaps "Bloody Roman!" "Watch it!" the Centurion snaps back, "We've got a few crosses left." This is a bit of an empty threat, however, given the Romans' actual ability to effectively police not only Rome and Italy, but the vast expanses of the empire. In regard to ferreting out Christians, for example, who refused to sacrifice to Roman gods, Toner reminds us:

> that Rome was a relatively unsophisticated preindustrial society. It had no police force. Enforcing imperial decrees demanding universal sacrifice was an impossible task. It was probably quite easy to avoid persecution by leaving your home town and staying with friends or Christians elsewhere. Or you could go into hiding. Or get a pagan friend to sacrifice on your behalf . . . or buy a fake certificate.[54]

In all likelihood Brian could have managed to evade capture, especially if he left the city for the safety of the desert, but that wouldn't have served the narrative's purpose.

REG: ". . . he's sorry he led the Fifth Legion straight to our official headquarters"—Reg gets to be sarcastic here, and will have to do with Brian's apology, but in the real world of terror, organization turncoats—or "nightingales," as they were known in Germany—were treated quite harshly for betrayals of the cause. The United Red Army's disturbing treatment of its unfaithful has been mentioned earlier, but the Germans proved they could be as merciless as their Japanese counterparts. In Brandenburg in June 1973, twenty-two-year-old Ulrich Schmücker was found dying, a single gunshot wound in his forehead. Schmücker had been a member of the RAF-influenced 2 June Movement, and he had been trying to become known as a dependable maker of bombs.[55] The 2 June Movement had also proven its interconnectivity with other terror groups and causes, planting a bomb at the British Yacht Club in Berlin in 1972 in direct response to deaths in Londonderry.[56] An elaborate plan to blow up

the Turkish Embassy in Bonn was hatched, and Schmücker was in charge of gathering the needed explosives. Police were able to easily track the group in relation to the purchase of the explosive gear: "A routine check in Bad Neuenahr, Schmücker's home town, trapped the entire gang sleeping in a parked Fiat—packed with bombs, detonators, walkie-talkies, false number plates, and house-breaking tools" (much more than a spoon, yes).[57] The willing nightingale then sang to interrogating authorities, laying out in great detail the identities, targets, and locations of his siblings. Police were able to make raids and many arrests, and prosecutors rewarded Schmücker with a sentence of time served. It is assumed that the several members of 2 June who had not been arrested in the police dragnet caught up with and executed Schmücker for his betrayal. A letter claiming responsibility for Schmücker's death was signed by Black June Commando, whose *Volkstribunal* had found Schmücker a "traitor and counter-revolutionary."[58] Brian is found to be simply a "klutz."

REG: ". . . the Fifth Legion . . ."—One of Rome's Fifth ("*V*") legions would be participating in the suppression of the Great Jewish Revolt, the *V Macedonia* sent by Nero to Vespasian. This was more than thirty years *after* the time period depicted in *Life of Brian*. There was another Roman fifth legion, but they were stationed along the Rhine during this period. Since Jerusalem was a smaller and, at least between the years 6 and 33, quieter than other parts of the empire, the Romans kept the garrisons understaffed, with larger cohorts further away in Caesarea and Syria.

REG: ". . . that's all right. Sit down. Have a scone . . . You KLUTZ!! You stupid, bird-brained flat-headed . . ."—Reg clearly calls Brian a "cunt" here as part of his cashiering, but the word is dubbed over later for "klutz." The Pythons performed this same kind of self-censorship as they prepared *Holy Grail* for distribution. To secure a milder, more audience-friendly rating, they dubbed over some of the harsher language. It's likely that as they shot *Life of Brian* they also shot multiple versions of these scenes to be sifted through later.

"scone"—Flat breads, griddle cakes, and fried bread (scones, essentially), were a regular part of Jewish diets during this period.[59] In Britain, scones eaten as part of a cream tea has been common for many years.

***(draft)* "cunt"**—A very old (early thirteenth-century, at least) word used in Britain, and was a carryover from an Old English version. The fact that a number of streets in a number of English towns were named with versions of "Gropecunt"—indicating the thoroughfares may have been known for the business of prostitution—meant that "cunt" was part of the English spoken

lexicon through the later Middle Ages. The use of the term as a way to insult a man is much newer, appearing sometime in the mid-nineteenth century, according to the *OED*.

As for the time period depicted by the film, a surviving mosaic in the Hadrianic Terme della Trincria baths announces very matter-of-factly "STATIO CVNNVLINGIORVM," meaning the local prostitutes might have offered *cunnilingus* services for clients seeking such attentions; that, or this is an insult to men using the bathhouse.[60] Koloski-Ostrow translates the phrase into common vernacular: "The station of those who lick cunts."[61] In other words, the Latin version of this term would have been part of the lexicon in first-century Jerusalem, and likely across the Roman Empire.

"bird-brained"—A twentieth-century phrase, according to the *OED*, while "flat-headed" is a nineteenth-century phrase found in both America and Britain.

CENTURION: "Have you ever seen anyone crucified?"—Of course he has, especially given his age. We've already seen crosses with desiccated victims attached, and we will again. Crucifixions were purposely public spectacles designed to discourage others from choosing acts of *laesa maiestas*, or acts that tend to "injure majesty," meaning the king or ruler, which would have warranted the death penalty.

MATTHIAS: "Crucifixion's a doddle!"—There was one Englishman who might have agreed with Matthias's assessment, as he lived through such an event. In July 1968 a Hampstead Heath park caretaker heard an unusual pounding and went to investigate. He found an odd tableau: Several men attempting to nail another man to a cross. They had already nailed his hands to the crossbar and were on to his feet when they were interrupted. The "attackers" were all arrested and the man, Joseph Richard de Havilland, was "saved" from the cross. It turns out, however, that de Havilland had arranged the crucifixion himself, after hearing voices and seeing visions for several years telling him to perform the crucifixion, and after he had talked friends into helping. When asked why he did it, he answered rather directly: "I had been told to by things not of this world. I am very religious."[62] He had also been told by the voice to confront the Archbishop of Canterbury just before the crucifixion, which he apparently did. The nonchalant way de Havilland describes the event (to a judge) would have likely disturbed the Centurion, as well:

> "I stretched out my left hand and I told Mr. Leach I was ready," he said. "He looked at me and I looked at him and he placed the nail in the centre of my palm and drove it through. He did the same thing with my right hand. Conklin and Pollydore were just watching."[63]

A bit later, in a May 1976 *Private Eye* story, it was reported that a mystic, Edward Shingler, wanted to have himself crucified "to prove the power of God to a world where people have lost faith." Mr. Shingler was planning to charge £3 for the privilege of watching the nails driven through his palms, but only 50p to view him on the cross near the Dunkirk Social Club.[64] Mr. Shingler did not explain how the "power of God" was to be made manifest via his public crucifixion. Auberon Waugh also had a hand in trivializing this most Christian of symbols. In July 1976 he reports that while attending a fundraiser (to help *Private Eye* pay its legal bills), he was so bored, "deafened and sweating like a horse" that all he could do was sit there and "try to think of Jesus at his crucifixion. . . . It is all in a good cause," he concluded.[65]

But what this riposte also represents is the continuing and increasing loss of *deference* seen as Britain emerged from the war and into the more permissive, modern world. Deference to authority figures in Britain had been at least assumed by society, even if that assumption was more myth than reality,[66] and the Pythons made a career of flicking authority's nose at every turn. Bogdanor calls it the "collapse of deference," and notes that the trade union rank and file membership, for example, seemed to change by the 1970s.[67] Essentially walking in lockstep for the first half of the twentieth century, unions had negotiated reasonable pay packages and benefits while often putting the needs of the country (during the war, for example) before their members' individual needs, securing for the trade unions a great deal of rapprochement with(in) the Labour Party.

When the uniting crises ended, however, so did much of the camaraderie among British workers. The transition from coal power to oil, for example, signaled the end of the miners' ability to set government policy—the Heath government had been brought down by angry, organized miners—and other unionized workers saw the potential for their own demise as cheaper imported goods flowed in from Asia while improving industrial technologies were kept at bay by insular, restrictive practices. The threat of progress and rigid incomes policies put the fear into all wage earners. By the time of the Callaghan administration in 1976, most of the older union leadership had retired—the ones who commanded respect from the government and deference from their members—and union workers (led by proactive shop stewards[68]) were ready to strike and strike and strike just to make sure their pay packets kept pace with inflation, no matter the effect on the rest of their neighbors, or even neighbor unions. Couple this with the decline in deference in schools, in the media, and

even at home, and it's no surprise to hear a Python commoner like Matthias shrugging off something as "nasty" as crucifixion. The British state power to threaten or punish antisocial behavior in the 1960s and 1970s had diminished as caning and slippering in schools disappeared, capital punishment was done away with, and the "permissive society" reduced the number of punishable offenses.

The SOLDIERS come rushing out—This shot is sped up, like a farce comedy moment, and is one of the places in the film most like the *Carry On* series, the kind of film Palin, at least, had earlier hoped *Holy Grail* wouldn't become.[69] The faster-than-life movement is a filmic conceit that draws attention to itself, to the film stock even, distracting from the unambiguous reality most classical films try to project. These kinds of effects—fast and slow motion, jump cuts, unnatural juxtapositions, etc.—are part and parcel of both avant-garde and (especially physical) comedy films, both of which came of age in the 1920s, sharing many cinematic tropes. Both flew in the face of traditional narrative films, one for shock or *ars gratia artis*, and the other for laughs. *Flying Circus* employed many of these, often the more outrageous and "cartoony" the better, and *Holy Grail* offers a handful, as well (over-the-top violence, killer rabbits, cartoon monsters).[70] The Pythons have moved closer to classical Hollywood film as they've moved from *Flying Circus* to *Holy Grail*, adhering to their own version of the pastiche (though not mosaic) narrative structures found in both Shakespeare and Modernism:[71]

> The Pythons then, are purposely moving beyond the seemingly *wirrwarr* but still self-aware structures of the [*Flying Circus*] episodes (which typified the first draft of *Holy Grail*) and closer to a visually and thematically consistent narrative set in the medieval world, but peppered by persistent (and increasingly multipotent) irruptions of modernity. The ultimate intrusion will be modern, uniformed policemen bringing the two strands of parallel narrative timelines together, and the film to an abrupt end.[72]

There are fewer such narrative fractures and intrusions in *Life of Brian*, and as a result it is the most complete narrative film the Pythons produced.[73]

MATTHIAS: "My sight is weak, my eyes are poor and my nose is knackered"—Matthias is repeating himself already (talking about his poor "sight" and "eyes"), though the Centurion doesn't seem to notice. To have one's nose "knackered" is interesting, given that it often means to be very tired (even "shagged out"), but can also mean "severely damaged." As it turns out, the nose being tweaked is the Centurion's, and he will seem to appreciate that.

SERGEANT: "We found this spoon, sir"—If nothing else, the spoon might be important only because it was used by Francis earlier as his pointer, thus a tool in the continuing struggle against Roman oppression? This sounds silly, and

it is, but the spoon (likely accidentally) figures into Pilate's relationship with the Jews in Jerusalem in a significant way. As mentioned, Pilate had earlier brought troops with him into the Holy City whose standards had "bosses adorned with portrait-busts of the Emperor," meaning they were "objects of cult in the Roman army," and therefore a sacrilege to the Jews.[74] The threat of mob hysteria and bloodshed forced Pilate to remove the standards. Later, Pilate commissioned the creation of almost featureless votive shields to honor Tiberius and brought those into Jerusalem; the Jews demanded those be removed, as well. Thwarted twice by the peace with the Jews his superiors demanded, Pilate may have purposely then struck coins that "show a similar disregard for Jewish feelings," according to Smallwood.[75] The coins didn't feature the profile of an emperor or any god, as was usual for coins struck in predominately Jewish regions, but Pilate seemed to be trying to slip one past his subjects:

> The coins of all the other procurators bear designs of objects such as an ear of corn, a vine-branch, a flower, or a palm-tree, which were inoffensive to the Jews. They appear on coins struck by the Jews both before the Roman annexation and during their revolt of 66–70. Some of Pilate's coins, however, show implements of pagan worship, the augur's staff *and the ladle with which the wine was poured in sacrifices*. These designs on coins handled every day cannot have failed to annoy the Jews.[76]

So the innocuous (ladle-like) spoon, in the crucible of Roman-Jewish relations, is much more important than even the bemused Centurion seems to think.

The Pythons may just like the sound and non-threatening appearance of the spoon, as well, since it crops up in their oeuvre a number of times. In *Holy Grail*, one of the villagers hustling the accused witch to her judgment is a young boy who wears a large wooden spoon as part of his hat.[77] One of the names floated for the original series in spring 1969 was *A Horse, a Spoon and a Basin*,[78] and spoon is one of the words an Italian student in an Italian class, has already mastered ("Il cucchiaio").[79] In Ep. 19 of *Flying Circus*, the "School Prize-Giving" sketch, a spoon is awarded as an academic plaudit, even though

> at Cambridge it was the student who performed worst in math who was awarded a wooden spoon, and later any academic or sport contestant/team could be eligible for such an honor. The sometimes very large spoons were last officially awarded in the early twentieth century, but live on unofficially at the Oxbridge schools and in public life (and are especially favored by UK consumer affairs gadflies).[80]

In sporting events, for example, no one wanted to be left "holding the wooden spoon," or be forced to "take the wooden spoon," because it often meant being shut out (victories, runs, tries, etc.), or winding up in last place like, for example, Ireland's rugby team in the mid-1950s.[81] For British viewers, then, this image—the Centurion holding the results of careful military search, a wooden spoon—is

a recognizable jibe at headmasters, sergeant majors, and sporting sad sacks across the Commonwealth.

. . . there is yet another knock at the door—This is the fulfillment of the tried and true "rule of threes" in comedy, wherein the third iteration is where the gag is set to pay off. Attached to this setup and payoff is the balcony on which Brian has been hiding—at his third go, the balcony collapses, and he neatly replaces the Boring Prophet below.

MATTHIAS: "You haven't given us time to hide!"—Here the entire façade that's been constructed—soldiers earnestly searching for (and not finding) terrorists who hide in plain sight—is admitted to be false. In a more "real" world this would lead to recriminations against Matthias and the PFJ, but here it's simply a tossed-off line as we cinematically escape the room with Brian. The following scene, where Brian is preaching but the soldiers looking for him for some reason don't recognize him (he hasn't even put a beard on), is equally silly. (Earlier in the film the Roman guards beneath Pilate's rooms have somehow walked right past the rather noticeable tussle between the CFG and PFJ, so the die has been cast.) These moments abound in the Pythons' work—coconuts can be used instead of horses and a castle on the hill is "only a model." The Goons pulled back the curtain on the nuts and bolts of dramatic radio production—acknowledging the artifice—calling attention to sound effects and actors switching voices to create the next character. In the episode "World War One," the scheming Grytpype-Thynne, thinking on the fly for the best means of fleecing the credulous Neddie, nakedly reveals his plan: "Do you know, I have certain information that I've just thought of."[82] Neddie somehow hears the "information" part but misses that it's fake, which Grytpype-Thynne baldly admits. In their "Robin Hood and His Merry Men" episode, the Goons comment on the fact that they've been using sound effects rather than actual fighting throughout.[83]

This is also the last we'll clearly see of old Matthias. In the later scene where Judith bursts into Mandy's home to tell the PFJ of Brian's imminent crucifixion, Matthias is puttering around in the background. It could be that Rome no longer sees Matthias as a threat, given his advanced age and knackered-ness. Convicts in the empire (who had entered gladiatorial ranks) could, if they survived their term, retire after active games service. In a series of letters from Emperor Trajan to Pliny, the emperor mentioned that those

> who have been convicted within these ten years, and whose sentence has not been reversed by proper authority, must be sent back again to their respective punishments. But where more than ten years have

> elapsed since their conviction, and they are grown old and infirm, let them be distributed in such employments as approach penal servitude: that is, either to attend upon the public baths, cleanse the common sewers, or repair the streets and highways, the usual offices to which such persons are assigned.[84]

There is no hint as to what will happen to Matthias as the PFJ's beard; perhaps his was an ideological separation?

Notes

1. King and Stager, *LBI*, 309.
2. Larsen, *BAFHG*, 450–51.
3. See Laqueur's *Terrorism*; Farrell's *BRJ*; also Dobson and Payne's *The Carlos Complex*.
4. See Bogdanor on this transition to postwar consensus in "The Character of the Postwar Period."
5. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 177.
6. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 19–20.
7. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 20.
8. "The Unfinished Revolution in China," *Times*, 2 July 1971: 16.
9. "Republicans Battle with Police at Stagg Memorial Service," *Times*, 23 February 1976: 1.
10. "Did Jesus See Himself as the Messiah?" *Times*, 1 April 1972: 14.
11. *Baader-Meinhof: In Love with Terror*, 2002.
12. Caryl, *Strange Rebels*, 12.
13. See Bernstein, *Myth of Decline*, 91–93; Carlton's *Britain and the Suez Crisis*; and Brendon, *DFBE*.
14. Bernstein, *Myth of Decline*, 92–93. The Goons mentioned both the canal and the crisis a number of times during the later years of *The Goon Show*.
15. Jenkins, *Mrs. Thatcher's Revolution*, 72; italics added.
16. Burleigh, *BRT*, 134. The African National Congress endured similarly failed but "symbolic" attacks in the early days of the fight against apartheid South Africa (144).
17. See Bell, *Terror Out of Zion* (1977).
18. Bell, *The Secret Army*, 6.
19. Bell, *The Secret Army*, 149; also "The IRA Bomb Campaign That Fizzled Out in Despair," *Times*, 14 September 1973: 16.
20. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 144.
21. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 149.
22. Dobson and Payne, *Carlos Complex*, 130.
23. "Brief Fame of a Terrorist," *Times*, 14 August 1975: 14.
24. This phraseology should sound familiar. When Dennis is arguing with Arthur about the benefits of syndicalism versus a monarchy, he talks a similar line: "Listen—strange women lying in ponds distributing swords is no basis for a system of government. Supreme executive power derives from a mandate from the masses, not from some farcical aquatic ceremony" (*BAFHG*, 143–44). Six years later, a noted political columnist echoes this "conviction politics" peasant.
25. Jenkins, *Anatomy of Decline*, 122.
26. Part of the Pythons' first film, *And Now for Something Completely Different*.
27. John 1:46.
28. There is typecasting in the film: The Ex-leper is certain that all donkey owners "are the same," and the Gregorys won't want to be crucified in anything but a Jewish section.
29. "Life without Michael X," *Sunday Times*, 26 June 1977: 32.
30. Bernstein, *Myth of Decline*, 279.
31. Bogdanor, "Collapse of the Postwar Settlement," a.t. Much of this has been overstated over the years, certainly, as Bernstein discusses in *Myth of Decline*.
32. Bogdanor, "Collapse of the Postwar Settlement," a.t.
33. Bernstein, *Myth of Decline*, 279.
34. Bogdanor, "Collapse of the Postwar Settlement," a.t.
35. Bernstein, *Myth of Decline*, 279.
36. Massive hunger marches of October 1936. Mentioned in Eps. 15 and 32 of *Flying Circus*, and discussed in *MPFC: UC*, 1.246 and 2.83.

37. In the interwar period (and coincident to the effects of the Great Depression), upwards of 20 percent of employable British workers were often out of jobs. These are the times and figures that would haunt both Labour and Conservative governments for many years to come, and the real reason that the election plank of "full employment" was clutched so tightly by both parties, until Thatcherism. See Bernstein, Marr, Turner, or Sandbrook for more.
38. Bogdanor, "Collapse of the Postwar Settlement," a.t.
39. Martin Bright, "Look Back in Anger," *Observer*, 2 February 2002.
40. "The Angry Brigade 1," *Eyewitness 1970–1979*, a.t.
41. *BRT*, 243.
42. Smallwood, *JURR*, 149.
43. Davies, "Police Work in Roman Times," 700; italics added.
44. Davies, "Police Work in Roman Times," 702.
45. See *DFBE*, chapter 5.
46. Similar struggles were underway in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, as well.
47. *MPFC: UC* 2.62.
48. Horsely, "The Sicarii," 451.
49. Quoted in Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 258–59.
50. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 259–60; also "Terror Trial Accused Ordered Out," *Times*, 11 July 1975: 6.
51. "Ulrike Meinhof and the Baader-Meinhof Gang," *Encounter* (July 1975): 11.
52. She and her accomplices firebombed a department store, Schneider's, wondering if the sellers and consumers of capitalist goods would appreciate a small taste of the fires that were raining down on the flesh of Vietnamese civilians. All were quickly arrested.
53. Hilke Schlaeger, "Vernunft gegen Gewalt"; translation provided by Prof. Robert McFarland.
54. Toner, *The Day Commodus Killed a Rhino*, 111.
55. Kemna, "Death of a Nightingale."
56. Kemna, "Death of a Nightingale," 61.
57. Kemna, "Death of a Nightingale," 61.
58. Kemna, "Death of a Nightingale," 62.
59. *LBI*, 18, 65–67.
60. See http://www.ostia-antica.org/regio3/16/16-7.htm for several versions of what this advertisement might have meant; also, Koloski-Ostrow, *ASRI*, 19.
61. *ASRI*, 19.
62. "Crucified Man Tells Visions," *Times*, 15 January 1969: 7. Terry Gilliam lived on Hampstead Heath, as did Julian Doyle. Many of the postproduction pickups and special effects backgrounds for *Holy Grail* were shot on the Heath.
63. *Times*, 15 January 1969: 7.
64. 14 May 1976: 8.
65. Waugh, *FCY*, 13 July 1976.
66. See Erickson's "Youth and Political Deference in England," where she discusses the differences between social and political deference.
67. Bogdanor, "Collapse of the Postwar Settlement," a.t.
68. Again, Fred Kite in *I'm All Right Jack*.
69. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 146. These films and their influence on the Pythons are discussed in *BAFHG*. Perhaps it was inevitable that some critics couldn't see the hoped-for distinction, seeing *Life of Brian* as, at least partly, just another *Carry On* product. See, for example, Ackroyd's review in *Spectator*, 17 December 1979: 28.
70. See index entries for "cartoony" and "reflexivity" in both *MPFC: UC* and *BAFHG* for more.
71. See Larsen, *MPSERD*, 73–74 for more.
72. *BAFHG*, 46.

73. With the noted exceptions of interruptive and purposely intrusive *Star Wars* moments, yes. One of the Pythons' complaints about their next and final film, *Meaning of Life*, is that they felt as if they'd regressed, simply linking sketches together with a loose narrative arc.
74. Smallwood, "Jews and Romans in the Early Empire," 316.
75. Smallwood, "Jews and Romans in the Early Empire," 316. See also *JURR*, 167–68.
76. Smallwood, "Jews and Romans in the Early Empire," 316.
77. *BAFHG*, 187–225 discusses the "She's a Witch!" scene.
78. *MPFC: UC*, 1.45.
79. *ATW*, 1.1.2; *MPFC: UC*, 1.11.
80. *MPFC: UC*, 1.306.
81. "Significance of To-Morrow's Rugby Match in Dublin," *Times*, 24 February 1956: 4.
82. "World War One" was first broadcast 24 February 1958.
83. 2 December 1956.
84. Grant, *Gladiators*, 30.

SCENE SEVENTEEN

BRIAN GIVES A SERMON . . . ***KNOCKING THE BORING PROPHET CLEANLY OFF HIS PERCH***—ANOTHER CARTOONY MOMENT OF PHYSICAL GAGGERY, WHEREIN THE AUDIENCE'S RESPONSE SHOULD HAVE BEEN SHOCK AND HORROR, BUT IN THE PYTHON WORLD THEY ARE MERELY ENTERTAINED BY THE "TRICK." THESE BITS OF DARK HUMOR CAN BE FOUND IN NEW WAVE FILMS OF THIS SAME PERIOD, MANY OF WHICH GREATLY INFLUENCED *HOLY GRAIL*, INCLUDING HERZOG'S *AGUIRRE: THE WRATH OF GOD*, WHICH FEATURES THE MURDEROUS, TRAITOROUS AGUIRRE (KLAUS KINSKI) WHO, AFTER SEIZING CONTROL OF THE EXPEDITION BY FORCE, CASUALLY NOTES THAT ONE OF HIS LESS MOTIVATED MINIONS IS A HEAD TOO TALL. HIS SECOND-IN-COMMAND TAKES THE HINT, DRAWING

HIS SWORD. THE DOOMED, CLUELESS MAN IS COUNTING THROUGH THEIR MEAGER FOOD STORES ALOUD —“ACHT, NEUN”—AS THE FATAL STROKE IS DELIVERED—HIS HEAD FLIES OFF AND LANDS ON THE GROUND, AND SAYS: “ZEHN.”[1]

The assembled crowd is simply happy that they are being entertained, and that another diverting speaker has taken the Boring Prophet’s place. Remember that Brian’s earlier space ride and spectacular crash only elicited a “jammy bastard” from a passerby. (In fact, the only physical double-take in the movie comes from the alarmed aliens in the spacecraft, wondering where this odd creature, Brian, has come from.) ***There is a smattering of applause from the crowd. They clearly like tricks***—(PSC) This is one of the film’s direct references back to *Flying Circus*. There, as early as the second episode, stock footage of the Women’s Institute applauding some sketch punchline is inserted as the payoff for one scene and the transition to the next. In the first case, “A Man with Two Noses” has just blown his second nose, to polite applause.[2] A similar response will later be had from a leering group of “shabby men in filthy macs” as a doctor examines a well-endowed patient, to stripper music.[3]

Off to Brian’s side we get a quick glimpse of an angle we’ve not seen yet. There are two other prophets haranguing the crowd, one dressed in flowing white robes and carrying a crook, and the other a rougher, wilder prophet all in black, and played by Jones.

BRIAN: “Don’t pass judgment on other people, or else you might get judged yourself”—Here we’re back to the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, the part that, we thought, Brian and Mandy couldn’t hear.[4] Apparently he’d heard Jesus preach before, since this is a fairly unbowdlerized version of the teaching.

COLIN (Jones): "Me?"—There were many instances where Christ's disciples (and his detractors, as well) asked for or demanded clarification of his parables, stories crafted to confuse nonbelievers.[5] Sometimes the disciples were left puzzled, given Jesus's move away from the strictures of the Mosaic Law. (Colin seems quite happy with the answer he receives, though.) When Jesus announced that he would be betrayed, the disciples immediately asked "Lord, is it I?" while at another point argued among themselves as to which of them was the greatest disciple.[6] There is very little "discipleship" in the finished film, however. The haggling for endorsements, the additional sermons, the discussion of the future of the movement, etc.—these all remain in the various unfilmed drafts of the script.

DENNIS (Terence Bayler): "That's a nice gourd"—This is "Dennis," who is otherwise unnamed in the film. Most of the characters after this remain unnamed, even those like Simon the Hermit, who have larger speaking parts (ironically). The balance of the film often involves mobs and chasing (like a silent comedy or a Fleischer brothers cartoon), so characters referring to one another by name would be unusual. Like *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*,[7] this film has become a chase film, and will only pause for Brian and Judith's night together. Also as depicted in those earlier films, the sexual encounter (or the significant appearance of a female character in an otherwise man's world) signals the beginning of the end for the male leads.

WOMAN: "Consider the lilies?"—This is adapted from Luke 12, where Jesus is asking his hearers to consider "the ravens" and the "fowls," as well as the "lilies" and the "grass."[8] In the "final" printed script, this question is given to a character named Geoffrey (to have been played by Gilliam). Here, it's delivered by an unnamed character (later called "Elsie"[9]) played by Gwen Taylor. Gilliam will appear in a moment, as a man named "Frank." The other characters named in this scene—named in the bound version of the script—include "Dennis," who wants to haggle for the gourd, Geoffrey, "Eddie," asking about the birds, "Arthur," and "Frank." None of their names are uttered, so these are just crowds.

ARTHUR (Cleese): "He say the birds are scrounging"—The listeners are responding with all the skepticism that isn't often seen in the scriptures, especially coming from the rank and file follower. Priests and scribes do nitpick Jesus's words, looking for ways to turn them into incriminatory weapons, but there are generally no persons asking about "cheesemakers" or the names of servants from a parable—that's the skeptical modern world talking. In Cook and

Moore's Jesus sketch, words like "abiding" get worked over in ways that don't happen in more sacred settings. The Shepherd is "abiding" in fields that he can't "abide" because they're not very "abideable," and on.

BRIAN: "No, look, the point is they're doing do all right, aren't they?"—Brian has identified the parable problem—so many listeners misunderstood or just missed the significance of the message. When he keeps having to say "it doesn't matter" he's pointing to the portions of the stories that tend to distract modern men like the Pythons, where details can mean everything.[10] He actually explains it rather well, reminding his listeners that they are more important than the birds or flowers, and that the Lord will look after them. But in the 1970s world of second-guessing and reading between the lines, the dismissal of deference means that no statement will go unchallenged. The sentries in *Holy Grail* can't get past Arthur's mention of coconuts, then swallows; quests and Lords and masters get lost in the skeptical shuffle. This is the kind of language Bogdanor was referring to when he talked about the place Britain found itself in the 1970s. When Heath tried to overcome the miners in the earlier 1970s, he was almost speaking a lost tongue: He called an election under the slogan "Who Governs?" and appealed to the country in language which would have had a lot of effect in the 1940s but which, by the 1970s, was greeted with a belly laugh. He said: "Think nationally. Think of the nation as a whole. Think of these [statutory incomes] proposals as members of a society that can only beat rising prices if it acts together as one nation." Now, in the time of Attlee and the Churchill peacetime Government, I think people would have responded to that language. There was a great deal of deference, a sense of social obligation, resulting from the War. By the 1970s, that sense of social obligation had worn out and different groups, including the miners, started asking, if they could use the market to get more, why shouldn't they?[11]

This is also the mythological Arthur waxing Maloric before the credulous Dennis—mystic swords and strange women are simply "no basis for a system of government" in the fallen world of the now. Those listening to Brian are closer to the 1970s than 33, as is their cynicism. Interestingly, once Brian trails off, leaving an unsaid potential blessing, the mob become followers.

ARTHUR: "He's having a go at the flowers now"—In the Python world, there is no possibility that a feel-good saying like this could go unchallenged. Arthur discovered this uncooperative, context-destroying behavior in the medieval-meets-mythology-meets-the-modern-world confusion of *Holy Grail*,

where peasants, sentries, knights, and enchanters—all "Britons," he assumed—meet Arthur at their level, not his.

Brian is clearly trying to deliver a sermon or parable as he heard Christ do on the mount, but his memorialized version is spotty, at best. Add to this that his hearers aren't hearing at all; Jesus had to explain and re-explain to his disciples, as well: "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand."[12] It's clear Brian couldn't explain this explanation, either.

ARTHUR: "What were they called?"—Likely the beginning of the parable of the talents, but he can't remember the details. In Matthew 24 and 25 Jesus is teaching his disciples at the Mount of Olives, but no one else is mentioned (as being in attendance), meaning Brian must have heard the parables second hand, at best. The parables of the fig tree, the ten virgins, the talents, and the sheep and the goats follow in close succession in these verses.

This heckling might simply be related to the questions that his disciples had of his other teachings; there's no indication, especially in chapters like Matthew 25, of any response from his listeners. Start to finish, Jesus simply delivers three parables without pause or comment between. Arthur here is more like a less-polite Xerxes, raising a hand to ask for clarification or specifics, and not unlike those attending a speech at a party conference, where such shouted questions from the assembled delegates weren't welcome. This last possibility is made more realistic when a deleted scene is considered. In an earlier draft, Reg and the PFJ have become more involved in Brian's messiahship, organizing a for-pay sermon on the mount marshalled by fences and a gate, and set up much more like a concert or conference than a Jesus sermon. As the sermon ends Brian is hustled off to a waiting donkey and another paying engagement.

BRIAN: "Oh, they were called 'Simon' and 'Adrian.' Now . . ."—A Simon will appear later as the hermit in the wilderness, and an Adrian has already appeared in *Flying Circus*, Ep. 19, in the speeding credits appended to the "Timmy Williams Interview."[13]

SAM (Cleese): "He's making it up as he goes along"—Brian might not be "making it up," either. In 1909 the scholar Walter Bauer gathered "vast apocryphal material about Jesus's life, miracles, relatives" and so on, with the page count exceeding five hundred and, according to Koester, another five hundred pages could have been compiled by the time he wrote his own article, "One Jesus and Four Gospels," in 1968.[14] That apocrypha could have included a

Simon and an Adrian, and likely did include mangled versions of the Beatitudes and parables, especially as they were adapted over time for more contemporary needs.

BRIAN: "Three. Well stewards really . . ."—The mystical number three, again, which so bedeviled Arthur in *Holy Grail*.[15] Brian is ad-libbing here, put on the spot by his precarious position as a wanted, fleeing man stuck on the preachers' rostrum. He's now "saying things in a very roundabout way," a character he's already played on Flying Circus.[16] In Luke 16:1–9 there is the parable of the "unjust steward," so the confusion between steward and servant is understandable.[17] "Steward" is only used in the KJV translation seventeen times, while "servant" appears almost nine-hundred times.

BRIAN: "Blessed are they . . . who convert their neighbour's ox . . . for they shall inhibit their girth . . ."—Brian is going from memory here, trying to mimic Christ's Beatitudes. The real world danger of this mimicry was mentioned earlier, when the preacher Theudas promised miracles *like* those Jesus and his followers claimed, including a parting of the river Jordan. The Judean procurator Fadus didn't wait for the miraculous events, and had the man arrested and summarily executed.[18]

This also may be a sideways nod to the teaching (or rantings) of the pseudonymic *Might Is Right* author "Ragnar Redbeard," whose Social Darwinist worldview offers a mangled, hateful (not just confused) version of the Beatitudes. His version blesses the strong, the "battle-blooded," the "iron-handed," and "the destroyers of false hope," and curses the "God-adorers," the "vanquished," and the "feeble-brained." This splenetic reads like a Python sketch, actually. "Ragnar Redbeard" was a pseudonym for, perhaps, Arthur Desmond but, for obvious reasons, the author kept his actual identity a secret, even though the work may have been an elaborate satire.[19] A new edition of this inflammatory book had appeared in 1972.

BRIAN: ". . . and to them only shall be given . . ."—Brandon points out that some earliest Christ-focused scholarship did actually see Jesus and his teachings as potentially combustive, as political rather than religious speech: It is significant that in what may be regarded as the first critical study of the life of Jesus the political aspect of his Messiahship was boldly asserted. In his *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger*, Hermann Samuel Reimarus interpreted Jesus's preaching of the coming of the Kingdom of God as incitement to revolt against the government of Rome.[20]

This and following works along a similar vein have been "repudiated by orthodox Christian scholars," of course, but it's clear that a number of thinkers in the field of Jesus studies saw a political aspect to his ministry, one that would make him a target of the Romans as well as the Sanhedrin.[21] The Pythons seem to have chosen to bypass any Jewish judgment of their central figure, Brian, posing him as a threat to Roman rule alone.

BRIAN climbs down from the ledge to leave—Josephus records that the high priest Jesus addressed "Idumaeans from the city wall" during the Zealots' siege of Jerusalem.[22]

BLIND MAN: "What was't he said?"—This garbled line was to have been spoken by a "Youth" who'd just arrived (perhaps even the "Intensely Dull Youth" of the "Dramatic Personae," set as Eric Idle). It was given instead to McKeown, playing a blind man. Gilliam's character Frank will grab the blind man's staff and push him out of the way in a moment. The blind man will later fall into Simon the Hermit's hole, just as he assures everyone he's been healed.

GIRL: "Is it the secret of Eternal Life?"—According to Hegesippus's account, these are the kinds of questions asked of James by "Sadducean leaders" eager to catch him out as a revolutionary, like Jesus, and then condemn him.[23] He would answer boldly, affirming Christ's divinity, and be stoned to death. The oddness of some of the questions and conclusions that follow—including the worship of a shoe as opposed to a sandal as opposed to a gourd—mirrors one of the Sadducean questions that was posed to James, according to Hegesippus: "Tell us, what is the gate of Jesus?" "This expression has never been satisfactorily explained," according to Brandon, and he concludes "that it is likely a corruption of some Aramaic expression."[24] (Meaning, Jesus as the gate to heaven, essentially.) Later Brian's mother Mandy will be asked, quite seriously, if she is "a virgin," meaning that the crowd either accepts the Immaculate Conception cult or has *no* conception of how biological impregnation actually occurs (or both?). These head-scratching bits of logic appeared earlier in *Holy Grail*, when, from the back of the crowd, the wise King Arthur calls out "A duck," helping Bedevere complete his chain of (il)logic, successfully identifying a witch.[25]

GIRL: "Tell us, Master"—He has gone from "Brian" to "Master" in one go. In the elided, paid-admittance Sermon on the Mount scene, the "regional organiser" Reg and the rest of the PFJ call him "Lord," and fawn over even his garbled Beatitudes as they count gate receipts.

GIRL: "Is that . . . <u>his</u> gourd?"—Objects associated with Christ or his disciples can evoke warm feelings from devotees. From the alleged gathering of his blood as he hung on the cross (into the "Holy Grail") to his death shroud (of Turin), and including the myriad parts of the true cross and bits of the nails, religious relics of all kinds were said to be imbued with healing or saving power, and became significant parts of pilgrimages and devotion.[26] In *Holy Grail*, the French sentries tease Arthur and his devoted knights, saying they already have a grail, and don't need to search for another.[27] The woman here is correct, though, she does have a gourd that Brian actually held, and they will find and carry "his" sandal, as well.

In the years leading up to the film, the Shroud of Turin was in the news often, including a round of age-dating testing making front-page news in 1977. The fact that the fabric was eventually found to be likely of thirteenth-to-fourteenth-century origination hasn't dimmed the hopes of believers. In fall 1978 (when the Pythons were polishing the *Brian* script, casting, and doing costume fittings[28]) the shroud went on display to the public for the first time in many years in the Turin Cathedral.[29]

DENNIS: "It's under offer. . . . Ten then"—Dennis immediately raises the price (or the value) of the gourd when it's been attached to the new "master." He first offered to buy it from Brian for one shekel, than two, and now he's bumped it to ten. Once Brian becomes a "savior," a value can be attached to what he does, says, and even touches. This leads to his disciples—in the earlier drafts of the script—setting up promotional agreements for products and concert events where an admission can be charged. He is both messiah and rock star, at least in those drafts. Much of that cynicism disappeared by the finished cut of the film.

GIRL: "It is <u>His</u> gourd! We will carry it for you, Master . . ."—(PSC) In a moment made for the readers of the script only, the possessive pronoun "his" has been capitalized to indicate a reference to deity. This had been common in print for a long while, since by the nineteenth century editors were recommending the "old practice" of an initial capital letter when referring to deity for "Him" or "His." This was certainly reverential, but also practical—the same pronoun ("his") could show up in the same scriptural sentence and be referring to both man and God, leading to confusion.

YOUTH (Idle): "He's gone! He's been taken up!"—Christ would be "taken up" after forty days of ministration following the resurrection. This is recorded in Acts 1, which postdates this moment. Perhaps this crowd of ready-made

believers (one admits to following a few saviors) had read or heard Psalms 68:18, and acknowledged it as a prophecy for their day.

ARTHUR: "No there he is, over there"—This moment of deflation is a Python trope, but also found in the classical Roman works. Herodotus (c. 484–425 BC) writes of Darius I's accession to the Persian throne, as discussed by Richard: The seven Persian aristocrats decided to ride their favorite horses to a certain spot before dawn the next day. The owner of the first horse to neigh after sunrise would become the new emperor. Darius' lowly groomsman found a way to fix the contest. Before dawn, he rubbed the genitalia of the favorite mare of his master's horse and stuffed his hands in his cloak to preserve the smell. Then, as the sun rose at the designated location, the groomsman pretended to fasten the horse's bit. The horse smelled his hands and neighed. That is how Darius became emperor of Persia, the most powerful man in the world. This story is typical of Herodotus *because it demystifies an important event*, attributing its outcome to a clever human, rather than to the gods. (In reality, it was not quite as easy as that; Darius had to win a brief but bloody civil war to secure his throne.)[30]

Richard concludes that Herodotus, "like a favorite uncle," takes the fun path through history, his "hilarious digressions" endearing the reader to him.[31]

Indicates BRIAN disappearing round a corner. At once the crowd gives chase—Brian is running away from those who would follow him as a spiritual leader (calling him "Master," "Messiah," and "Lord"), but who also see him as a potential political tool (Reg and the PFJ acting as his "handlers").[32] The Romans would find the latter much more troubling, given the number of Jews in Judea compared to the number of Roman troops. Jesus found it necessary to elude large crowds, as well, which is likely the Gospel incident that spawned the scene: The Gospel of John, though not adhering to the Markan chronological framework and being much later in date, appears to know a tradition concerning Jesus that must be primitive and authentic. According to this tradition, during his Galilean ministry, the miracles of Jesus caused so great an impression on the people that there was a concerted movement to proclaim him king: "Jesus therefore perceiving that they were about to come and take him by force, to make him king . . . withdrew again into the mountain alone." The account suggests that Jesus was the unwilling subject of the popular excitement which his display of supernatural power had occasioned, and that he eluded the intent of the crowd. It is, however, significant that this popular enthusiasm was so strong that it took a political form.[33]

The Jewish and Roman authorities took these circumstances as "politically serious" in the Gospel of John, and Jesus was eventually a target for both. In *Life of Brian*, remember, the Jewish authorities are nowhere to be found in relation to either Jesus or Brian, continuing the Pythons' avoidance of delving into the Jewish world of first-century Jerusalem.[34] The Romans *are* concerned, and it's just after Brian's last mob moment—in his mother's home when he's surrounded by the PFJ, the diseased, and kindly promoters like Mr. Papadopolous—that the Romans catch up with him, and he is arrested and sent for execution.

Notes

1. Larsen, *BAFHG*, 174.
2. Larsen, *MPFC: UC*, 1.26.
3. *MPFC: UC*, 1.319; *ATW*, 1.20.265.
4. Recorded in Matthew 7:1–2 and Luke 6:37.
5. Vermes, *The Authentic Gospels of Jesus*, 140. See Mark 10:10, for example.
6. Matthew 26:22 and Luke 9:46, respectively.
7. And obvious comedies like the *Carry On* films and *It's a Mad Mad Mad Mad World* (1963), which is just an extended chase narrative.
8. Luke 12:24–28.
9. In the "Dramatis Personae" for the printed version, Carol Cleveland was to have played Elsie; she does not appear anywhere in the street preaching scene as filmed. This kind of change happened often during the run of *Flying Circus* (*MPFC: UC*, 2.32).
10. In Ep. 30, a simple anagrammatic problem—a sign says "Mary Recruitment Center"—can easily be switched to "Army Recruitment Center," and a line of nuns queuing up for a job are dispersed. Also, in Gilliam's *Brazil*, a typo—"Buttle" for "Tuttle"—ends a man's life, destroys a family, and sets the film on its narrative course. The broad strokes of a parable just won't do in the postmodernist age. Finally, in *Meaning of Life*, a serious discovery about the meaning of life is sidetracked by the mention of hats.
11. Bogdanor, "Collapse of the Postwar Settlement," a.t.
12. Mark 4:11–12.
13. *MPFC: UC*, 1.291.
14. Page 204. That book was *Das Leben Jesu im Zeitalter der neutestamentlichen Apokryphen* (Tübingen, 1909).
15. See the *BAFHG* index entries under "threes" for more.
16. Ep. 26, "The Queen Will Be Watching."
17. Vermes, *The Authentic Gospels of Jesus*, 161–62.
18. There is some disagreement as to Theudas's actual place in the timeline of known events; see Thiessen and Merz, *The Historical Jesus* 71, 143, and 154.
19. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 77–78. Otto would have enjoyed this book.
20. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 22.
21. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 23. Reimarus's work was first published after his death, c. 1774. See also Thiessen and Merz's *The Historical Jesus*, chapter 14, for more.
22. Horsley, "The Zealots," 173.
23. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 123–24.
24. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 124n2.
25. See *BAFHG*, 190–91, for more on this moment.
26. See Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, for example.
27. For a discussion of some of the relics and shrines pertinent to Christianity, see *BAFHG*, 273.
28. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 475–80.
29. "Turin Shroud to Be Shown in Bullet-Proof Case," *Times*, 28 August 1978: 10.
30. Richard, *WWAR*, 167; italics added.
31. *WWAR*, 166.
32. Importantly, Brian is only called "King of the Jews" and "Son of God" once, in the nativity scene, being a mistake immediately admitted and corrected in the world of the film.
33. John 6:15; Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 16.
34. Perhaps due to the potentially sticky consequences from Israeli and/or Jewish backlash in the wake of an already controversial film. The Pythons also spent the run of *Flying Circus* avoiding significant

references to the “Irish situation,” perhaps to avoid an IRA-placed car or letter bomb. Scotland and Wales took the brunt of the Pythons’ spoofing instead.

SCENE EIGHTEEN

SIMON THE HERMIT ***BRIAN APPEARS AT THE GATES OF THE CITY . . . ALONG THE LOWER SLOPES OF THE HILL TOWARD CALVARY*—**CLEARLY MEANT TO INDICATE THEY'RE IN JERUSALEM, THIS IS PRECISELY THE SAME LOCATION (AND ALMOST, EVEN THE SAME CAMERA ANGLE) SEEN IN *JESUS OF NAZARETH*.

ARTHUR: "He has given us a sign!"—Christ would tell the scribes and Pharisees that only a "wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign."[1] These followers didn't ask for a sign, but they'll take one (or two, or three) when it's gifted to them.

EDDIE: "He has given us . . . his shoe!"—In Ruth 4, the lowly shoe is shown as importantly symbolic in an example involving Boaz, marriage, and inheritance, and the "ceremony of the shoe": 7 Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour: and this was a testimony in Israel.

8 Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe.

According to Josephus, the shoe ritual was part of a levirate marriage ritual (which some scholars have since disputed), but articles of clothing were often invested with meaning in relation to holy places (i.e., where shoes were removed, heads covered or uncovered), and here, in this ritualized transaction: "So [Boaz] called the senate to witness, and bid the woman to loose his shoe and spit in his face, according to the law; and when this was done [Boaz] married

Ruth, and they had a son within a year's time."[2] Perhaps now the spittle that Ben was so longing for earlier makes more sense in this public, ritualized setting?

GIRL: "Cast off the shoe!"—"Putting off the shoe" was the phrase for the published refusal made so that a woman whose husband had died (and left her without a son) could remarry.[3] The mob here don't seem to be appreciating the symbolic element of the shoe, except that it represents their "master."

GIRL: "Follow the Gourd! The Holy Gourd of Jerusalem"—Again, this sounds silly and over the top, but sacred vessels were a significant part of life in ancient Israel. "Pure goods" were kept in special "ovoid and cylindrical jars" at Qumran, for instance, some labeled as "fit for the purity of hallowed things," and the jars were often destroyed when the sacred use was complete.[4] This gourd only seems to be holy by association with Brian.

The search for allegedly sacred vessels was part of the reason that hundreds (or even thousands) of Samaritans followed a self-proclaimed prophet into the wilderness of Mount Gerizim.[5] This messiah figure—whom Josephus labeled as a man "who thought lying a thing of little consequence"—promised that these sacred vessels had been buried on the mountain by Moses, and invited followers to make their way to the holy site. For some reason many were armed, Josephus reports, and Pilate, fearing sedition, attacked the energetic "multitude." Many were killed in the battle, and more were executed afterward.[6] So, following the "Holy Vessel of Gerizim" wasn't a particularly wise decision. This was the cruelty that would eventually unseat Pilate, according to Josephus. The film does not offer any consequences or punishment for those who follow Brian, the shoe, a sandal, or the gourd, and only the hermit Simon might later suffer the multitude's wrath as an "unbeliever" and "heretic."[7]

Later, and closer to the Pythons' own time, there was waged a vigorous debate in regard to the authenticity of clay pots. These pots would have been as insignificant and unimpressive as the gourd in this scene had they not purportedly held portions of the Dead Sea scrolls found in a cave at Qumran. Scholars including Yigael Yadin promoted the authenticity of the ancient jars (he had bought them at a dear price, after all), while other scholars, like contemporary gadfly Solomon Zeitlin, pooh-poohed the claims in often withering terms: Muhammad ed-Deeb who supposedly discovered the scrolls in the cave said in his interview that he broke all the jars; none were left intact. How could Dr. Yadin possess two intact jars which he claims had come from the cave and which contained the scrolls? Why did Dr. Yadin never mention that the potteries had fresh breaks in them? Is there not a likelihood that the Bethlehem

merchants perpetrated a hoax on the archaeologists and sold them jars which never contained the seven scrolls? These jars became a popular feature in the press, on the jackets of books published on the Dead Sea Scrolls, and on television.[8]

This very public set-to is similar to the one surrounding the popular and publicized archaeological dig for "Arthur's Camelot" at Cadbury Castle; there, the claims of discovery outpaced actual discoveries, and the whole endeavor became a made-for-television event.[9]

HARRY: "It's a sandal"—Eddie (Palin) has called for the group to "Follow the Shoe," and the nitpicking can begin when Harry reminds him it's a sandal. In the KJV, the translation to "sandal" only happens twice, while there are more than thirty references to "shoe." These are the kinds of details that derail many scenes and sketches in *Flying Circus* and *Holy Grail* (like riding on a horse or using coconuts, or how or what type of a swallow could carry a coconut, or yellow or blue as a favorite color). Specifics matter in the Python world.[10]

ARTHUR: "Follow the shoe-ites!"—Various "factions" in Jerusalem of the first century include those who aligned themselves with either the Pharisees or Sadducees, while the "splitters" might be the more ascetic Essenes (perhaps like Simon, who we'll meet in a moment), who saw themselves as practicing a purer form of devotion. (They even believed the Jews had defiled the temple and its righteous purposes.) These parties disagreed on interpretations and definitions of scripture, on priestly authority, on Hellenization, on the concepts of freewill and the afterlife, and on the temple services, at the least. The outsider, terrorist types were the Zealots, who actively agitated and even murdered in their quest for freedom from Rome.

ARTHUR: "Let us, like him, <u>carry</u> one shoe . . ."—Brian isn't actually carrying one shoe. He's lost one, and he's now running from them with just one shoe. This is likely a nod to the mutability of devotional practice following Christ's crucifixion. Various groups added to, modified, or rejected teachings they'd heard or read, leading to multiple Christian faiths, often varying by city. See Paul's letter to the Galatians in relation to circumcision, for example.

EDDIE: "No! Gather shoes!"—So one follower has called for carrying one shoe, another wants shoes to be gathered, and then a girl calls for shoes to be "cast off" and the gourd followed instead. There were myriad disagreements between and within sects, and for myriad reasons. The differing interpretations of life and scripture from the Hillel and Shammai schools, for instance, colored Jewish everyday life for centuries. Magness notes that the disagreements

involving the letter or spirit of the law were constant between Pharisee and Sadducee, also observing only what was written or acknowledging oral traditions, and between practices of purity in the desert, in the city, and near the temple. There were more and less strict rabbinical traditions, and schools that taught scripture and schools that taught custom. The Qumran sect was so outraged by practices in Jerusalem and even smaller cities that they separated themselves to the desert, choosing a more ascetic, and to them, a more faithful life.[11] Simon, whom we'll meet in the following scene, is one such man.

Terror groups of the 1970s had similar disagreements, leading the Palestine-based groups to fracture into nonviolent and violent splinters, and sometimes targeting each other, similar to the divisions within groups on *both* sides of the issue in Northern Ireland.

In the political realm, it had been disagreements of conviction that fatally split Labour. Some on the far left wanted a more socialist state where the government set prices and incomes and oversaw all manner of production, others a more syndicalist worker-controlled industrial model that got rid of management and the upper crust. There was also a populated middle ground between these two poles simply trying to keep Labour in competition with the Tories for votes. The more moderate Labour figures like Wilson spent endless energy trying to keep the Left from keeping too far left, alienating the more conservative Labour supporters. The disagreements in the PLP, Whitehall, and No. 10 often sound like shoes versus sandals—to defeat inflation, for example, some argued for artificial stimulants to the economy, others said that higher unemployment was the answer, others that conservative pay policies needed to be nurtured, dividends needed to be restrained, and on.[12] As they dithered and jockeyed in Wilson's last administration, Thatcher and friends managed to win their Party leadership, then the confidence of a frightened country, and then a general election. Brian's followers don't let their disagreements break up their mob, happily.

YOUTH: ". . . we must like him think not of the things of the body but of the face and head"—It's not clear where this deviation comes from, except that hair-splitting rabbinical traditions make every action parsable. Brian gave up a gourd and lost a shoe—from that, the Youth has divined a focus on parts of the body. If it's a simple matter of hygiene, then this is accurate. Given the scarcity of fresh water, most people of this period would have washed only parts of their bodies—hands, face, and (the ritual washing of) feet.[13] Actual bathing in Jerusalem proper was likely a rarer thing, for observant Jews. (The Romans

likely bathed, but in their quarters, apart from the Jews.) There is a great deal of rabbinical disagreement focusing on the body, its potential for defilement and purity, even down to specific parts of the body. Magness notes one tradition arguing that the hands can be defiled when touching an impurity but not the rest of the body, while another tradition argues that the entire body is defiled; there were disagreements about bathing before mentioning "the divine name" in the morning, or bathing afterward; whether the inside of a vessel or only the outside of a vessel can be impure; and whether scrolls—and even parts of scrolls (even depending on what is written on the scrolls)—can "impart uncleanness" to the hands that touch them.[14] It's also possible this is a more Augustinian admission, acknowledging the profaneness of the "naughty bits" of the body, especially, and its proclivity for sensuality and sin.[15]

GIRL: "All ye who call yourself Gourdenes!"—Perhaps a nod to the Pythons' study as they prepped for the film. This seems related to the Essene sect, since they could have said "Gourdites," but did not. The Essenes had been in the news often over the previous decade as Dead Sea scrolls researcher John Allegro published his controversial (and often refuted) findings.

SPIKE: "He cometh to us, like the seeds of the grave . . ."—Spike has raised his hands appropriately here, praying as in ancient Israel, arms reaching heavenward, as mentioned a number of times in the OT.[16] He is still ignored. Perhaps the time has passed for discrete followers to listen to preachers like this, having now aggregated into a "crowd" of disciples who will chase Brian back to his home. Also, the Prophet Spike isn't preaching on the prophet's wall, meaning he's indistinguishable from the rest of the mob.[17]

But SPIKE is left alone as the crowd sets off . . .—This is one of the Pythons' comedy heroes, Spike Milligan, who wrote most of *The Goon Show* episodes they grew up with. Milligan had also made a (vocal) appearance during the run of *Flying Circus*, yelling from off-camera during the "Election Night Special" in Ep. 19.[18] This is actually sadly prophetic. In the 1991 documentary *At Last the Go On Show*, Milligan is interviewed, and notes ruefully that his brand of comedy had been rejected by contemporary producers, leaving him "totally unemployed." Even in 1979, most Python fans wouldn't have recognized the Python hero in this scene.

The abandoned, crackpot-type character might just be a nod to the infamous John Stonehouse, a former Labour Party politician (and Wilson junior minister) who had tried to fake his own disappearance and death in November 1974 while on holiday in Florida. Most didn't actually think he'd died—Tony Benn doubts

it in his diaries, echoing many others[19]—rather that Stonehouse had concocted an escape from financial and legal problems. He would be arrested in Australia just five weeks later, and even though he had run away and clearly wanted people to think he was dead, he was still eligible for his seat in the House (much to the chagrin of Wilson and the PLP), and was still trying to participate in parliamentary functions. On 20 October 1975 Stonehouse stood in the benches on the *Tory* side of the House and tried to explain his disappearance to the Commons, speaking of himself in the third person, like an odd prophet: A new parallel personality took over—separate and apart from the original man, who was resented and despised by the parallel personality for the ugly humbug and sham of the recent years of his public life. . . . The collapse and destruction of the original man came about because his idealism in his political life had been utterly frustrated and finally destroyed by the pattern of events beyond his control, which had finally overwhelmed him.[20]

Bernard Donoughue characterized it as "bizarre, but not mad, and crudely calculated. . . . The House looked embarrassed."[21] Spike's character looks quite embarrassed, too. Stonehouse was eventually sentenced to three years in prison for insurance fraud. His resignation diminished Labour's already slim majority, and would factor into PM Callaghan's struggles to maintain a functioning Lib-Lab pact necessary for a minority government.

. . . a hole . . . in which crouches a bearded mystic, in a meditative position—This bearded, unkempt[22] holy man with a cup and a bowl is likely inspired by an Essene hermit whom Josephus followed: Banus[23] . . . lived in the desert, and used no other clothing than grew upon trees, and had no other food than what grew of its own accord, and bathed himself in cold water frequently, both by night and by day, in order to preserve his chastity, I imitated him in those things, and continued with him three years.[24]

The Essenes were much more ascetic than either the Pharisees or Sadducees, and kept themselves apart (on the cliffs at Qumran, for instance), from the general Jewish population. There were deep disagreements between and even within these sects; the arguments we've just seen regarding sandals, shoes, and gourds are not outré in the least. Simon isn't mentioned specifically as an Essene, though he is in the wilderness, and has clearly renounced the things of the world. Simon doesn't seem to be waiting for the arrival of the promised Messiah, though, as the Essenes vowed.[25] He's likely related to the ascetic in Buñuel's *Simon of the Desert*, though that Simon is in the wilderness atop a pillar.[26]

His hirsuteness is reminiscent of St. Mary of Egypt, a hermitess who lived in the fourth century, and whom Gilliam sketched as he prepared for the animations on *Holy Grail*.[27] These eremites or anchorites seemed to have become more common later, from the third and fourth centuries, after St. Anthony of Egypt (c. 251–356). Gilliam had also sketched from Boschean versions of this hermitic saint as he prepared for the *Holy Grail* animations.[28]

SIMON: "Eighteen years of total silence . . ."—Ascetics could take all sorts of vows distancing themselves from the world, including a refrain from speaking, or bathing, or clothing, or relationships, or a refrain from taking in or putting on *anything* of Man's making (think of John the Baptist's diet of locusts and wild honey).[29] It's probably telling that his first words are oaths—"damn" and "blast it."

Now that his "fast" from speaking is over, he admits that he has wanted to "shout and sing and scream" his name out. The goal of the ascetic was often to put off the things of the world as well as the things of the self, so that a concentration on the godly could be achieved. Simon's is an odd situation, though. He isn't speaking to men, and his isn't praying (speaking) to God, so the point of his devotion (or accidie?) is a mystery, unless he is rejecting both the world and God. And since language and communication are key elements to being human, the refusal to speak (even to God) and, by removal to the wilderness, the refusal to be spoken to have denied his human identity. It's no surprise then that the first thing Simon wants to do is reaffirm his identity by screaming his own name. He also admits that he hasn't enjoyed this fast (he wants to "enjoy" himself now). The consequences of his vow-breaking become evident quickly: his sanctuary is violated, his berries are eaten, and he is carried off for execution as if he were a medieval witch.

The hermits that the Pythons offered in Ep. 8 of *Flying Circus* were far more chatty and convivial than Simon. Those hermits had left modern life to get away from it all, and ended up in a sort of hermit suburb where they could mingle with each other, gather berries and water, and chastise themselves. This silliness would be stopped by Chapman's "Colonel" character.[30]

SIMON: "'Hava Nagila'!"—This is a very modern song, composed when Britain administrated the Mandate of Palestine after World War I. Russian dancer Valery Panov and wife, who had petitioned to emigrate to Israel and subsequently suffered at the hands of Soviet authorities, were finally granted their freedom in 1974. Panov remembers passengers on their plane heading for

Tel Aviv singing “Hava Nagila,” a song he’d “heard on a thousand Radio Israel broadcasts.”[31]

CROWD: “A blessing! A blessing!!”—The crowd have taken Brian’s “Go away!” as the first words of his ministry to them. These would have attended Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount, maybe followed some of the other minor prophets, listened to the various prophets preaching in the city, and even attended Brian’s for-profit sermon, so they assume there’s more preaching to follow. This same “A blessing!” moment happened in *Holy Grail*, as well, just after God appeared to the knights and called them to their quest.[32]

ARTHUR: “How shall we go away Master?”—A fair question, given that the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and perhaps even the “Fourth Philosophy” sects might have differing answers. Moving away from the proscription of the Mosaic Law was a challenge for many. Following Jesus’s teachings, the easily observed (for most) Ten Commandments were in the process of giving way to just two charges: Love God and love your neighbor. Having to be taught how to “go away” fits right in with the more proscribed rabbinical Judaism of the post- and Second Temple period.

ELSIE: “Give us a sign”—Signs have been mentioned earlier, where Brian allegedly gave a sign without being asked (or meaning to). Jesus and his apostles warned about seeking signs,[33] but there’s neither a warning nor punishment for the asking in *Brian*. Vermes notes that Jesus answers (in the Gospels) several different ways to those who ask him for signs, several negative (like Arthur’s response in a moment), but some more positive, as well.[34]

ARTHUR: “There is no food on this high mountain”—What follows is a loaves-and-fishes moment, where Brian is said to have made the juniper bushes fruitful “by his word.” In Cook and Moore’s *Not Only . . . But Also* “Jesus” sketch, the loaves-and-fishes miracle is mentioned, when Jesus tells his landlady he has five-thousand lunch guests on the way, and she says she only has a little fish and bread. When Jesus returned with twelve baskets full, his landlady puts it down to his ability to carve delicately. Brian hasn’t, of course, made anything fruitful, but the crowd sees all this as “a good sign, by any standard.” This scene will simply follow the Pythons putting Brian through the “accidental messiah” wringer, with versions of Jesus’s miracles and words peppered throughout.

Remembering John the Baptist’s locusts and wild honey, these berries indicate that Simon, like John, has “a concern with purity,” and eats “only wild, not processed food.”[35] Earlier, the Jewish revolutionary Judas Maccabeus had also escaped into the wilderness, eating only “what grew wild.”[36]

ELSIE: "The bushes have been made fruitful by his word"—More often than barren trees made fruitful, unfruitful trees were cursed, as in the fig tree mentioned in Mark and Matthew.[37] "Fruitful" only appears twice on the KJV New Testament, and only a handful of times in the Old Testament relative to actual vines and trees.

ARTHUR: "Do not tempt him, shallow ones. Is not the miracle of the juniper bushes enough?"—In Luke 4:12 Jesus tells Satan "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God," while sign-seekers were treated similarly. Arthur is echoing Jesus from Matthew 12. When Jesus chastised the scribes and Pharisees for demanding a sign, Jesus not only said that no new sign would be provided, but that the sign given anciently to Jonas should be enough.[38]

ARTHUR: "They are a gift from God"—The wandering Children of Israel were granted manna, quail, water from a rock, bitter water made sweet, healing by a gaze at the brazen serpent—all gifts of God as they spent forty years in the wilderness. In the New Testament, the gifts from God include the more abstract (spiritual) grace and eternal life, for example, building on the newer teachings of Jesus and his apostles. These wouldn't be as interesting to this lot.

SIMON: "They're all I've bloody got to eat!"—John the Baptist survived (and even thrived) on the fruit of the desert, including that of the carob tree, as well as wild honey and locusts.[39] Early "desert prophets" like Elias drank from natural sources and were often fed by local people.[40] Banus ate only what the desert offered him, and was clothed from the things of nature, Josephus mentions. Later eremites like Mary of Egypt also ate what the desert provided, though many hermits relied on local people offering food as alms.

HARRY: "Lord! I am affected by a bald patch!"—Most of the healings ascribed to Jesus involved chronic afflictions, including leprosy-type diseases, withered limbs, hemorrhaging, deafness, blindness, and paralysis. Brian will be asked for more pedestrian miracles—curing a rich woman's headache so she can make it to a dinner party, and baldness. The blind man will claim to be cured, but he falls face first into the hole, anyway.

BLIND MAN: "I was blind and now I can see!"—The man immediately falls into the hermit's hole, since he cannot see. This scene is staged very much like the moment in *Jesus of Nazareth* where Christ heals the palsied man. Healed and called by Jesus to stand and walk home, the man gets up, healed arms outstretched, and walks around in front of the assembled crowd, rejoicing. The Pythons are careful not to even hint that Brian might actually be a healer, a Christ-like figure, or anything beyond a harried man keen for time alone with his

beloved. It is the baying crowd following another savior for signs and self-serving miracles that seems to take the brunt of the film's ridicule.[41]

ALL: "A miracle! He is the Messiah!"—Brian is not called the Son of God here, of course, but he is confused with a messiah, or one who might deliver the Jews from their current oppressed state. The only mention of Brian as the potential savior is in the manger at the beginning, before the Wise Men realize their mistake. As Brandon points out, in the Markan Gospel Christ is very clearly recognized "as the Messiah of Israel, [and] is also accorded a far higher status, namely, that of the Son of God."[42] The Pythons likely skirted this potential land mine by pushing the fervor of the misguided crowd as opposed to any claims by Brian. In a moment he will tell them very clearly that he is not the messiah.

ALL: "Hurt my foot Lord!!"—Simon's complaints—that he speaks, that he only eats juniper berries, and that his foot has been trod upon by Brian—are interpreted as Brian's miracles and signs by the enthusiastic crowd. They seem to want whatever their Messiah sees fit to provide, including pain. In Gilliam's (and Palin's) film *Time Bandits*, Evil's minions will thank him profusely when he promises to turn them "inside-out over a very long period of time."

BRIAN: "I'm not the Messiah"—The proof may be in Brian's answer, actually. Jesus offered many "I am" utterances ("I am the way, the truth, and the life"), but spent less time saying what he was *not*. Brian's mother will also tell Judith that her son is "not the Messiah," rather a "very naughty boy." Brian is also smart in saying this aloud, since the Romans would deal harshly with messianic contenders both prior to and after Christ, seeing the possibility of sedition at every turn.[43]

ARTHUR: "I say you are Lord, and I should know. I've followed a few"—There was an eschatological outburst following the death of the oppressive Herod in 4 BC, and "the whole countryside erupted in spontaneous rebellion led by messianic pretenders in each of the principal districts, Galilee, Peraea, and Judea:[44] "Judas of Galilee, the founder of the Zealot movement, probably advanced Messianic claims, and it seems certain that Menahem, his son, did," Brandon writes. "It seems likely that the Theudas of Acts v. 36 . . . was a Messianic pretender . . . as was also the Egyptian (Jew) mentioned by Josephus . . . who, however, disappeared after the failure of his coup."[45] These pretenders would have included the later agitators like Menahem and Simon bar Giora, whose feats ended with the mass suicide at Masada.[46] Given these potentials, Reg would have had plenty of Messiahs to follow.

This “I say you are” argument is addressed in the author’s earlier work in relation to the Pythons’ and Shakespeare’s willingness to use language as a tool for the making or remaking of characters, situations, and even alternate histories. Richard III was able to cast those he wanted to destroy (Clarence, Margaret, Hastings, the young princes, et al.) into “Others,” remaking them either before or after their deaths, to suit his needs.[47] If “Richard *says* someone is a traitor, that person *becomes* a traitor, and can be dealt with accordingly. A married woman can become an available woman; a cousin can become a foe; rightful heirs can become seditious, and so on. Richard is perhaps the ultimate ‘maker’ in English literary history.”[48] Naming and totemic words also carry a significant power in the Python world. Arthur Jackson becomes “Two Sheds,” and that moniker becomes inescapable; “Ni” is somehow magical, and must be obeyed after its utterance; a police inspector becomes Sir Philip Sidney after being named as such, even though we know (or we think we know) he is Inspector Gaskell.[49] Here Brian can become a messiah to these people, he will play out that role for one night and morning, and then be arrested.

GIRL: “Only the true Messiah denies his divinity”—Jesus doesn’t deny who he is, but he also doesn’t go about trumpeting the fact, preferring to allow those around him to come to their understanding of him as they will. When Simon Peter answers Christ’s own question about who his disciples think he is, his disciple say “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Rather than simply agree with him, Jesus tells him he is blessed because he learned it from “my Father in heaven.”[50] It is an admission that is not a damning admission, since everyone within earshot could also say they had a father in heaven.

Brian denies he is the Messiah, but then will say that he is the Messiah, just to be left alone. This is the answer the crowd has been waiting for, however, and he *is* now their Messiah.

BRIAN: “Now <u>fuck off!!!</u>”—This of course doesn’t insult the crowd, they simply seek a way to follow their new leader’s perhaps rabbinical command. This juxtaposition of spirituality and harsh language isn’t just the Pythons’ conceit, of course. When it was announced that the Rev. Ian Paisley would be leading a march through Catholic sections of Derry, a *Sunday Times* correspondent recorded this reaction, likely from a Roman Catholic: “D’you think I’m goin’ to let that f—n’ Paisley walk through the f—n’ streets of f—n’ Derry to curse the f—n’ Pope?”[51]

ARTHUR: “An unbeliever . . . Persecute! Kill the heretic!”—This bell, book, and candle condemnation is weakly protested by Brian, those protestations

overcome by the appearance of comely Judith. And rather than Jewishness, the mob here is responding to the new messiah-type—"Christian" if they had decided to follow Christ (who is still somewhere just offscreen in the world of the film)—or "Brianian" as they try and follow Brian. The continuing disaster that was Northern Ireland prompted this assessment from a period journalist: "Despite all its protestations to the contrary, Christianity has always been a bloody religion, whether crusading against infidels, or persecuting Jews, or suppressing heresy with the rack and stake, or turning nation against nation or brother against brother. It has preached peace and made wars."[52] The mob of followers seems to bear this out as they bear Simon away to certain death.

This kind of public manifestation of condemnation had been witnessed very recently. Heartbreaking images and stories from China emerged as the Cultural Revolution went through its most violent period (1966–1968). "Unbelievers" ("counter-revolutionaries," using Mao's term) perhaps "harbouring bourgeois tendencies"[53] were arrested by the youth of the Red Guard, paraded through the streets wearing signs and dunce caps, tortured, and even killed. Fixing counter-revolutionary "revisionism" was the mob's main goal (like anyone who might not recognize Brian as Messiah, once the crowd has so anointed him). These "shock troops" in China's Cultural Revolution were the Red Guards, young people and students whose task, as they saw it, was to weed out all manifestations of creeping revisionism in Chinese society. This included bureaucracy, privilege, political cliques, excessive reliance on material incentives, failure to use local resources to deal with local problems, and many other phenomena which have a tendency to creep into sociality systems. . . . Elements among the Red Guards also committed severe excesses in the treatment of people they regarded as class enemies.[54]

Of course the Pythons didn't have to rely on current Chinese politics and society for examples of mob justice. These same kinds of summary judgments (and executions) were being made among contemporary revolutionary groups like the URA and the 2 June Movement, in Belfast and Derry, across the Middle East and Asia, stretching all the way back to Zealots and the *sicarii* of first century Judea. As this scene closes, the mob leader's language escalates. He first calls Simon an "unbeliever," then says he is guilty of heresy (likely an actionable charge) and must be persecuted, and from there it's an easy step to "kill"—his language has made Simon into a target: But this is an important part of revolutionary technique. Language must be redefined to support the revolutionary thesis, make real understanding impossible and thus leave no other

form of communication but violence. Violence gives the illusion of doing something, not just talking. It forces the authorities to pay attention to people they have hitherto despised and rejected. Above all, violence baptises the revolutionary into the faith.[55]

Simon is then carried off “to his doom,” the script says, just like the “It’s a fair cop” witch in *Holy Grail*.

Notes

1. Matthew 12:39, 16:4.
2. Josephus, *AJ*, 5.9.4 (Whiston, 121).
3. Jeremias, *JTJ*, 372n65; cf. Deuteronomy 25:9–10.
4. Magness, *Stone and Dung*, 27 and 19.
5. *AJ*, 18.4.1 (Whiston, 380).
6. See also Brandon's *Jesus and the Zealots*, 80.
7. The ending of the Simon scene is very similar to the ending of the "She's a Witch" scene in *Holy Grail*, as will be discussed later.
8. "The Idolatry of the Dead Sea Scrolls," 265.
9. Larsen, *BAFHG*, 26, 54, 252–53, 304–5.
10. An influence from the Goons. In "The Secret Escritoire," the characters go to great lengths to differentiate between an escritoire and a writing desk: "And does it mean, all in all, a writing table with tiroirs? And pigeonholes? As distinct from a writing desk which has a sloping front?" (27 September 1955).
11. Magness, *Stone and Dung*, chapter 1.
12. Donoughue's many entries on these subjects are fascinating reading; see *DSD*.
13. Borowski, *Daily Life in Biblical Israel*, 78–79.
14. Magness, *Stone and Dung*, 22–25.
15. Richard, *WWAR*, 276–78.
16. See Calabro, "Gestures of Praise."
17. In *Brazil*, Sam won't get anywhere wearing the suit he's wearing, for some reason, and has to be given another, very similar suit. He then is recognized and effective.
18. Larsen, *MPFC: UC*, 1.305–6.
19. Palin, *Diaries 1973–1976*, 272–73.
20. Quoted in Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun*, 175–76.
21. *DSD*, 1.534–35. See "Speaker Halts Mr. Stonehouse Five Times in His Commons Statement," *Times*, 21 October 1975: 1.
22. In 1 Samuel 21:14, an unkempt beard is a sign of madness.
23. Some scholars have said Banus may have been a follower of John the Baptist.
24. *The Life of Flavius Josephus*, 2 (Whiston, 1).
25. Kotker, *HLTJ*, 46. See Norman Bentwich's discussion of Josephus and Banus in *Josephus*, 40–41, as well as the entry for Banus in the *JE*.
26. *BAFHG*, 486.
27. *BAFHG*, 514–15.
28. *BAFHG*, 205, 266, 525, and 528; *MPFC: UC*, 2.111.
29. *BAFHG*, 190, 220n11; "ascetics" in *MPFC: UC*; Magness, *Stone and Dung*, 39–40.
30. See the entries for the "Hermits" scene in *MPFC: UC*, 1.131–42; also *BAFHG*, 88.
31. "Last Exit from Leningrad," *Sunday Telegraph*, 19 March 1978: 8. The melody from this song would find its way into "You Won't Succeed on Broadway" from *Spamalot*.
32. *BAFHG*, 262.
33. See Mark 13:21 and Matthew 24:23, for example.
34. Vermes, *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus*, 182–83.
35. Magness, *Stone and Dung*, 39–40.
36. Magness, *Stone and Dung*, 40.
37. Mark 11:12–14 and 11:20–25; Matthew 21:18–22.
38. Matthew 12:39.
39. *HLTJ*, 49.
40. See the *Catholic Encyclopedia*.

41. This is the tack that Cleese, at the least, tried to take defending the film upon its release, including during the infamous interview with Palin, Muggeridge, and the Bishop of Southwark.
42. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 7.
43. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 7, and 110–15.
44. Horsley, "The Sicarii," 447.
45. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 18n3.
46. Horsley, "The Sicarii," 455–56.
47. Larsen, *MPSERD*, 166–71.
48. *MPFC: UC*, 1.22, also, *MPSERD*, chapter 5.
49. *Flying Circus* Ep. 1; *Holy Grail*, "Knights Who Say Ni"; and *Flying Circus* Ep. 36, respectively.
50. Matthew 16:15–17.
51. From David Holden's "The Storming of Stormont," *Sunday Times*, 1 December 1968: 7.
52. George Gale, "A Land of Trouble," *Spectator*, 11 July 1970: 5.
53. Allessandro Casella, "Confessions of a Bourgeois," *Times*, 7 April 1971: 14.
54. "Cultural Revolution: Effects Linger On," *Times*, 21 March 1973: VIII.
55. "Angries and the Middle-Class 'Revolution'," *Spectator*, 18 July 1975: 18.

SCENE NINETEEN

“HE’S NOT THE MESSIAH” PANTO ***DAWN OVER A LARGE CUT-OUT OF JERUSALEM. USUAL DAWN CLICHÉS. COCKS CROWING . . . SOUND EFFECTS MEN WORKING OVERTIME*****—**DRAWING ATTENTION TO THE ARTIFICE, JUST AS THE GOONS DID. IN THE BUILDING OF THE *HOLY GRAIL* TROJAN RABBIT SCENE, ALL SORTS OF MECHANICAL AND CARPENTRY SOUNDS ACCOMPANIED THE EVENT.[1] HERE THE CROWING COCK SOUNDS LIKE ONE PRODUCED BY JONES, OR RATHER MANDY, AND IT’S POSSIBLE SHE IS TRYING TO WAKE BRIAN THIS WAY.

(draft) BRIAN wakes. He sees a pretty lady asleep next to him. It is CHERYL

—In the longer draft Brian has come home with “disciples” Cheryl and Karen, who will appear from under the covers in a moment, and he will hide them in a cupboard. These more amorous followers can be connected back to a number of sources, and from quite different eras. In Nikos Kazantzakis’s controversial 1955 novel *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Christ dreams (while on the cross) of marrying more than one woman (Mary, then Martha and Mary) and living a long

and happy life, even welcoming grandchildren. When he awakes he is still on the cross, and he then surrenders his life to God. These girls in Brian's bed had been present at a boozy (and elided) "Last Supper" scene. Brian's mother interrupts this morning-after bliss, demanding to know why these girls—who can't be disciples since "they haven't got a stitch on"—are in her home, and why there's a mob outside. The international terrorist Carlos had his own female disciples, and they were of great use to him in his work: "He had long since been taught by his instructors in subversion to 'surround yourself with pretty young girls.' It was a counsel he followed with much pleasure and assiduity. The women he seduced were mostly innocent ones, not at all involved in terrorism," write Dobson and Payne. "But he intended to use them to provide him with cover.[2] Brian's schemes aren't nearly so homely or nefarious, of course; he wants the girls (in the rough draft) and Judith (in the finished film) for more libidinal purposes. He isn't much of a terrorist (though he did try and help kidnap Pilate's wife), nor much of a revolutionary, short of painting clumsy Latin on a palace wall, but he is trying to have it all, it seems—mixing illegal work and ill-famed play with a particular maternal devotion. Dobson and Payne write again of Carlos, in about 1973: He flitted in and out of [England] and nobody imagined for one moment that he was a terrorist. When he was in London he lived the good life, dancing the night away, smoking cigars and eating richly until he grew even more sensitive about being El Gordo. . . . Somebody who knew him then says: "He had a ball here, always out with the birds. But his mother was always in the background. He adored her and never went against her wishes." Little did his mother know what the darker side of his life involved.[3]

When the womanizing and drinking and excessive eating in the earlier upstairs "Last Supper" scene are considered—the same scene where Brian flirted with and won both Karen and Cheryl—this revolutionary seems ready to embrace the sweet, naughty terrorist/messiah lifestyle, as long as he can keep it a secret from his mother, Mandy. Perhaps to ease the tint of debauchery on this shadow Messiah, the Pythons decided to remove the entire Last Supper they'd considered, as well as the "birds."

. . . naked sleeping form of Judith . . . apparently rude behavior has occurred during the night—In the American New Wave film *Bonnie and Clyde*, Clyde Barrow resists a physical relationship with Bonnie Parker, he says because he sees in her more than her sexuality. It also seems that he's uncomfortable with or just uncertain about his own sexuality. The moment that they do progress to a sexual union is a crucial plot pivot, the beginning of the end, dramatically; from

there it's an inexorable chase to their bullet-ridden deaths. Following this formula, Brian wakes to a glorious "morning after," and after wading through the mass of adherents and the wretched, he escapes his house, is congratulated by Judith (though as a leader, not a lover), and is then arrested, leading inexorably to execution.

As mentioned earlier, the notorious Danish film project *The Sex Life of Jesus Christ* excited much talk in Britain in 1975–1976, eventually leading to the director being banned from entering the country. Newspapers published many letters to the editor condemning the proposed work and its creator, and many stories ran predicting the decline of British civilization should the film be shot or screened. *Private Eye* got in on the fun, as well, with the fictitious Rev. J. C. Flannel writing in his column "Wayside Pulpit": From what we have heard it does seem that there may well be real grounds for disquiet about some of the scenes that are to be shot. And yet, is there not another side to the coin? I think there probably might well be. Today more than ever surely Christians have a duty to explore every avenue of our beliefs. Mr Thoresen, it may well transpire, could discover for us some hitherto overlooked corner of the Faith. For even in the most unlikely places we may find a message of Hope. And now Hymn 95^{4} in the Soho Hymns for Today, "Strip off, strip off for Jesus."[5]

It's fortunate that the amorous Brian and Judith belong to the Peoples' Front of Judea and not a group like the extremist faction of the Japanese Red Army, known as the Rengo Sekigun. In that group, disagreements about political motivations and, more pointedly, sexual activity between cadre members led to a grisly, weeks-long internal purge, a lengthy standoff and gun battle with police, and a salacious trial that fascinated and horrified the Japanese people in 1973.[6] Members of this same revolutionary group had been intent on overthrowing the Japanese government and the monarchy, and had successfully hijacked a plane for political asylum in North Korea.

Similarly, when the members of the nascent Baader-Meinhof gang went to Jordan to train with the PLO (Fatah), they quickly ran into trouble, according to one B-M member, Horst Mahler: There were disagreements with the PLO. These got more heated when Baader and Ensslin made a demand. They said, "We are a fighting group. We do everything together, and we should be able to sleep together." But for our hosts it was inconceivable, that men and women in a military camp would sleep together. The result was that the PLO said: "Give us back the weapons. We will make sure you get back to Berlin safely, but we don't want anything more to do with you."[7]

The co-leaders of the RAF, Baader and Ensslin, were a well-known romantic couple, and both committed suicide rather than await the results of their criminal trials.[8]

The trope of good bedfellows making for good politics could also be found in the workaday world of twentieth-century British politics. Even as the British postwar socialist paradise that would be the New Jerusalem was being formulated in the 1950s, it wasn't all wealth redistribution, nationalization, and parliamentary heavy-lifting—the "private freedom" that Brian enjoys with Judith was one of the hallmarks of Anthony Crosland's "revisionist" version of the future, according to journalist Peter Jenkins: With his seminal work [*The Future of Socialism*] published in 1956 he liberated socialists not only from the encumbrances of the Marxist tradition but also from the earnest worthiness of Sidney and Beatrice Webb,[9] who had spent their honeymoon collecting information about trade unions in Dublin with no time to visit a theatre or gallery. A famous passage towards the end of *The Future of Socialism* was headed, "Liberty and Gaiety in Private Life; the Need for a Reaction against the Fabian Tradition," and it ended with the words: "Total abstinence and a good filing-system are not now the right sign-posts to the socialist Utopia; or at least if they are, some of us will fall by the wayside."[10]

Crosland preceded this paragraph with a complaint that the full weight of "society's decisions" had become onerous, impinging "heavily on people's private lives as well as on their social or economic welfare . . . in too restrictive and puritanical a manner."[11] Earlier, Brian had complained (in the script draft) that Judith needed to liberate herself—meaning have sex with him—when she's totally focused on larger issues like freeing Judea from the Romans and the fact that Jewish law forbids women to go to stonings. Brian manages to eventually help Judith "liberate" herself (and in the script draft he also liberates Cheryl *and* Karen), and immediately follows that act with a kind of sermon to his followers, successfully aligning his "social commitment and private freedom," like a good Crosland socialist.[12]

He throws open the shutters . . . [a] vast crowd thronging the courtyard outside his bedroom window . . ."—This is yet another moment found in the foundational *I'm All Right Jack*. After Stan has gone back to work and Mr. Kite has thrown him out of his house, Stan has to move in with his aristocratic Aunt Dolly (Margaret Rutherford). Bouquets, fruit baskets, and fan mail have piled into Dolly's sitting room as a result of Stan's assumed union-busting behavior,

and outside, a chanting, singing crowd can be heard: Aunt Dolly: Just listen to all that cheer.

STANLEY continues opening letters.

Stan: How long have they been there, Aunt Dolly?

Aunt Dolly: Hours! What a nation we British are, once we are stirred.

Dolly then pulls back the curtains to reveal a sea of singing supporters carrying placards, all in support of Stan and against the strikers and the excesses of organized labor. The gathered are singing "Land of Hope and Glory," and one enthusiastic woman, seeing the open curtain, shouts: "Three cheers for Mr. Churchill! And for Stanley Windrush! Hip-hip-hooray!" Nearby a line of girls wearing "Luv Elvis" shirts—with Elvis scratched through and "Stan" penned instead—chant "We want Stanley!" Just one scene later Stanley will be encouraged by Aunt Dolly to make an appearance outside so his supporters can have a good look at him. It continues to be clear that, perhaps unconsciously, the Pythons owed a great debt to this popular film.

He is quite naked—Palin comments in his *Diaries* that director Jones wanted this scene, and was adamant—an "unshakeable commitment to full-frontals"—that both Judith and Brian be seen fully naked. Producer John Goldstone and Cleese were reportedly much less impressed by the blatant exhibitionism—Goldstone worrying about an eventual ratings restriction (meaning a reduced audience)—and spent time on the set trying to talk Jones out of it.[13]

A period version of this elevated full frontal moment exists, of course. During Passover in about 48, Josephus reports, a certain rudeness (that would have fit nicely into either of the French soldier sequences in *Holy Grail*) caused a bloody uproar: But on the fourth day of the feast, a certain soldier let down his breeches, and exposed his privy members to the multitude, which put those that saw him into a furious rage, and made them cry out that this impious action was not done to reproach them, but God himself; nay, some of them reproached Cumanus,[14] and pretended that the soldier was set on by him, which, when Cumanus heard, he was also himself not a little provoked at such reproaches laid upon him; yet did he exhort them to leave off such seditious attempts, and not to raise a tumult at the festival.[15]

They raised a tumult anyway, and as the angry and frightened pilgrims ran from the garrison's approaching soldiers, as many as 20,000 were killed in the stampede. In Brian's case, his assembled followers don't even seem to notice the "last turkey in the shop" image.

MANDY: "'Popped by?'. . . There's a multitude out there!"—Mandy is correcting Brian, and using the more proper biblical term that appears almost eighty times in the Synoptic Gospels alone. "Multitude" is a term borrowed from the encounters Jesus had with his followers, and is a big part of the reason that those angry with him in the Jewish community were reticent to have him arrested and charged. "Swarm" is solely an OT term, and is generally associated with plagues and devastation.

CROWD: "The chosen one . . ."—*Not* an appellation used in the Gospels in reference to Jesus, the Children of Israel are the "chosen ones" (1 Chronicles 16:13), and later Ananias tells Saul that he has been chosen by "Just One," Jesus Christ, to do God's work (Acts 22:14). The phrase appears in fantasy and science fiction literature to refer to the (often unwilling) central character who must undertake his dangerous, world-saving quest. Bilbo was "chosen" by the God-like Gandalf for the adventure in *The Hobbit* (1937), while Frodo was also chosen as ring-bearer in *Fellowship of the Rings* (1954), for example. Frank Herbert's "kwisatz haderach" character Paul Muad'Dib was later born to the role in *Dune* (1965).[16]

. . . JUDITH appears from BRIAN's bed stark naked . . .—This image of titillation amid a politically and religiously charged event wouldn't have been unusual for the period, actually. Rupert Murdoch's newspaper *The Sun* had offered nude Page Three Girls since 1969; the West German Leftist magazine *Konkret*, for which Ulrike Meinhof wrote, also featured nude and semi-nude cover photos of both men and women (mostly women); and politically charged magazines like *Private Eye* featured nudity in cartoons and occasional photos.

The image of a revered man of faith caught *in flagrante delicto* was a bit more unusual, but might be borrowed from a very recent scandal involving the Bishop of Preveza, Stylianos. A grainy photo appearing on the covers of a number of newspapers in September 1978[17] purported to show the bishop in bed with the wife of a junior priest (Greek bishops are "eternally celibate" and may not marry[18]). Stylianos denied the accusation, calling the photo "forgery, blackmail, a communist plot to undermine my position." His Judas, according to the indignant bishop, was his former chauffeur, who harbored a grudge against the holy man, and who was seeking blackmail payment.[19] The photo and accompanying leaflets calling for the bishop's ouster were being circulated by a group calling itself, appropriately for our purposes, the "Preveza Christian Fighters." In the Pythonesque version of this scandal, of course, the followers of Brian don't seem to mind his nakedness or his association with women.

Stylianos was charged by the church with "scandalizing the conscience of the Christian faithful"; Brian seems to have simply increased his stature among his faithful.[20]

MANDY: ". . . He's not the Messiah, he's a very naughty boy"—Mandy is also able to use her naming power to keep Brian's feet on the ground, though it won't save him from the cross. Idle will take this as the title of an oratorio version, *Not the Messiah (He's a Very Naughty Boy)* in 2009.

CROWD: "Behold his Mother!"—A version of Jesus's cry from the cross, "Behold thy mother!" as recorded in John 19:26. There isn't a significant Mary tradition in Jewish culture, but in Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant, and even Islamic cultures, there is. In the Roman Catholic tradition, Mary took an elevated position, so it's no surprise that this crowd is perhaps renouncing whatever Jewishness it may have had in favor of what they think Brian can offer, a new version of Christianity (Brianity?). If that's the case, then Mother Mandy must be venerated, too.

CROWD: "Well . . . all right"—The crowd is doing this in one voice, of course—a hint of the pantomime to come—which Josephus mentions as a common practice of the Roman armies, as well: Then do the trumpets give a sound the third time, that they are to go out, in order to excite those that on any account are a little tardy, that so no one may be out of his rank when the army marches. Then does the crier stand at the general's right hand, and asks them thrice, in their own tongue, whether they be now ready to go out to war or not? To which they reply as often, with a loud and cheerful voice, saying, "We are ready." And this they do almost before the question is asked them: they do this as filled with a kind of martial fury, and at the same time that they so cry out, they lift up their right hands also.[21]

In *Flying Circus* the Pythons present beloved pantomime characters like Long John Silver, Puss, the Principal Boy, Dobbin, and even their own Pantomime Goose and Princess Margaret. In Ep. 4 the audience hisses at the evil dentist, a pantomime response. Episode 28 will devolve into a pantomime.

MANDY: "Leave that Welsh tart alone"—Like Jones, actress Sue Jones-Davies was born in Wales. A singer and performer, Jones-Davies would go on to become the mayor of Aberystwyth, Wales. In *Holy Grail*, Dennis has already complained about a "watery tart" handing out magic swords.[22]

(draft) A couple of ROMANS can be seen at the back of the crowd—In the early draft Judith[23] and Reg are actually down among the crowd, "working" to keep the emotions high, and the Romans are keeping a wary eye on the goings-

on. These watching Roman soldiers are likely a nod to those that Pilate inserted into crowds around him as he addressed Jews' concerns about blasphemous images in the governor's palace, and as he answered angry cries as a result of plundering temple funds for a public works project.[24]

***(draft)* WOMAN IN CROWD: "Is it right that we should pay taxes to the Romans?"**—This scene at the window, in an earlier draft, becomes more like a political news conference, with a PM answering questions from the press. Earlier drafts of the script featured tax questions, which were incredibly significant to the provincial Roman citizen, to Jew and Gentile (and to historians over the centuries), but those elements were worked out of the script prior to completion of the film.[25] The subject would have been important to Reg: "This [tax] issue . . . was the basic test of Jewish patriotism: for payment of this tribute was tantamount to denying Yahweh's absolute sovereignty over Israel—it was the issue on which the Zealots, the nationalist action party, were prepared to die."[26] Reg had hissed that the hated Romans had "bled us white," likely a reference to the taxation demanded not for the sustenance of the Roman cult (which the Jews could have reasonably revolted against), but to keep the empire running, to pay for the garrisoning of troops in places like Caesarea and Jerusalem, who would maintain Roman law and order.[27]

Brian's answer in this draft is drawn right from the pressers of the Heath, Wilson, and Callaghan administrations of the 1970s—mealy-mouthed and obtuse: "It is one that each and every one must face . . . individually . . . at this point in time. But . . . I think we must be wary of quick and easy solutions."[28] Heath's leadership speech at the 1973 Conservative Party Conference offers these familiar lines as he discusses the problems in Northern Ireland: "We still have a long way to go. There is no easy and quick solution. There is going to be no speedy end."[29] New PM and Labour leader Callaghan's speech at the party conference at Blackpool, 1976, included the following: We live in too troubled a world to be able to promise that in a matter of months, or even in a couple of years, that we shall enter the promised land. The route is long and hard. But the long march has at last begun, and I hope to lead you at least some part of the way, with the Social Contract and our industrial strategy as our guide.[30]

In this earlier draft, Brian would take additional questions, becoming more politic and glib in his answers. Mandy is also a part of this sequence, letting followers in who have brought gifts, as if she's the gatekeeper to power (like a Marcia Williams) at Brian's No. 10.

BRIAN: "You've got it all wrong. You don't need to follow me. You don't need to follow anybody! You've got to think for yourselves. You're all individuals!"—This is where a thaumaturgic preacher became a foe of Rome *and* the Jews. Pilate, Herod Antipas, and the hardline Sadducees were for the most part content to allow even millennial preachers and miracle workers to operate in Judea and Galilee, so long as they never crossed the Rubicon from holy man to political man. Once Jesus was perceived, rightly or wrongly, as a potential *political* leader for tens of thousands of unhappy Jews, his fate was sealed.[31]

The other street preachers seen earlier in the film had been calling to repentance and predicting destruction—John the Baptist-like—and admonishing Jerusalemites to behave better. Such a population would be ideal Roman subjects. (Those that are listening seem disconnected from any political thought; they are pulled along by intermittent and ultimately harmless evangelistic currents.) Brian is even safe telling his multitude to not follow him, that still leaves room for obeisance to Rome or the Sanhedrin—he steps in it when he tells them to think for themselves. This puts him at odds with the Jewish elders and the Romans.[32]

This softer, almost guileless depiction is closer to the Jesus as seen in *Godspell*, the Broadway hit that reached the West End in November 1971. Critic Harold Hobson described playwright Michael Tebelak's Jesus, and his unusual look: Some people may, at least initially, be surprised to find Christ represented by a clown, with red paint on his nose . . . but if I had to choose a single one to show to a visitor it would be this Christ, this simple, wondering Christ played by David Essex. The shining thing about Mr Essex's performance is its manifest, stirring incapacity to perceive evil, or to recognise mockery. It inhabits a world in which there is no guile and no cruelty. But it is not a simplicity to be made a fool of: its meekness is as strong as it is true.[33]

BRIAN: "You've all got to work it out for yourselves!"—This sentiment alone might have pricked contemporary Christians like Mary Whitehouse, and groups including Festival of Light.[34] Brian is claiming that there is no need for a savior, a god, or organized religion, essentially, which may be the most visible evidence of the Pythons' credo, and their reason for making the film.

This also sounds remarkably similar to what one celebrated contributor to China's Democracy Wall posted in early December 1978,[35] a secular humanist plea for self-realization from former Red Guard Wei Jingsheng: We want to be masters of our own destiny. We need no gods or emperors. We do not believe in

the existence of any savior. We want to be masters of the world and not instruments used by autocrats to carry out their wild ambitions. We want a modern lifestyle and democracy for the people. Freedom and happiness are our sole objectives in accomplishing modernization.[36]

The restrictive demands of political, religious, and moralist institutions across the years likely accounts for this call for freedom, a sort of collective "leave me alone" from the overwhelmed individual. Paramount leader Deng responded to Wei's call for change by having him arrested; the Democracy Wall was cleared and declared off limits in late March 1979, six months before *Life of Brian* premiered in the United States.

CROWD: "Oh no it wasn't!"—This same pantomimic exchange goes on in Ep. 28 of *Flying Circus*, when the Principal Boy breaks into a Venezuelan police station scene: Principal Boy (Julia Breck): Hello, children!

> Police Chief (Cleese): Stop! Stop this adaptation of "Puss-in-Boots"! This is the Police Department of the State of Venezuela!
>
> Principal Boy: Oh no it isn't!
>
> Police Chief: Oh, yes it is!
>
> Principal Boy (*children joining in voice over*): Oh no it isn't!
>
> All (*plus children*): Oh yes it is!
>
> Principal Boy (*plus children*): Oh no it isn't . . .
>
> Police Chief: Shut up! Shut up![37]

Cleese ends the scene here much the same way Reg ends many of his scenes—flustered. Mandy shuts down the panto digression very quickly, as well. In *Holy Grail*, it was an animator heart attack that stopped a fatal monster attack, and in *Meaning of Life* it will be a large building that crushes the marauding Crimson Permanent Assurance as it tries to hijack the narrative.

YOUNG MAN *(to Mandy)*: "Are you a virgin?"—This might be a silly, Pythonesque question, given that the mob knows this is Brian's biological mother they're addressing, meaning she's both conceived and given birth. Immaculate conception aside, Ackerman reminds us that this wouldn't be an out-of-place question (or at least consideration) given "how highly prized virgin brides were in biblical Israel."[38] Mandy is also aligned with at least some of the single, unmarried women who have had a child during this time, and seems to support herself, as Ackerman describes: It is not surprising, then, that only servant women, who are provided for out of the resources of their masters' and mistresses' homes; prostitutes, who assumed responsibility for their own financial well-being; and a king's daughter like Tamar, who presumably could

draw on the resources of the royal palace, are identified in the Hebrew Bible as being able to live independent of a husband.[39]

Mandy doesn't appear to be a servant working in someone's household, and she isn't a king's daughter, certainly. That only leaves the possibility of prostitute, which has been hinted at earlier in the scene with a visiting centurion in Mandy and Brian's home.

This is also a fair question for the biblical time period, especially if the questioner has read (or heard read aloud) Isaiah,[40] where a reference to a virgin with child is found, and later used by Matthew (1:23). The virgin birth is a sign given by the "Lord himself," so any potential Jesus-like messiah should come from such a conception. Mandy's indignant response confirms her *virgo intacta* status, at least to the mob. (She's already admitted to having a semi-enjoyed fling with a Roman soldier, so the bloom is clearly off the rose.) In 1975, however, the question of virginal status was put to "Jesus" himself, and money was the reason. As the multimillion dollar *Jesus of Nazareth* was in production, the "smouldering" star who had been hired to play the leading role found himself in a bit of a tricky situation, not unlike what Brian experienced moments earlier with the full frontal reveal before his mother. *Private Eye*'s "Grovel" rehearses the story in mid-April 1977, when *Jesus of Nazareth* has been safely premiered:

> Lord Grade[41] has some happy news. Robert Powell, who portrays Jesus of Nazareth in the £10 million epic of that name, and his good wife Barbara are expecting their first child. A happy ending to a dangerous moment in the production of the film, two years ago, when newshounds found that Bob and Babs were cohabiting in an extramarital state. The thought of the Americans finding out that "Jesus" was living in sin made ATV apoplectic, with several hundred million dollars invested in the film. Bob obligingly got hitched.[42]

It is likely that both American and British audiences would have reacted negatively to such news, given the eventual reaction to *The Sex Life of Jesus Christ*, *The Love That Dares to Speak Its Name*, and even, to a lesser degree, *Life of Brian*.

In a ranging profile written by Caroline Moorhead and published in October 1977, Mary Whitehouse espoused her views on premarital sex and the importance of virginity: "'There is something very wonderful about keeping oneself a virgin, making one's virginity a gift to the man one loves.' The notion of restraint, self-denial, the antithesis of what she calls the 'I want it, and I want it now' mood of the Sixties is important to her."[43] And rather than being offended by the topic, Moorhead notes that Whitehouse freely discusses her

sexual choices with interviewers, being "not averse to descending to more mundane levels."[44] Mandy isn't so free with her privacy. This same year romance novelist Barbara Cartland wrote a guest column in the *Times*, "Why Virginity Is Becoming Fashionable Once More."[45] Cartland had been selling millions of copies of her novels around the world, and was certain she could account for their increasing popularity: "Why? Because all my heroines are virgins." Her description of the ideal modern heroine sounds quite Mary-like, actually: "It is the idealized woman which every man puts in a secret shrine and worships as his wife, as the mother of his children, as his guide and inspiration." Waugh comments on Cartland's revelations, too, in both *The Spectator* and in a column in *Private Eye*.[46] In the latter he celebrates the fifty-year anniversary of the loss of Cartland's own virginity, and notes that a "small commemorative party" is in the offing.

Lastly, the tabloids were full of whispers about the country's most eligible bachelor, Prince Charles, and concerns about the potential match's vestal status floated just beneath the words in every column inch. Charles's quest for an acceptable spouse began when he was still at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1968, and wouldn't end until he'd decided on Diana Spencer in 1980. Not-so-coincidentally, these are the same years the Pythons could call their own, with *Flying Circus* airing in 1969 through *Life of Brian* in 1979–1980. (Historian and academic Richard Vinen also sites Margaret Thatcher's ascendancy and triumph during this precise thirteen-year epoch, 1968–1980, from a member of the Shadow Cabinet through her first year as Britain's first female prime minister.[47]) Charles was photographed with princesses and aristocrats, British debs and foreign beauties—more than twenty "serious" relationships in all, according to Wilson's count. In November 1977 *Private Eye*'s "Grovel" mentioned three he saw as potential mates, all married but all suitably unsuited to their current husbands (in his opinion), including Camilla Parker-Bowles.[48] Charles's eventual wife, Diana, would be generally accepted as virginal prior to their marriage, which became one of the biggest stories of 1980.

REVOLUTIONARIES are everywhere, carrying in a table, controlling queues . . .—This is the *Parousia* of Brian, his appearance before adamant followers, sycophants, and those seeking sundry cures and blessings. This scene became the portmanteau scene for the several that had followed it in earlier drafts. In later (elided) scenes Brian was being prodded about healing a rich man's wife, promoting food and business ventures, appearing like a combination of Robert Powell and Andy Williams at the fee-paying Sermon on the Mount,

and where we are introduced to Otto and his suicide squad (Otto a Jewish Nazi seeking a Jewish homeland free from "riff-raff," gypsies, and Romans[49]). This final bit would have likely tipped the scales of at least good taste for the Jewish and Israeli communities. Including these scenes would have put off Brian's arrest for a further twenty screen minutes, at least, which is likely why they were removed.

FRANCIS: "Now don't jostle the chosen one, please"—There were many who believed that if they simply touched Jesus or his clothing they would be healed. In Luke 8:43–48, Jesus is surrounded by a crowd and is likely being jostled quite a bit, but when the woman who has bled for years touches his garment he knows "that power has gone out from" him. Peter even tries to tell Jesus that many were "pressing in on" him, essentially saying "pay no mind." The woman admits her touch, and Jesus blesses her and sends her on her way.

***(draft)* MAN: "Will he endorse fish?"**—This was a significant theme in the later missing scenes, where Brian was being asked to endorse "Airway Fish" and buy an olive press, then lease it back to the people, as if Reginald Maudling or Marcia Williams were making Brian's deals. On the Pythons' albums, ministers sing commercial jingles on radio, while the bishops of Leicester and Bath and Wells hawk lager and frozen peas, respectively.[50]

Former PM Wilson had been famously wearing and even shilling for Gannex raincoats,[51] the maker of which, Joe Kagan, would later find his way onto the so-called "Lavender" honours list as a life peer after HW resigned.[52] Lord Kagan would be arrested for stealing from his own company, found guilty in 1980, and would spend time in prison. Tory MP Maudling had been a consistent target of the Pythons, and his shady business dealings had been in the news since the late 1960s.[53]

"REG: *(pushing mother and baby away)* "Don't push that baby in the Savior's face"—In Mark 10:14, Jesus is answering his disciple's questions regarding the laws of divorce when young children were brought to him "that he should touch them." His disciples rebuked the parents, likely, and were in turn rebuked by Jesus—these children were like "the kingdom of God." There is a similar scene in the 1976 film *The Passover Plot*, where scores of moaning, screaming sick run after Jesus, swamping the disciples.

GREGORY: *(from across the room)* "Could he just see my wife? She has a headache"—In the elided restaurant scenes this man lowers his ill wife through the roof so that Brian can cure her, a borrow from Luke 5:17–19.

REG: "The lepers are queuing"—The lepers and the "women taken in sin" are asked to queue up for Brian's ministrations, but he pushes on past all of them to be alone, outside. There had been ten lepers (mentioned earlier) who came to Jesus to be cured, and they likely queued up for Christ's ministrations.

Queuing has become something of a British institution—"a great British tradition" and "a sensible British invention"[54]—especially during and after World War II, when lines formed regularly for everything from fish to fabric to birdseed. Later, the NHS endured jibes and complaints for the dreaded patient queues, especially those needing surgeries. In August 1967, more than half a million Britons were waiting for even minor procedures, and many for major surgeries, the shorter waits being six months, and some more than two years.[55] In the Middle East region of the 1960s and 1970s, queues were a regular sight, populated by Arabs wanting to work in Israel-held lands. In *Flying Circus* Ep. 14, we are presented with a long, winding queue of brown-coated gas men waiting to help Mrs. Pinnet (Jones) with her new cooker, the line extending well into the cartoon section that follows.[56] The ever-present dole queue, finally, was a running joke in newspaper comic panels and opinion pieces, becoming especially prevalent during the 1970s.

REG: "Brian, can I introduce the gentleman who's letting us have the mount on Sunday?"—George Harrison, who financed the film (along with Denis O'Brien), makes a quick appearance here. In the missing additional Sermon on the Mount scene, it's likely this same "Mr. Papadopolis" who is allowing access, and whose man, Hosea, asks everyone to be more mindful of the donkeys' droppings. In this instance his name is spelled "Papadopoulos," for some reason. There were many open-air music festivals during this period—famously Woodstock and, infamously, Altamont, but also many in Hyde Park, for example—which the excised Brian performance very much resembles.

REG: "Those possessed by devils, try to keep them under control . . ."—Many of the physical complaints during this period were taken to be demonic possessions as opposed to medical illnesses, and were treated as such. Bringing the afflicted to a spiritual healer as opposed to a "doctor" makes sense, then. See the discussion earlier in the "Ex-leper" scene.

REG: "Incurables, I'm afraid you'll just have to wait for a few minutes"—This is one of the few rim shot jokes in the film, not unlike Reg's earlier "struggle against reality" jibe aimed at Stan/Loretta.

REG: "Women taken in sin line up against that wall, will ya?"—This might also be another crude reference to the acts of prostitution that often took

place in narrow, “Gropecunt-like” alleys, where business was accomplished against the alley wall. These were mentioned earlier when Reg calls Brian a klutz.

Notes

1. Larsen, *BAFHG*, 286, 291.
2. Dobson and Payne, *Carlos Complex*, 39.
3. Dobson and Payne, *Carlos Complex*, 43.
4. Hymn 95 in the 1965 version of the Anglican Hymn Book is "Away in the Manger."
5. *Private Eye*, 17 September 1976: 9.
6. "Red Army Five Block Tokyo Trial," *Times*, 12 February 1873: 6.
7. *Baader-Meinhof: In Love with Terror*, a.t.
8. Ulrike Meinhof also hung herself in her cell in 1976.
9. The Webbs' work with the Fabian socialists led to a reworking of the Poor Law in 1909, and would become the foundation for the Welfare State after World War II.
10. Jenkins, *Mrs. Thatcher's Revolution*, 6. Crosland's *Future of Socialism* would provide a giddy, forward-looking wish list of the good things that properly revised socialism should cultivate. It reads like what the Romans brought to the ungrateful PFJ, with such improvements as more open-air cafes, brighter and gayer streets at night, later closing hours for public houses, more local repertory theatres . . . more hospitable hoteliers and restaurateurs, brighter and cleaner eating houses, more riverside cafes, more pleasure gardens . . . more murals and pictures in public places, better designs for furniture and pottery and women's clothes, statues in the centre of new housing estates, better-designed new street lamps and telephone kiosks and so on. (521–22) This seems to be Crosland's preemptive strike at the Tories' cries over the next two decades—"What have the socialists ever done for us?"
11. Crosland, *The Future of Socialism*, 521.
12. This exchange between Brian and Judith occurs in the draft version of the script, and is found just before the stone salesman accosts them. In the finished film, Brian and his mother are walking to the stoning, Brian's just glimpsed Judith from a distance, and she won't be seen again until the Colosseum scene. Quote from Jenkins, *Mrs. Thatcher's Revolution*, 6.
13. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 493.
14. The Roman curator of Judea, c. 48–52. See also Smallwood, *JURR*, 263–64.
15. Josephus, *AJ*, 20.5.3 (Whiston, 419).
16. Herbert would say that his characters and story illustrate the dangers of surrendering to a charismatic leader, and that thinking for one's self was always the best option; just what Brian and Cleese would say. See Clareson's *Understanding Contemporary Science Fiction*, 169–72.
17. The news of this sensation broke the day before Palin flew off to Tunisia for shooting.
18. "Photos Found to Be Genuine: Sex Scandal Involving Bishop Shakes Church," *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* 5 September 1978: 5A.
19. "Unfrock Bishop, Say Priests," *Daily Telegraph*, 9 September 1978: 3.
20. This lurid incident played out in the press for many months—the *Daily Mail* headlines screamed "'Rasputin' of Greece Charged with Debauchery" and "The Bishop and Three Nudes"—and eventually became a popular play that would be banned, its performers and director arrested. See Nikos Kokosalakis's "The Political Significance of Popular Religion in Greece," 43.
21. Josephus, *WJ* 3.5.4 (Whiston, 505).
22. *BAFHG*, 144–45.
23. By the final draft and shooting, "disciples" Karen and Cheryl have disappeared, and Judith has taken their place in Brian's bed.
24. See the entries for "enormous statue of Pilate" and "The Aqueduct?" above for more on these situations, one of which ended peacefully, the other in significant bloodshed and lingering animosity toward Pilate.
25. Matthew 22:15–22.
26. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 8

27. See the entry above for “They’ve bled us white . . .” in “The PFJ Plan Their Raid” scene.

28. On *Monty Python’s Previous Record*, Idle offers a “Teach Yourself Heath” guide for record buyers, where Heath tells the listener that “there are no quick and easy answers” (drawn from the 1971 Leader’s Speech in Brighton).

29. “Leader’s Speech, Blackpool 1973.” http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=120. In fact, Heath uses the ”quick and easy” phrase many times in his political speeches.

30. See http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=174. Labour’s belief in the workability of the Social Contract would figure in Thatcher’s ascension three years later.

31. See Kotker, *HLTJ*; also Maier, *Pontius Pilate*, 1968.

32. Well, it *would* have had religious consequences if the Pythons had decided to include in the world of the film the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Sanhedrin—and Jewishness in general—in anything more than a cursory way. It’s possible the Pythons were simply willing to fight the “blasphemy” battle with Christians, but not Jews. It may be that, like relentlessly poking fun at Scots and giving the Irish a miss during the run of *Flying Circus*, the troupe knew which sacred cows could be slaughtered, and which might kick. (The IRA were blowing things up, including Parliament Square at the heart of the British government.) See Larsen, *MPFC: UC* 1.123 and 2.11, 65.

33. “Rejoice, Rejoice,” *Sunday Times*, 22 November 1971: 37.

34. The Nationwide Festival of Light was a grassroots Christian organization created to campaign for a return of Britain to a pre-permissive society mindset.

35. In the “real” Python world, the troupe screened the first Julian Doyle-produced cut of the film on 6 December 1978, and were pleased with the audience’s response (Palin, *Diaries*, 514–15).

36. Quoted in Caryl, *Strange Rebels*, 176.

37. *ATW*, 2.28.73.

38. Ackerman, “Women in Ancient Israel,” 4.

39. Ackerman, “Women in Ancient Israel,” 4–5.

40. Isaiah 7:10–16.

41. Baron Grade (Louis Gradansky) was a dancer, talent manager, media mogul, and owner of ATV. Grade and his brother Leslie have been mentioned in *Flying Circus* Ep. 34 (*MPFC: UC*, 2.107). Lew was also mentioned a number of times by the Goons, and the Jewish character “Lew” (voiced by Sellers) is a likely salute to the ambitious impresario.

42. *Private Eye*, 15 April 1977: 5.

43. “A *Times* Profile,” *Times*, 31 October 1977: 8.

44. “A *Times* Profile,” 8.

45. *Times*, 12 January 1977: 8. The eventual Princess Diana Spencer read Cartland novels voraciously through the late 1970s. There remains a well-known image of the young Diana in a comfy chair, *c.* 1977, several Cartland novels around her.

46. *Spectator*, 12 February 1977: 6; *Private Eye*, 21 January 1977: 15.

47. Vinen, *Thatcher’s Britain*, 7–8.

48. *Private Eye*, 25 November 1977: 6. Bowles eventually married Prince Charles in 2005.

49. If Otto was to have been the Pythons’ take on the ironic evils of Zionism (displacing thousands of Arabs, e.g.), it’s even more ironic that, as Burleigh notes, the “Zionist Establishment was either socialist or Marxist . . . evidenced by the fact that it was not until 1977 that the state of Israel elected a right-wing government” (*BRT*, 92). Idle’s portrayal of this ultra-nationalist Jew, then, is as contemporary as can be.

50. Listen to “Baxter’s” from *Monty Python’s Previous Record* and “Treadmill Lager” from *Another Monty Python Record*.

51. For example, “Wilson, Gannex and Me,” *Daily Mail*, 6 July 1976: 13; “Mr. Stonehouse Tells Court of Raincoat Meeting,” *Times*, 6 July 1976: 5; also even earlier, “Politicians ‘Turned into Puppets,’” *Times*, 29 April 1968: 2; and Ferdinand Mount’s “The Loss of Indignation” looks closely at the lack of shame, really, in the House (Maudling, et al.), *Spectator*, 30 December 1978: 4. There are dozens of these tongue-clucking articles.

52. Also see Donoughue, *DSD*, 1.519.
53. See the entries for Maudling in *MPFC: UC*.
54. *Daily Mail*, 27 February 1973: 13, and 20 September 1969: 6.
55. "Hospital Orders Waiting List Inquiry," *Daily Mail*, 8 August 1967: 7.
56. *MPFC: UC*, 1.231.

SCENE TWENTY
BRIAN IS ARRESTED, AGAIN

JUDITH: “. . . Reg has been dominating us for too long”—Charismatic terror leaders like Carlos, Arafat, Baader, and Shigenobu could fall out of favor with followers, especially if the goals at the top don’t match the foot soldiers’ needs, or vice versa. When Shigenobu had to flee Japan, her minions were forced to disband or team up with sympathetic causes like Fatah; Arafat saw more violent offshoots of the PLO go their own way when talks of rapprochement began; and Baader harangued his followers to action, urging them on as he and the rest of the RAF leadership languished in prison. Brian would agree with Judith here, but when she tries to pass the PFJ’s mantle to Brian’s shoulders, he balks, admitting that he’s not a revolutionary at all.

A familiar ROMAN CENTURION’S hand claps itself down on Brian’s shoulder—There are two significant elements of this action worth mentioning. First, the authoritative “hand on the shoulder” is a “familiar” throwback to *Flying Circus*, where trench-coated inspectors appeared regularly to rein in the mayhem, often clapping a gloved hand on the shoulder of the suspect. In Ep. 29, for example, Inspector Leopard (Cleese) of the Fraud Film Squad breaks up an Elizabethan film being made by a Luchino Visconti impostor (Jones), and later Inspector Baboon (Idle) attempts to make an arrest of a blackface Michelangelo Antonioni impostor (also Jones).[1] And in the “Another Six Minutes of *Monty Python’s Flying Circus*” section of that same episode (featuring “The Argument Clinic”), Inspector Flying Fox of the Yard (Chapman) breaks into the silly sketch in a very familiar way: “Right now you two me old beauties, you are nicked.”[2] This characterization is a direct borrow from the very popular *Dixon of Dock Green* show the Pythons had grown up watching, and where “Evening all” was a standard greeting.[3] Inspector Flying Fox of the Yard is finally interrupted by Inspector Thompson’s Gazelle of the Yard (Idle), who is interrupted by another inspector who claps him on the shoulder (“Hold it!”), followed by yet another inspector who claps him on the shoulder, and the sketch ends. *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* had ended similarly, a victim of its own reflexive, undercutting structure.[4]

Secondly, it's no surprise that the Roman authorities would continue to look for a subversive like Brian, even without an active police force. Smallwood notes that the popularity of a "terrorist" like Jesus bar Abbas kept the local Roman constabulary wary of similar irruptions of widespread anti-Roman sentiment, with Christ himself commenting on the phenomena:

> Christ's reproach to the crowd who arrested Him for treating a peaceful preacher as a terrorist by coming against Him in arms[5] suggests that the rounding up of terrorists was a commonplace in Judaea at the time. And indeed attacks on law-abiding citizens by individual terrorists living on plunder were so much an accepted feature of the social scene then that Christ used them in His teaching without comment.[6]

This fear is demonstrated when the gathered Jews and Roman soldiers all flee as the terrifying Judean Peoples' Front race toward the crosses later in the film.

CENTURION: "You are fucking nicked me old beauty!"—Is this the "Judas" moment for Judith Iscariot? It doesn't appear so, given Judith's reaction. Brian is simply taken into custody after a brief exchange with Judith, and also after they consummated their relationship the night before.

There is no disciplic Judas figure, per se, in the film, no betrayal, likely one of the early decisions about things to avoid as the troupe pondered its "Monty Python's Life of Christ" story at the earliest stages. There is a Judas moment in one of their film influences, *I'm All Right Jack*, meaning the possibility was at least on the table as they wrote what would become *Brian*. When Stanley Windrush decides to be loyal to his uncle and go back to work, crossing picket lines and disrupting the otherwise "solid" strike, he is called a "Judas" by the shop stewards and Mr. Kite.

After about the year 52, the new procurator for Judea, Antonius Felix, set about rounding up known terrorists to try and rein in the blossoming anarchy in the province. His forces were even able to ambush and capture Eleazar, the terrorist leader who had helped organize a recent attack on the Samaritans.[7] Eleazar was sent to Rome in chains and likely executed. Felix also managed the fate of the former high priest Jonathan, a different kind of threat:

> Felix also bore an ill-will to Jonathan, the high priest, because he frequently gave him admonitions about governing the Jewish affairs better than he did, lest he should himself have complaints made of him by the multitude. . . . So Felix contrived a method whereby he might get rid of him, now he was become so continuously troublesome to him; for such continual admonitions are grievous to those who are disposed to act unjustly.[8]

So Felix[9] wearies of being dressed down for his administration's and his own shortcomings. (Brian doesn't reach this level of impertinence with Pilate, though

his helpful “mishearings,” corrections of pronunciation, and declaration of his Roman blood seem enough to condemn him—it’s the Roman guards who snigger disrespectfully.) Felix then arranged for a friend of Jonathan’s to deliver the high priest into the hands of *sicarii*, Judas-like (and for the promise of money), where he was stabbed to death in a crowd by the cloaked assassins.[10] Josephus credits this as the first sicarii assassination, and bemoans the far-reaching consequences:

> And this seems to me to have been the reason why God, out of his hatred to these men’s wickedness, rejected our city; and as for the temple, he no longer esteemed it sufficiently pure for him to inhabit therein, but brought the Romans upon us, and threw a fire upon the city to purge it; and brought upon us, our wives, and children, slavery,—as desirous to make us wiser by our calamities.[11]

There’s no such person as Josephus in *Life of Brian*, except perhaps the manacled Ben and the doomsaying prophets, and certainly no wholesale, God-cast retribution.

JUDITH struggles briefly with a SOLDIER . . .—What she does is slap the Centurion’s back armor, then his helmet, also from behind. He clearly sees her as no threat, and simply tells her to leave off.

PILATE: “. . . given us a good wun for our money”—This is an American colloquialism, but these kinds of anachronistic moments are on par for the Pythons. This rearrest is key though, for what had been happening in the world outside the film. Remember that in 1976 George Davis had escaped wrongful arrest and incarceration (he’d been sentenced to seventeen years) for a 1975 robbery, nipping away from the authorities when bumbling police couldn’t prove their case against him. But his spurt of freedom was nearly as brief as Brian’s. In September 1977 Davis was caught red-handed, like Brian, working as a getaway driver for yet *another* bank robbery. The entire 1975–1976 Davis case was rehashed in the news, including the “George Davis is Innocent OK” graffiti, when this new arrest came to light. The judge in the 1977 case bemoaned the fact that no death penalty meant less of a deterrent for armed recidivists such as these, and sentenced Davis to fifteen years.[12]

PILATE: “This time, I guawantee you will not escape”—There seems to be nothing *ultra vires* in relation to Pilate’s statutory power, at least as he is portrayed in the film. What he is about to do was also well within his power as prefect of a Roman province. This is justice delayed, since Brian was able to escape earlier, but it is a sanctioned legal proceeding nonetheless. In a discussion of Pilate’s authority to pass sentence on virtually anyone—in this case, Jesus—brought before him, Smallwood outlines that authority: “The hearing before

Pilate was a regular *cognitio extra ordinem*, a trial conducted without a jury at the discretion of the governor, who could pass sentence by virtue of the powers delegated to him by the emperor; and as the prisoner put up no defence, Pilate had no option but to convict."[13] So even if the historical Pilate was more weak (Smallwood) than vicious (Philo), the Pilate in the film seems to have been ready to sentence Brian to die at either one of these two goes.

Pilate also needs to make sure Brian is punished this time, and in a public way. His crime had been one that threatened to upend the authoritarian society perpetuated by the Romans, and that potential upset had to be righted. The centurions managed to stumble into rearresting Brian (after searching for him and his poorly hidden colleagues in Matthias's house and finding only a spoon), and the promised punishment will be what rights the ship: "Pre-industrial states could rely on neither a reliable police force nor secure prisons to provide their populations with such public reassurance," Wiedemann writes. "That reassurance had instead to be provided by the punishment itself; and that explains why punishment normally had to be both cruel and public."[14] Not long after this, Pilate won't remember they even have a "Bwian" in custody, and he agrees to free him even though he's been charged with this most capital of crimes.

GUARD: "A hundred and thirty-nine, Sir, special celebration. Passover, Sir"—Pilate has embraced the democidal power he's been gifted by the emperor, though there is no historical evidence that Pilate used festivals to execute a special number of criminals. There is also significant scholarly disagreement about the celebrated release of a criminal from Roman justice at festival time.[15]

This mention of the annual festival is accurate, but the name at this point in history is anachronistic. As he looks at the dating of the Johannine Gospel, Zeitlin notes that the "use of the term Feast of the Passover . . . demonstrates that the Gospel according to John was compiled sometime after the destruction of the Temple."[16] He goes on to remind readers that in the Bible the name "Passover" is only used in "connection with the Paschal Lamb, while the festival itself is called the Festival of Unleavened Bread."[17] Zeitlin concludes: "There is no mention in the Bible of the Festival of Passover." For the Pythons (and most commercial films in general), historical accuracy can yield to convenience, since most viewers would have been stumped if the guard had answered "special celebration . . . Unleavened Bread, Sir."

PILATE: “. . . we now have 140 . . .”—The Romans weren’t generally this bloodthirsty, at least outside of the arena. Mass executions were most often reserved for times of insurrection when a show of strength (proving the futility of revolt) was required. Thousands were crucified following Spartacus’s slave rebellion, and in the days and weeks of Titus’s siege of Jerusalem in 70, Titus’s forces would round up as many as five hundred foragers a day outside the city walls and crucify them in full view of the besieged inhabitants.[18] The goal was to convince the Jews to surrender the city.

Kropotkin describes the “desperate resistance” a sitting government like tsarists (or the Romans) will put up when challenged, a resistance to change that “is savage in its repressions.”[19] There’s never been talk of a trial, or simply imprisonment or even exile for Brian. From the first moment he was in jail for raiding Pilate’s palace the specter of crucifixion has been looming. “Rebels deserve execution,” Wiedemann says of those who would refuse Rome’s offer of provincial protection.[20] First the old prisoner Ben mentions the likelihood of crucifixion, given that this is Brian’s first offense, and the Centurion then jokes that Pilate wants to see Brian to decide whether he is crucified head-up or head-down. It’s clear that Pilate did have this kind of authority in 33, and acted on it often. Wiedemann notes that just a few decades later, in 69, the unsettled Roman Empire was targeted by groups who would take “advantage of the confusion of Rome’s civil wars,” for example, “Garamantine marauders.”[21] These marauders were captured and publicly executed, perhaps even in a games setting with gladiators and wild animals.[22] After the fall of Jerusalem in the 70s, Titus and Vespasian would make sure thousands of Jewish captives died in bloody, well-organized games.[23]

In the 1970s, the treatment of terrorists once in custody was often less severe. Many were sentenced to long prison terms, which for a time increased the likelihood of additional attacks to ransom them out of prison. The Lod Airport survivor Kozo Okamoto *wanted* to be executed, and had even asked to be allowed to commit suicide, according to Farrell, but these requests were denied:

> Okamoto was tried under the antiterrorist law formulated during the British occupation of Palestine. The purpose of the law was to control the activities of Zionists seeking the establishment of an Israeli state through the use of force. The law was used in this case because Israeli authorities viewed the political nature of the Tel Aviv attack as a threat to the security of the state. Under ordinary criminal law, the penalty could be no greater than life in prison. However, the antiterrorism law allowed for the death penalty.[24]

Released from prison in 1985, Okamoto was granted asylum in Lebanon, where he reportedly still resides.

CENTURION: "Permission to disperse them please"—The crowds that gathered when Pilate had tweaked the Jewish population with his displays of Roman cultus images were also ordered to disperse; one refusal ended in some significant bloodshed. Our Pilate has nothing to fear from these crowds; they come armed with derision, only.

PILATE: "My address is one of the high points of the Passover"—Pilate thinks the people of Jewusalem are eagerly awaiting his address, but it wasn't likely, given his reputation. Fast forward to 1977, and the Queen's Silver Jubilee is being planned, celebrating twenty-five years on the throne. Many in Britain questioned the tact of holding such an expensive fete amid high unemployment and Callaghan's cuts across the public sector.[25] The Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) took to the streets, editorial pages, and airwaves to show their opposition to the Jubilee and the monarchy in general. SWP-created "Stuff the Jubilee" and "Abolish the Monarchy 1977" badges and posters were everywhere. The SWP also took out a small ad in *Private Eye* condemning the entire process:

> Jubilee? What a load of rubbish! Arrogant, hypocritical rubbish in a year when living standards have been cut by 4 per cent, when hospitals are being closed "for lack of money," when our children are being taught in overcrowded classrooms "for lack of money," when councils have stopped building houses "for lack of money." The royal family costs as much as a new hospital every year. . . . They're costing millions more this jubilee year. Don't let them get away with it. Tell them to STUFF THE JUBILEE![26]

The Sex Pistols would have their say this same day when they played their raucous version of "God Save the Queen" while sailing down the Thames, leading to their arrest.

PILATE: ". . . Biggus Dickus has come all the way from Wome"—It was common for the nobility and wealthy to make trips across the empire for festivals, and it was very likely that Pilate, his household in Caesarea, and his friends, even from Rome, would have traveled to Jerusalem for Passover. Pilate may have first visited Jerusalem during Passover, actually, in the spring of 27.[27]

CENTURION: "You're not thinking of giving it a miss today, sir?"—"Give it a miss" is one of those more recent idioms in British English; the *OED* credits it to the early part of the twentieth century. It simply means skipping something, or passing up on an opportunity.

CENTURION: "It's just that the crowd is in a funny mood today, sir"—This was actually a concern to emperors, especially, as they attended public

events like *ludi* and *munera*. The "mood" could strike different crowds to ask for releases of slaves or prisoners, to complain about price rises, and even to protest the removal of a favorite statue to an emperor's home.[28] Emperors knew that attending such public spectacles put them in the position of, for example, being asked by the demanding crowd to agree to "the manumission of a slave belonging to someone who was not the editor" of those particular games.[29] This meant the emperor had to go to the slave's actual owner and ask for such permissions, and then do what the crowd asked. These very forceful "Welease Woger"–like demands are at least part of the reason, historians believe, that Tiberius "gave up attending spectacles," while both Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius also dealt with these overwhelmingly forceful requests.[30] Wiedemann concludes that

> attendance at *munera* subjected emperors to pressure from the people, rather than diverting potential expressions of political will in other directions. Tiberius preferred to keep away altogether to avoid such pressure; but the unpopularity which this brought upon him shows that it was a mistake which later emperors knew they could not afford to repeat. . . . To appear not at all would have been a challenge to the people by denying that the power exercised at these events was shared, even if only symbolically, between emperor and people.[31]

For our purposes, the symbolic power is shared not at a games event but at a very public address from Pilate's porch, shared between the regional governor Pilate and his "wabble of wowdy webels." The people do get what they want.

This is also a comment that is an echo of the recent Passion film, *Jesus of Nazareth*. As the condemned Christ is being led out of Pilate's jails it's clear that the locals out in the streets are more agitated than usual:

> A CENTURION comes through the prison gate, calls down the passageway.
>
> Centurion: Hey Mark! Where's the prisoner? Come on.
>
> *At the far end of the passage is a JAILER.*
>
> Jailer: Here's your man.
>
> *He pulls Christ into the passageway, bent over and bleeding, tied to the heavy patibulum.*
>
> Jailer: Ahh. The King of the Jews.
>
> Centurion: Hurry up. This crowd worries me.
>
> *The JAILER pushes CHRIST toward the bright entrance.*
>
> Jailer: Here. Take him.

The mood of the crowd has been measured by the Centurion, and the rest of the trip to the site of crucifixion is a struggle through angry, confused, or weeping citizens.

PILATE: “I’m surprised to hear you wattled by a wabble of wowdy webels”—But perhaps there shouldn’t be surprise here. Judea had been one of the more restive provinces held by Rome, “having been torn by twelve major rebellions since its conquest.”[32] The Jews bristled almost continuously under Roman rule, never submitting to being dominated; many of Rome’s other conquests admitted to the benefits of Roman citizenship and protection.

CENTURION: “A bit thundery, sir”—A colloquialism simply meaning the threat “of an explosion of anger or passion,” meaning the Centurion and Pilate are now actually speaking the same language at the same time. It won’t matter, since Pilate misinterprets the Centurion’s warning as reticence, and heads out to the crowd, anyway.

PILATE: “. . . and cwucify him well”—There probably weren’t many failed crucifixions, though some were rescued from unattended crosses, or the nailing might be insufficient to hold the body, *etc.*

Notes

1. See Larsen, *MPFC: UC*, 2.40–49. The hand even comes from offscreen, just as in Ep. 29.
2. *ATW*, 2.89.
3. *MPFC: UC*, 2.43.
4. Larsen, *BAFHG*, 487.
5. Smallwood lists Matthew 26:55, Mark 14:48, and Luke 22:52 as examples.
6. Smallwood, *JURR*, 164; Smallwood further lists Luke 10:30, and John 10:1 and 8.
7. Smallwood, *JURR*, 274.
8. Josephus, *AJ*, 20.8.5 (Whiston, 421).
9. Felix is also mentioned in Acts in relation to Paul; he arrests him and interviews him, hoping for a bribe, which isn't forthcoming. Pilate never asks for nor does he seem to expect any kind of tribute from Brian—he's simply interviewing him prior to his sentencing and execution.
10. *AJ*, 20.8.5 (Whiston, 421); also *JURR*, 274–75.
11. *AJ*, 20.8.5 (Whiston, 422).
12. "George Davis Is Guilty OK," *Daily Mail*, 25 July 1978: 16–17. In September 1977 the Pythons were writing together on *Brian*. It's no surprise that the Davis case—arrest, graffiti, escape, rearrest, conviction—ended up figuring prominently into not only the film's production design, but into Brian's character arc.
13. *JURR*, 169.
14. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 72.
15. See Husband, "The Pardoning of Prisoners by Pilate" (1917); Brown, *The Death of a Messiah* (1994); a contemporary, popular version can be found in Maier, *Pontius Pilate*, 130.
16. Zeitlin, "Crucifixion of Jesus Re-Examined," 351.
17. Zeitlin, "Crucifixion of Jesus Re-Examined," 351.
18. Kotker, *HLTJ*, 123.
19. Quoted in Iviansky, "Individual Terror," 45.
20. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 104.
21. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 15–16. The Garamantines had been a nuisance to Rome for many years. See Felipe Fernandez-Armesto's *Civilizations: Culture, Ambition, and the Transformation of Nature*, 64–65. The Romans of the time reported that these "barbarously exotic" Garamantine marauders, like the PFJ, covered their faces, though with scars and tattoos rather than veils (64).
22. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 16.
23. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 104.
24. Farrell, *BRJ*, 140.
25. One of the more popular placards seen on the streets read: "Cuts? Axe the monarchy!" The Queen had much earlier asked that no one go to any financial extreme in planning Jubilee events.
26. *Private Eye*, 10 June 1977: 2.
27. Meier, *Pontius Pilate*, 85.
28. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 168. Tiberius eventually put the statue back, by the way.
29. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 167.
30. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 168.
31. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 169.
32. Maier, *Pontius Pilate*, 75.

SCENE TWENTY-ONE
THE PFJ DISCUSSES

REG: ". . . item 4 . . . attainment of world supremacy within the next four years"—One of the major influences on the Pythons, apart from the Goons, was Peter Cook. A Cambridge alum like Chapman, Cleese, and Idle, as early as 1964 Cook had formed the "World Domination League." In the group's stated goals, the date for successful domination had already passed, but they pressed on.[1] The PFJ won't seem to mind missing a deadline, either.

So the Peoples' Front of Judea are not just trying to rid themselves of the Romans, but have set their sights on ruling the world. This is quite in line with the thinking of the first-century Zealots who, according to Josephus, following an "ambiguous oracle," believed that "at that time from their country one should rule the world."[2] The Zealots believed one of their own (Judas or Eleazar?) could be this liberator, while Josephus obsequiously assured his own future by claiming the prophecy was fulfilled when Vespasian became emperor while campaigning in Judea.[3] Judas was eventually killed, Eleazar died at Masada, and Josephus became a favorite of the Flavian dynasty. One of the Qumran[4] scrolls, the *Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness*, actually supports the PFJ's optimism, as it "envisages a six years' struggle between the forces of Israel and the Gentiles, with varying fortunes, until God intervenes mightily to give final victory to his people."[5] This optimism is based on the "forces of Israel," meaning likely more than the dozen or so PFJ members. What's also missing here, for the PFJ, is the ask for or expectation of God's help. Reg and friends are a secular group—they are seeking miracles through militancy, not messiahs.

In 63 BC—less than one hundred years prior to the events depicted in the film—the Roman senator Catiline had planned a very similar revolt with very similar ends: the overthrow of the Roman government. Catiline was a well-born soldier and statesman who was accused of myriad crimes—including, in Sallust's

history, adultery with a Vestal Virgin and beheading his brother-in-law, then parading the head around Rome.[6] The terrorist plan was discovered by Cicero, and Catiline's co-conspirators arrested, while Catiline fled. His comrades in Roman custody were executed immediately under orders from Cicero. Catiline's army fell apart in the light of scrutiny, and he died in battle with many of his followers.[7] Cicero's treatment of these terrorists is identical to Pilate's approach for Brian—summary execution.

More recently, while the PLO's charter seems to indicate a more regionally focused revolution, Dobson and Payne write of the PFLP that, having "dreams of world revolution, they had always been more internationally involved than Fatah."[8] The earliest incarnation of what would become the Japanese Red Army —in 1966 simply a more "violence-oriented" offshoot of the Japan Communist Party—"called for the complete destruction of the existing social system in Japan," this based on Japan's "complicity" with the United States in the Vietnam war effort.[9] They wanted to remake Japan in a new revolutionary image, and without the presence or influence of the United States, its military, or culture. The JRA truly "embraced the concept of a simultaneous world revolution," Farrell concludes.[10]

REG: "Francis, you've been doing some work on this?"—The PFJ is clearly all about planning, a notion the Pythons had grown up hearing, especially in the postwar years. Rather than surrender the closely held wartime control over much of the nation's production, distribution, and consumption, social engineers like Bevan, Cripps, and Beveridge saw the opportunity for a fairer Britain. In their estimations, planning at the central government level could mean every Briton works, has enough food and entertainment, and lives and retires safely and comfortably—social justice at its best. Leaving the economy to capitalist forces or the upper class would mean more of the same, with the rich remaining rich and the poor remaining poor, and an enormous, silent working class somewhere in the bulging middle. Planning was the answer to this inequality, Bogdanor mentions:

> The second element [after the Welfare State] was a belief in planning, which was a great contrast to the end of the First World War, when planning and nationalisation had rapidly been succeeded by de-control. The Labour Party, in its 1945 Manifesto, called "Let us Face the Future," said that it would plan "from the ground up." Herbert Morrison, Leader of the House of Commons, said in 1946 that, "planning, as it is now taking shape in this country under our eyes, is something new and constructively revolutionary, which will be regarded in times to come as a contribution to civilisation as vital and distinctively British as parliamentary democracy and the rule of law."[11]

The politicians and trade union representatives that the Pythons tend to present are planners, like the PFJ.

FRANCIS: ". . . I think five years is optimistic . . ."—The PFJ weren't the only terror group with overly optimistic ambitions. Lev Tikhomirov had been certain that a vigorous two-to three-year terror campaign against the sitting tsarist government in Russia would be enough to bring about collapse.[12] The Soviet Union under Stalin and the PRC under Mao laid out a series of (occasionally successful, often disastrous) five-year plans to centralize and improve the nations' vast resources and industry, using a commitment to Communist principles as guide. The revolutionary Daniel Cohn-Bendit, leader of 1968 student protests in France and then London, would many years later admit that he and his mates were also optimistic, and even "a bit naive and excessive from time to time."[13] The article continues, rehearsing names covered in these pages: "You would hear much the same from their immediate ideological descendants, Ulrike Meinhof, Donald DeFreeze, Eldridge Cleaver, Lynette 'Squeaky' Frome [*sic*], Leila Khaled etc., those people who made the 1970s such an entertaining place to be, with their bombs, guns and ludicrous liberationist ideologies."[14] The PFJ are meeting and talking as if they are the opposition party, actually, biding their time, waiting for the ruling party, the Romans, to run themselves out of office. Of course, the PFJ aren't actually *doing* anything, since they are currently out of power; they are the shadow party. In this they are like Thatcher and the Tories waiting for the economy to undermine Labour completely after 1975. (The economy would carry the day for the Tories, however.) As *Brian* was being produced, Britain (and people like Palin and Jones) were even smugly certain that a Tory like Thatcher could never be elected. In fact it became the Pythons' Labour Party that would remain unelected for the following eighteen years.

FRANCIS: ". . . unless we can smash the Roman Empire within the next twelve months"—First, the Roman Empire (meaning after the Republic) enjoyed a one-and-a-half millennia lifetime, give or take a few decades, meaning Francis is being optimistic, at best. In the year 33, when this film is ostensibly set, the Roman Empire was still growing; it wouldn't reach its apex, size-wise, until the third century, long after Brian, Reg, and the PFJ are gone.[15]

As has been seen, most revolutionaries overestimate their cause's popularity and influence—the masses generally don't rise up and join, and leadership often fractures after a few arrests or deaths. In the mess that was Jerusalem between 66 and 70, when groups *like* the PFJ were very active, the overly optimistic rebels

had managed to seize control of the city by late 67, less than a year after the isolated hostilities—between insurgents and local Roman cohorts, then between insurgents and insurgents—burst into open fighting. This twelve-month success within the city's walls certainly led the revolutionaries to believe that licking Rome would be as easy.[16] The wealthy (those interested in "peace" and survival) would soon pack up and leave, according to Josephus: "Many of the most eminent of the Jews swam away from the city, as from a ship when it was going to sink" (or a "rat out of an aqueduct"?).[17] The bulk of the population never did join the rebels, however, and many more fled the city before the Romans arrived, or remained and died rather horribly in the privations of the prolonged siege.[18]

Second, there are six PFJ acolytes—"urban guerrillas"—in the cell meeting here. Only Judith is missing, as well as Brian, who has been arrested by the Romans. That means there are seven revolutionaries prepared to overthrow the largest and most technologically advanced empire of the ancient world. Nineteenth-century socialist Louis Blanqui had envisioned just such a possibility—a small band of committed revolutionaries overthrowing a sitting government—though he was never able to unseat the monarchy in France, and actually spent much of his life in prison as a rabid republican.[19] In nihilist Sergei Nechaev's mind, eight committed members of his "People's Justice" cell could unseat the tsarist monarchy.[20] Paucity in numbers isn't unusual, however, even for the most recent well-known terror groups, as Laqueur notes:

> Terrorist groups in contrast to guerrilla units do not grow beyond a certain limit. The basic unit usually consists of three to ten people. Some of the recent terrorist "armies" such as the Japanese Red Army, the Baader-Meinhof group . . . the Angry Brigade, the Symbionese Liberation Army, etc., numbered a few dozen members at the height of their exploits.[21]

Also recently, in 1969 Colonel Qaddafi and just "eleven other like-minded revolutionaries" were able to topple King Idris and claim Libya—but Idris was no Caesar, and Tripoli no Roman Empire.[22] Much closer to home, in the decade leading up to the creation of *Life of Brian*, the minority Provisional Army Council—or Provos—had convinced themselves "that as long as they had the support of most Catholics" in Northern Ireland, partition could be ended, and both the Irish Protestants and the British could be defeated.[23] The Provos' optimistic goal sounds familiar: "It [had] turned into a fight to force an end to the United Kingdom and to bring about the unification of Ireland."[24] Nothing short of full revolution, then, just what the Peoples' Front of Judea is calling for.

On the economic front, Ted Heath had taken as his mandate in 1970 to curb the growing powers of the unions, power that the previous Labour administrations

had drip-dropped to organized labor to keep the economy running smoothly. Heath chose a frontal assault, pushing legislation that strangled income growth and hobbled strike actions, actions that he assumed would have the support of British consumers. This was "his strategic mistake," Marr writes. Heath chose to "attack union power head-on and in a single act" (like the PFJ assaulting Pilate's palace), "rather than piecemeal, as [Thatcher's] wilier government would."[25] By 1972–1973 Heath's ambitious agenda was driven onto the rocks of a miner's strike in a gale of an OPEC oil embargo—it was the perfect storm.[26] Francis's timeline is a fine example of the inapposite expectations many twentieth-century "revolutionaries" cultivated, whether they wanted to end Japan's monarchy and "occupation" by the United States, sever Northern Ireland's Westminster umbilical, upend France's higher educational system, reduce the powers of Big Labor, feed the California Bay Area's poor, or replace entirely the capitalist and imperialist governments (and influences) of Britain, Germany, or the United States. Fifty years on and more, all of these leviathans remain unslain. Even the revolutionary's spiritual leader, philosopher Herbert Marcuse, in a 1978 BBC interview cited earlier, acknowledged the blinkered shortcomings of the New Left:

> Well I would mention perhaps as a main defect the unrealistic language and in many cases the totally unrealistic strategy among the New Left, by no means general, but very definitely among the New Left, the refusal to recognize that we are not in a revolutionary situation in the advanced industrial countries, that we are not even in a prerevolutionary situation, and that the strategy has to be adopted [*sic*] to this situation.[27]

The always dependable Tony Benn not only helped underscore the silliness of these kinds of declarative moments, but he provided many of them over his entertaining ministerial and political career. In October 1980, just months after the much-heralded premiere of *Life of Brian*, Labour held its rather gloomy party conference in the rather gloomy Blackpool. This was also just months after Margaret Thatcher and her brand of conservatism had swept in to office, surprising most political mandarins. Party conferences are times for licking wounds, lambasting the winners, and trumpeting the "here's-what-we'll-do-next-time" plans to the faithful. The party in opposition, it had been generally agreed over time, could and did over-promise in its overly optimistic platform, with the unwritten agreement that those flights of rhetorical, political, and economic fancy could be rerouted after retaking No. 10. "You can't write a Manifesto for the Party in opposition and expect it to have any relationship to what the Party does in Government," Callaghan had said back in 1974, just *after* Labour

narrowly ousted Heath and the Tories. “We’re now entirely free to do what we like,” he concluded.[28] “Free” doesn’t mean owning up to every special interest promise in the party’s manifesto; often, it actually means freedom from having to be accountable for those promises. Benn obviously liked the “entirely free” portion of this statement, and not its subtext, because at the 1980 Blackpool conference he offered his messiahship to Labour’s masses, according to the *Times*:

> After the extraordinary performances of Mr. Wedgwood Benn, first at the conference where *he promised to change the face of Britain within a month* and then afterwards at fringe meetings, even some of his own followers wondered if he was the messiah[29] to lead them to the socialist promised land. A life-long member of the party said Mr. Benn was bonkers—a wonderfully expressive word suggesting a degree of unreality or willfulness far short of certification and libel. Mrs. Shirley Williams[30] wondered why he was so unambitious. “After all, it took God only six days to make the world.” A senior member of the Shadow Cabinet added that it would take Mr. Benn only three days to destroy it.[31]

Mr. Benn was even more ambitious than Francis or the PFJ—he promised that in just one month after Labour took back power he would nationalize every significant British industry, abolish the House of Lords, and remove Britain from the EEC.[32] It seems to have been concluded at this off-the-rails conference that Benn—as a potential messiah bringing either redemption or destruction—would not be the face of the Labour party in the years to come . . . and he was not.[33]

FRANCIS: “. . . as Empires go, this is the big one . . .”—The Roman Empire was much smaller than many others, historically, including the actual largest, the *British* Empire, which covered a great deal of the world at its largest.[34] The Pythons are always referring to their own empire as well, of course, as through *Flying Circus* and *Holy Grail*.

What Francis might be hinting at, though, is the perhaps insurmountable revolutionary challenge presented by the Roman Empire. As was being discussed generally by terrorism experts in the 1970s, countries with “effective dictatorships” were the *only* countries escaping the scourge of terrorism.[35] Heavy-handed Communist countries like East Germany, China, the Soviet Union, and North Korea were fairly immune, thanks to effective secret police, surveillance, and limited personal freedoms, as well as harsh punishments for those who challenged the state’s hegemony. The more liberal, socialist, and democratic countries—where individual liberties were protected and “rehabilitation” trumped “retribution” for lawbreakers—proved fertile nurseries for revolutionary types. Terrorists could count on lighter sentences (if they were arrested at all) in France, England, Japan, and Germany, as well as easier access

to weapons, while in the United States the lack of popular enthusiasm for such underground movements (the Weathermen, the Black Panthers, the SLA) kept those cells tiny and only sporadically noticed. In Francis's Jerusalem, the sitting government has obviously arrested and is ready to execute 140 criminals of all types, the event only being "special" because it's Passover—not likely the best recruiting tool for the next batch of budding anti-imperialists. In the end, we'll see, the PFJ is back to its standard, perhaps most efficacious size—Reg, Francis, Stan/Loretta, Judith, and three unnamed others (and maybe Matthias in the background)—and while Brian is left to die on the cross as a "martyr to the cause," the Roman Empire moves on unhindered. This Pyrrhic victory cycle actually mirrors the progresses of most terror groups and organized revolutionary activity of the 1960s and beyond, Laqueur points out:

> It was easy to get publicity for almost any action or threat of action, for manifestoes and appeals. *But all this activity, however often repeated, had no political impact, nor was there any support beyond a small fringe of intellectual sympathizers*. . . . Urban terror became self-perpetuating: a major operation would be staged to seize hostages so as to assure the liberation from prison of some leading comrades. Meanwhile there would be fresh arrests and new operations would have to be planned to affect their release. Neither workers, nor peasants, nor even the intellectuals would show any sympathy, and after hundreds of bombs and thousands of lead stories in the media, the surviving terrorists, sadder and wiser men and women, would have to face *a balance sheet that was almost entirely negative*. If it was their intention to undermine the system and bring about its downfall, there were obviously more effective ways to do so.[36]

The IRA, JRA, PLO, and RAF all discovered this, to varying degrees: today there remains a British presence in Northern Ireland; Japan still has a monarchy and a military relationship with the United States; Israel exists; and Germany is now a *united* Federal Republic. The PFJ don't seem "down-hearted," though; they will live to discuss and plan another day.

STAN: "It's action that counts, not words and we need action NOW!!!"—So, *action directe*, the slogan of the nineteenth-century syndicalists.[37] Gerald Priestland stated it simply as he surveyed the economic, social, and political unrest in Britain in 1975: "Violence gives the illusion of doing something, not just talking."[38] This rather natural step was taken by most revolutionary groups, even those that *started* with (perhaps) more noble intentions, like the Tupamaros in Uruguay, or the FLQ in Quebec.[39] Brazilian revolutionary Marighella, author of the *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla* and spiritual father to many modern terror organizations, wrote simply that it was "the duty of every revolutionary . . . to make the revolution."[40] Laqueur explains further:

> Typical for Marighella and also for the Argentinian terrorists was the burning conviction that shooting was far more important than any other activity—especially intellectual discussion. There was contempt for ideology and "politics"—the future society (Marighella wrote) would be built not by those who made long-winded speeches or signed resolutions but by those steeled in the armed struggle.[41]

What Stan is asking for is "propaganda by deed" (*propagande par le fait*), the clarion call of the Anarchist movement, for example, across the nineteenth century in Europe, Russia, and even the United States.[42] Mikhail Bakunin had called for the spread of "our principles not by words but with deeds, *for this is the most popular, the most potent, and the most irresistible form of propaganda.*"[43] V. I. Lenin would later bemoan the preponderance of the one over the other, expressing "real anguish that his party had merely been talking about bombs but that not a single one had been made."[44]

Even those in the fray during this period saw the need—if Western imperialists were to be overthrown—for more action than discussion. Libya's Colonel Qaddafi hailed the JRA's commitment to violence following the Lod Airport massacre in May 1972:

> Fida'i[45] action must be the type of operations carried out by the Japanese. . . . Action has not yet reached the level of the true spirit of the fida'in. We demand the fida'i action is able to carry out the operations similar to the operation carried out by the Japanese. Why should a Palestinian not carry out such an operation? You will see them all writing books and magazines full of theories, but otherwise unable to carry out one daring operation like that carried out by the Japanese.[46]

Qaddafi would help the JRA conduct terrorist operations later in the 1970s.

REG: ". . . we could sit around . . . passing resolutions, making clever speeches, but it's not going to shift one Roman soldier"—This is probably the way of most nascent revolutionary groups—we have never heard of them because they never made it out the door. Bernard Donoughue would call this "left-wing claptrap," and it flowed from the Tony Benn-Michael Foot-Ian Mikardo[47] wing of the Labour Party, where Donoughue knew public appeal in 1976 didn't hang its hat, and sitting governments went to die.[48] Donoughue and his boss, Jim Callaghan, tracked a more moderate path during their administration—Thatcher would even accuse Labour of adopting Conservative policies, but half-heartedly[49]—a status quo return, essentially, just where Reg and the core of the PFJ end up as the film concludes.

In the nineteenth century, Fenian sympathizer "Professor Mezzeroff" had lectured on the virtues of explosives, teaching that "a pound of the stuff contained more force than 'a million speeches.'"[50] The Angry Brigade had graduated from fomenting revolution around the kitchen table to flinging bullets

and bombs (and communiques) at government targets, as would many terror groups. Britain's own "situationist" flash-in-the-pan were the King Mob, eager but ineffective. At a Revolutionary Festival held in Essex in 1969, much was being *said*, as a description of the festival from an attendee indicates:

> The thing had fallen into the hands of the situationists, the Notting Hill King Mob lot, you know, the people who make very good slogans—one on a wall in Notting Hill that just says SCREAM, another near the Hornsey Art College which says DORIS ARCHER[51] IS A PRUDE. They're very good *provocateurs*, they've got a splendid sense of style and presentation, but they're theoretically immature. By Monday evening the Marxist-Leninists had the festival back in control.[52]

The King Mob can't wrest the narrative from the Marxist-Leninists; the *provocateur*-ish PFJ struggle in vain with the CFG—all lose as everything sounds ridiculous.

This was an oft-heard assessment of the state of formerly volatile student movements, especially those that had made the transition to action with violence. Peter Hazelhurst characterized the feared Red Army this way in October 1975: "Japan's once powerful and cohesive radical student movements, the main fount of terrorism in the country for terrorism today, have disintegrated in recent years into feuding factions of left-wing militants arguing bitterly over ideologies."[53] Just a few years earlier, however, the embryonic JRA was the answer for a number of "radical youths," according to Farrell: "One of the most attractive features of the Red Army was its bent toward action. The appeal of doing something now, as opposed to long theoretical debates concerning the proper road to victory, attracted many of Japan's youth."[54]

REG: "This calls for immediate discussion!"—Reg has fallen back on the safest choice the PFJ could make, and the reason they are still alive and free—words, not action. They are once again shop stewards with a labor-management bone to pick. This attention to parliamentary detail also hews close to the description of the escape committee from Palin and Jones's *Ripping Yarns* episode, "Escape from Stalag 112B":

> Colonel Owen (John Phillips): We have a sort of agreement here about escapes. We have a sort of system whereby all escape plans go to Escape Committee. The Committee then recommends some of them to a full session of the Escape Board, and whichever plan has a two-thirds majority is put to a secret ballot. And the plan with the most votes then becomes the official plan and goes to the Escape Plan Review Committee, and if they like it they'll commission a feasibility study.

It turns out that the next meeting of this last committee is four months away. Major Phipps resolves to escape on his own (which he never manages).

During the exciting but dangerous days of the 1905 Russian Revolution, when secret police were active and members of an emerging soviet were increasingly targeted for arrest, "it was easier . . . to discuss tactics in the abstract than to carry them out in practice."[55] In Britain of the Pythons' day, only the Angry Brigade really crossed the line from discussion to action, setting off bombs and actually injuring one person. Their heyday lasted just nine months before they were all arrested and sent to prison; the PFJ gets about three days or so, once Brian joins, before they take their ball and go home. Andrew Marr explains why these groups found such little success:

> Though in many ways the Angry Brigade were a non-event they represent the only direct [British-born] confrontation between revolutionary protest, supposed to be one of the key ingredients of the sixties, and the evolving economy of pleasure which was the sixties' real story. Other left-wing groups, mainly Trotskyists, would argue with each other and march, protest and publish about employment and foreign affairs.[56]

The discussion-centric PFJ align themselves nicely, then, with 1960s–1970s terror groups.

Later, in a festering clash to the north, this endless discussion trope was applied by Bernard Donoughue to the Irish situation. There was a high-level meeting at No. 10 involving the Church leaders of Northern Ireland, and Donoughue characterized the confab as more of a convenient excuse for the PM to come home early from his Scillies vacation—where he was "bored"—than any pressing matter of life and death. Donoughue mentioned the "Irish crisis" as "usually a good enough excuse" for the PM, meaning the deadly struggle to the north had become nothing more than an irritant to not only Westminster, but England. Donoughue admitted: "I did not go in to the Irish meeting, since it was bound to be a lot of blather."[57] Incidentally, in 1974 bombs had detonated in Dungannon, Belfast, Dublin, Monaghan, Ballykinler, and London, killing many and causing enormous casualties and property destruction.

The newspapers (and, eventually, diary pages) of the Winter of Discontent period point up over and over again the government's inability to make decisions —what Donoughue bemoans as "dithering"—with the Parliamentary Labour Party's credibility diminishing at every new strike action and associated pay policy retreat.[58] In just a matter of weeks over the winter the polls showed Labour and Callaghan dropping from comfortable leads, and even though Thatcher was still personally disliked, the government she led in opposition grew in favorability as essential services like food delivery, sewage, and water works slowed or stopped altogether in parts of the country. Meanwhile the emerging

“enemy,” the powerful trade unions, dithered in their own self-destructive ways. Peter Jenkins writes of this transitional 1978–1979 period with muted alarm and certain portent. He saw a gap between the country’s trade union leadership and the rank and file members, a fracture that was growing ever wider:

> If the country threatens to become ungovernable it is not because of the power of the unions, it is rather because of their powerlessness to govern their own members. Their national leaders have lost control. I have never known them to be more alarmed. They fear that this is not just another wave of industrial unrest, rather something novel, something different.[59]

Reg and the PFJ have been acting like a (trade union) leadership council for their revolutionary movement, finding safety and reassurance in the orderliness of parliamentary procedure, including the thoughtful, directed “discussion” mentioned above. Once they set Brian free, however, their “powerlessness” became apparent. Brian is acting the part of renegade shop steward or ambitious local union member—he’s wildcatting. In *Holy Grail* the local syndicalist Dennis actually stood toe-to-toe with a king and argued for a devolved power structure by and for the people; he was throttled for his efforts.[60] Brian has embraced action—the graffiti, the palace assault, escaping from Pilate, falling in love, even acting the unwilling prophet—rather than the inaction of his leadership. Jenkins continues: “There was the official trade union movement, national in character and formally structured, and there was the unofficial movement, local, sectional, and informal.”[61] Jenkins saw the latter group as the prosperous one, but with a high cost. The Scargills and Scanlons (and for us, Reg) were no longer calling the tune; that was happening at a more local level, and with predictably fractious results. The “something novel, something different” is what will put Brian on a cross as the film ends, while his fellow members salute him and return to their safe, symbolic struggle.

And perhaps the worst of both worlds occurred as the government took meetings with trade unions and their leaders, where everyone “dithered” quite a bit, the government giving in to irresponsible double-digit pay rises that would then encourage the next workers’ group to expect the same consideration, and so on. Prices rose, the value of pay packets dropped, and manufacturing slowed. The wage-and-inflation death spiral would eventually topple both the Labour government and, ironically, turn the tide of popular support against the unions for what Donoughue called “hard-faced, grab-whatever-you-can capitalism with a union card.”[62] The country was so put off that voters gave the much-disliked Margaret Thatcher the keys to No. 10.

REG: "Well obviously once the vote's been taken. We can't act on a resolution until you've voted on it"—This parliamentary, trade union "stop-go" action keeps the PFJ from reaching Brian prior to his being nailed up, and it will also keep him on the cross once they're there to affect a rescue (if they were in fact the rescue committee). In *I'm All Right Jack* the shop stewards come to the plant manager to demand that non-union-card-holder Windrush be fired. But when the manager instantly agrees with them, a "wait a tick" epiphany occurs, and, after conferring, like the PFJ, it is decided that if Windrush is fired he is being "victimised," which would constitute a strike-able action. Life provided these very moments for the Pythons to draw upon, creatively.

In October 1976 *Private Eye* reported that an ITN reporter took a camera crew to interview a group of squatters calling themselves "Mustard" (Multiracial Union of Squatters to Alleviate Racial Discrimination) in the upscale Chepstow Villas, near Notting Hill. What followed reads like a PFJ excursion:

> The chief squatter, Afro-hairstyled Michael Stewart, insisted that all the ITN men must take their shoes off before entering the house, on the premise that it was a holy place. [Reporter Geoffrey] Suchet was prepared to comply. But the cameramen refused, so they all had to go back to the office. A union meeting was then convened to discuss the issue. After much wrangling it was decided by the brothers to send a different camera team who were prepared to comply with the squatters' demands.[63]

The squatters were officially evicted that same month, with Mr. Stewart being arrested on assault and obstruction charges.[64]

JUDITH: "All you've got to do is go out of that door now, and try to stop the Romans nailing him up!"—Judith is wasting her breath, since for Reg and friends, parliamentary procedure will always, *must* always, trump "immediate action." As they hear the urgency of the situation the PFJ kicks into high gear, proposing a "completely new motion" to be discussed. The simple fact is "you can't act on a resolution until you've voted on it," Reg reminds Francis, and Judith will have to leave, frustrated and typed, as will be seen.

But Judith still qualifies as a citizen Nechaev and Bakunin would have counted on. The other half of his fifth category in *Catechism* addresses the fairer sex: "Finally, the women: some were useless and stupid and were to be treated like categories three and four [useful high-ranking people and politicians]; others were capable, passionate and devoted even though they might not yet have acquired full revolutionary consciousness."[65] Judith also likely fits into Nechaev and Bakunin's sixth category, comprising those who "had completely thrown in their lot with the revolutionaries"—these are "the most precious possession of the revolution."[66] When she finally understands what Reg is after, and she also

leaves Brian to his martyrdom, then she has reached the sixth category, clearly, fully committed to the PFJ's catechism.

JUDITH: "Something's actually happening . . ."—Judith is at least energized and ready to do something, not unlike Ulrike Meinhof, a respected journalist, then activist, then terrorist. Meinhof's adopted mother, activist Renate Riemick, described admiringly her adopted daughter's commitment to change: She "put aside her Proust and her Kafka and entered the political arena."[67] The later Middle Eastern imbroglio saw the benefits of the female fellow traveler, as Burleigh writes: "Women . . . were crucial in fanning the fires of hatred across the family generations . . . reminding young males of the great deeds of their fathers, or jolting their emotions with idealised details of a way of life the family and an entire people had lost."[68]

REG: "A little ego trip from the feminists"—In *Jesus of Nazareth*, one of Christ's male disciples, upon hearing Mary's report of Jesus's resurrection, sniffs under his breath: "A woman's fantasy." Mary lashes out at him, and leaves. Margaret Thatcher was treated similarly by her political opposites, her own party, and even her Cabinet.[69] Donoughue admitted that he grudgingly respected Mrs. Thatcher, but he wasn't shy about calling her speeches "poor," that she lacked "confidence," and she was often "shrill and humourless."[70] She was known (mostly behind her back) as "that bloody woman"—by her own party and the Conservative Central Office—or "TBW" in some official communications.[71]

Notes

1. Thompson, *Peter Cook*, 175–77.
2. Quoted in Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 59; from *WJ* 6.5.4 (Whiston, 583).
3. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 59.
4. For much more on the connections between the Qumran settlement, the Essenes, and the Zealots, see Brandon's *Jesus and the Zealots*, chapter 2, and its notes.
5. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 60.
6. Sallust, *Catiline's War*.
7. Richard, *WWAR*, 173–77.
8. Dobson and Payne, *Carlos Complex*, 22.
9. Farrell, *BRJ*, 60.
10. *BRJ*, 87.
11. Bogdanor, "The Attempt to Construct a Socialist Commonwealth," a.t.
12. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 49.
13. Discussed in Larsen, *MPFC: UC*, 1.355 and 2.88.
14. "Stand by for a Year of Nostalgia for 1968," *Spectator*, 5 January 2008: 18. Cleaver was a member of the American terror group The Black Panthers.
15. Mitchell, "Human Parasites," 1. And, as Mitchell points out, "while the Western Roman Empire fell in 476 AD with the conquest of Rome, the Eastern Empire with its capital of Constantinople lasted until 1453 AD as the Byzantine Empire" (1). The PFJ were tragically optimistic, as most rebel causes are.
16. See all of chapter 12 of Smallwood's *JURR* for more.
17. Josephus, *WJ*, 2.20.1 (Whiston, 497). The governor of Syria, Cestius Gallus, led forces against Jerusalem in September of 66 but retreated in November, likely due to the approaching winter weather, losing many troops along the way. This defeat acted as catalyst for the exodus from the city of Jerusalem by the wealthy—they knew that Roman recriminations were coming in the spring. See *JURR*, 297–99.
18. Kotker, *HLTJ*, 122–24.
19. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 85.
20. Nechaev and Bakunin's *Catechism* is discussed earlier.
21. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 108. It's also important to remember that these more modern groups possessed or had access to weapons with considerably more destructive potential—grenades, submachine guns, plastic explosives, even aircraft—outstripping the long knife a *sicarii* would have secreted beneath his robe, or the single handgun of a twentieth-century Slavic nationalist.
22. Dobson and Payne, *Carlos Complex*, 126.
23. Marr, *HMB*, 318.
24. *HMB*, 318.
25. *HMB*, 320. After the horrendous Winter of Discontent, Thatcher's government likely had an easier time justifying the "punishment" of those who had held the country hostage—public opinion was by then clearly in favor of hamstringing the unions.
26. It is Marr's opinion that "in Britain [the oil shock] arrived with special force," exacerbating the vulnerabilities of Britain's economy (340).
27. Marcuse, *Modern Philosophy: Marcuse and the Frankfurt School*, a.t.
28. Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun*, 276.
29. Remember that earlier drafts of the script for *Brian* contained more on-the-nose political references than the ultimate draft or finished film. On-point questions about taxes and Brian as a Christ figure, as well as near-quotations from party conference speeches, found their way *out* of the script as the film moved to completion.
30. Williams would leave Labour to help form the Social Democratic Party in 1981.
31. "Mr Healey, the Man Most Likely . . ." *Times*, 2 October 1980: 14; italics added.

32. “Appalled Reaction from Leaders over ‘Demagogy,’” *Times*, 30 September 1980: 1.
33. This was the last significant government position Benn would hold; he would lose a closely contested leadership bid to Healey in 1981.
34. By 1924, the British Empire was approximately “seven times larger than the territories of Rome at their greatest extent” (Brendon, *DFBE*, 337).
35. See Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 210, for example.
36. *Terrorism*, 257–58; italics added.
37. Iviansky, “Individual Terror,” 49.
38. “Gerald Priestland on Angries and Middle-Class ‘Revolution,’” *Spectator*, 18 July 1975: 18.
39. The Tupamaros would give away proceeds from robberies to the poor, for example; and, from Laqueur, “the FLQ during its early years directed its attacks against establishments rather than persons” (Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 239).
40. Marighella, *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla*, 20.
41. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 225.
42. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 67–72.
43. “Letters to a Frenchman on the Present Crisis,” September 1870, found at www.marxists.org.
44. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 88.
45. Farrell notes: “*fida’i* or *fedayeen* is derived from an Arab term meaning sacrifice” (*BRJ*, 144).
46. *BRJ*, 144–45.
47. Benn was barnacle-like, willing to weather any tides as long as he kept a ministerial post, and Foot could at least be worked with, according to Donoughue and Sandbrook. Mikardo, however, was singled out by Donoughue as one of the “horrors” of the Far Left, even admitting that Callaghan hated him (*DSD*, 2.96).
48. Donoughue, *DSD*, 2.95.
49. See Sandbrook’s *Seasons in the Sun*. Bernstein would later write that things in 1976 weren’t as bleak as assumed, and that the IMF loan and stringent cuts might have been unnecessary as the economy had begun to improve (*Myth of Decline*, 225–26).
50. Quoted in Burleigh, *BRT*, 12.
51. A character on the long-running *The Archers* radio series, played by Gwen Berryman. *The Archers* was referenced by the Goons and the Pythons (“The Spanish Suitcase”; *MPFC: UC*, 2.25, 187, 192, 193, and 207).
52. “One Day in the Life of a Revolutionary Festival,” *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 February 1969: 199.
53. “Japan’s Terror Groups Raise Fears of a Police State, *Times*, 22 October 1975: 16.
54. *BRJ*, 87.
55. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 58.
56. *HMB*, 333–34.
57. Donoughue, *DSD*, 1.270.
58. *DSD*, 2.442.
59. Jenkins, *Anatomy of Decline*, 103.
60. Dennis is both a medieval subsistence farmer and a well-versed political tannoy; the PFJ are a first-century Jerusalem terrorist group and a (slightly more) modern trade union. These kinds of bedfellows appear often in Monty Python’s oeuvre. See Larsen, *BAFHG*, 117–18.
61. Jenkins, *Anatomy of Decline*, 104.
62. *DSD*, 2.439; also, see all of chapter 5 of *DSD*, vol. 2 for Donoughue’s fascinating day-by-day account of the government’s slow, inexorable tumble.
63. “TV News,” *Private Eye*, 15 October 1976: 4.
64. “Notting Hill Squatters Evicted,” *Times*, 1 October 1976: 5.
65. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 44.
66. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 44.

67. “Meinhof’s Legacy,” *Spectator*, 22 May 1976: 9.
68. *BRT*, 159.
69. Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun*, 666–67, and 681–82; Caryl, *Strange Rebels*, 190–94.
70. See the index entries for Thatcher in *DSD*, both volumes.
71. Bogdanor, “Thatcherism, 1979–1990,” a.t.; also, Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun*, 666–67.

SCENE TWENTY-TWO
THE CRUCIFIXION QUEUE

NISUS WETTUS (Palin): "Crucifixion? Good"—His name indicates that he's both "nice" and "wet" (meaning ineffective); he doesn't fit well as a Roman soldier. Palin has faced this most of his life, and was generally known as "the nice one" as a Python. Jones had played a similarly "wet," ineffectual character, Herbert, in Holy Grail, there clearly a disappointment to his ambitious father.

MR. CHEEKY (Idle): "I can go free and live on an island somewhere"—This was actually a standard exilic pattern, but for the leading men and women of Rome, not riff-raff across the empire. Even though he has been claiming to be a Roman, Brian is here classed with the *noxii*, or criminal element selected for a degrading death. As Cook writes, "The *noxii* are a central concern of this investigation, since the individuals to be crucified were criminals whose alienation from the civic community became a matter of public spectacle." He goes on to quote Jean-Jacques Aubert's summarizing of their condition:

> Crucifixions were usually carried out outside the city limits, thus stressing the victim's rejection from the civic community. Because of the absence of blood shed out of an open and lethal wound, which evoked the glorious fate of warriors, this type of death was considered unclean, shameful, unmanly, and unworthy of a freeman. In addition, the victim was usually naked. Essential, too, was the fact that the victim lost contact with the ground, which was regarded as sacrilegious.[1]

Cook notes that in depictions such as mosaics the criminals' state of undress made them easy to spot. Brian will be stripped to a loincloth, as well, though many others on the crosses around him will remain fully clothed.

Note

1. Cook, “Crucifixion as Spectacle,” 76.

SCENE TWENTY-THREE PILATE'S PASSOVER ADDRESS *PILATE AND BIGGUS . . . APPEAR ON THE BALCONY*—INSIDE THIS PORTICO ARE TWO ADDITIONAL PAINTED FIGURES AGAINST POMPEIAN-RED BACKGROUNDS, SIMILAR TO THE ONES SEEN EARLIER IN PILATE'S ROOM. THESE ARE ALSO FROM POMPEII, BASED ON A WORK KNOWN AS *THE THREE GRACES*, AND ORIGINALLY FOUND IN THE HOUSE OF TITUS DENTATUS PANTHERA.[1]

. . . outside in the Forum a line of GUARDS is struggling to keep back a surging crowd—This is precisely the type of setting most conducive to *sicarii* activity, though here the Pythons use the crowd as a jeering, uncontrollable audience, not a threatening mob. They aren't "surging," they are just eager to hear Pilate's speech impediment, and begin their "wagging."

PILATE and BIGGUS and the CENTURION appear on the balcony—This scene may be styled after the Antonio Ciseri painting, *Ecce Homo,* completed in 1871, or Mihály Munkácsy's version of the same scene (1896).[2] These paintings (and many others of the same event) feature the Christ figure as well as Pilate. The Pythons decided to avoid the sticky, perhaps ultimately indefensible challenge of having a scourged Brian appear in this scene—he is with the other criminals, undifferentiated. The Pythons' version of this "Here's the man" moment is missing the man, pushing the scene further away from the life and death of Christ, and away from a possible legal entanglement with more conservative viewers and organizations who might file writs.

This is also a setting where the Roman overlords' disdain for Jewish feelings can be glimpsed. It's been mentioned that under earlier emperors—Julius Caesar and Augustus, for example—the wisdom of ruling respectfully as opposed to vindictively went a long way to keeping the peace in Judea. Jewish religious beliefs and practices were largely tolerated, yes, but principle and practice often diverged. The year 6 census, according to Brandon, struck the Jews "at the very roots of Yahweh's sovereignty over Israel—the holy land of his ancient promise was now regarded as the property of the Roman emperor."[3] Brandon continues: "The Romans not only made little attempt to placate the religious susceptibilities of their new subjects, they often designedly outraged them."[4] Pilate would eventually be recalled and lose his prefecture when he ran roughshod over the

(particularly) religious feelings of his Jewish and Samaritan subjects. Pilate's incidents involving offending Jewish sensibilities (cataloged by Josephus) with iconic standards and shields very nearly led to earlier insurrections on a large scale. The sum total of these slights cost the prefect his job. The Pythons have *not* set out to punctiliously re-create the Holy Land settings in regard to Jewish religiosity—conspicuous by absence are the temple and its cult, the Sanhedrin, any real exemplars of Jewish religious life (Pharisees, Sadducees), Sabbath considerations, and on. Given this more surface (or just more Christian?) approach to the Gospels, it's not a surprise to see the multiple statues of emperors and Pilate himself,[5] and Roman soldiers wearing iconic armor, in this large courtyard scene. Pilate's deployment of graven images caused outrage in the third decade, but the Pythons included them simply to re-create the "look" of a third decade Roman-occupied city. Without them, the cityscape they chose for the shoot didn't look either "Roman" or "biblical" enough.[6] They were also likely counting on the fact that audiences for this newest Monty Python film had little or no knowledge of first-century Jews and Jerusalem. Most audiences would have fallen back on their Sunday School memories or, more likely, the world proffered by the very recent *Jesus of Nazareth* miniseries, which also featured statues.

PILATE: "People of Jewusalem—Wome is your fwiend!"—Herod would address his Jerusalem subjects often, gathering residents together to hear his announcement of the rebuilt temple, to trumpet a reduction in taxes, to tell his people that he'd mended fences with his sons, and finally to announce the execution of "two of his sons several years later."[7]

Dictators and despots often use this language to convince the defeated that they are in fact in a better position "under new management" than laboring under their previous freedoms. The Soviet-installed Polish leader Edward Gierek—who, in 1970, replaced the more authoritarian Władysław Gomułka—took a friendlier tack, like Pilate: Gierek . . . was a natty dresser and a self-confessed technocrat who felt equally at home meeting with workers and foreign dignitaries. As soon as he assumed power, he headed off to Gdańsk to apologize to the workers there for the bloodshed and to promise a fresh beginning. Then he embarked on a series of "consultations" with various social groups to demonstrate his democratic credentials.[8]

PILATE: ". . . it is customawy at this time to welease a wong-doer fwom our pwisons"—Not likely, according to most biblical scholars. Neither Josephus nor Philo mention such a custom, nor does Tacitus. Scholarship at the time of the

film's creation toed the accepted line, as it's clearly been assumed that the people of the Roman Empire could wield significant power in matters of life and death, and did so in several settings: In the amphitheatre, just as in the Circus and in the theatre, the people might give expression to their political opinions. . . . The people might [also] make concrete demands rather than just formal statements of approval or disapproval. . . . The most famous example is a provincial one. The sovereign power of the Roman people extended throughout the empire: as early as the reign of Tiberius, at the Jewish Passover feast, the Roman prefect of Judæa could use the right of life and death that he had received, via the emperor, from the sovereign people to allow the crowd to request the release of a condemned man.[9]

And so Barabbas may have been released, and Christ went to the cross. In true Python fashion—and true to the gloomier, more pessimistic 1970s from which the film emerges—Brian will be "released" and yet still go to the cross.

More recent scholarship disagrees. Brandon goes the next step, given the tense political situation coupled with Pilate's acknowledged disposition, asserting, "Such a custom is inherently impossible": Judaea was seething with revolt; its government would have been annually frustrated by having to release a notable prisoner—according to *Mark*, on this occasion a dangerous rebel, probably a Zealot, was freed. But, even if we pass over the improbability that such a custom existed, what *Mark* tells of Pilate's use of it passes beyond belief. He depicts this tough Roman procurator, who was backed by a strong military force, as resorting to this custom to save a man he adjudged innocent. In so doing, he invites the Jerusalem mob to choose between Jesus and a rebel leader, Barabbas, who had killed Romans in a recent insurrection. To have given the crowd such a choice would have been the height of folly, if Pilate had sought thus to save Jesus. The mob's decision was a foregone conclusion. Led by the chief priests, they naturally chose Barabbas, to them a patriotic hero. Frustrated Pilate is represented as weakly asking the mob; "what shall I do with the man whom you call the King of the Jews?"[10]

Smallwood, writing at the time the Pythons were producing *Brian*, agrees: Of the strange "custom" referred to here by which the Roman governor contributed to the Passover celebrations by releasing a prisoner of the Jews' choice there is no trace elsewhere; the most definite statement, in John, may be a general deduction from Pilate's action on this one occasion, or from a habit which he had adopted (as Matt. and Mark suggest) of trying to ingratiate himself with his subjects,

even at the price of increasing his administrative problems by returning one of his opponents to the fray.[11]

Brandon concludes that given Pilate's well-known hardheadedness—especially in relation to his Jewish subjects—"consulting a Jewish mob about what he should do with an innocent man is ludicrous to the extreme."[12] And since Brandon also concludes that the Gospel of Mark "was written for the Christian community in Rome,"[13] it only makes sense that the Roman prefect is displayed in a favorable light if Christianity is to escape strangulation in its crib. The Pythons likely have no such concerns; they simply follow tradition, the recent *Jesus of Nazareth* example, as well as the Markan gospel version and include this oft-reproduced scene.

In the Roman Empire at large this proposal was a kind of *munus*, or act of munificence or beneficence meant to impress the crowds and even future generations—often done as editors put on games at their own expense, "intended to remind the local population of the generosity of the editor."[14] These acts were also attempts to curry favor with Roman patricians and leadership, and as political acts to impress games attendees to vote for particular candidates. The Jerusalem posited by the Pythons isn't a place wracked with uncontrollable violence or even religious schisms, and their Pilate isn't in danger of being unseated, by the emperor or the people of Judea. Therefore, Pilate's willingness to hand over a criminal as a sign of "Wome's fwiendship" is a particularly selfless sign of Roman goodwill, and therefore even more unusual, given Pilate's reputation.

BOB HOSKINS—The character leading the "wagging" assault on Pilate is named "Bob Hoskins" in the printed script. Jones plays this character, dirty and with ratty teeth, and there is no indication as to why the fellow British actor's name was chosen. Palin had been fairly certain that he could get Hoskins to play the RSM role in a *Ripping Yarns* episode in 1977, but that didn't pan out.[15] At some point they decided to just employ his name.

CENTURION: ". . . some Jewish joke, sir"—The Centurion is simply trying to protect his boss, convincing him that the Jews aren't laughing *at* him, but just among themselves. This is also one of the very few mentions of anything Jewish in the film. In Freud's *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, most of the Jewish jokes studied by Freud were self-denigrating—Jews making fun of Jewishness—so Pilate could be mollified by this suggestion (if he's read his Freud).

PILATE: "Are they wagging me?"—"Ragging" is university slang for antiauthority pranks, boisterousness, or contentious debating.[16] By the time the Pythons were at university, "Rag Week" was an established part of the good-natured, fundraising social scene.[17] Pilate here plays the stuffy headmaster-type being ridiculed by a churlish audience, but there's no hint of retribution from above. Chancellor Denis Healey had been booed and shouted down at the Labour Party conference in Blackpool in October 1976, as he shared with disgruntled delegates the realities of an inflationary economy, the necessity of public expenditure cuts, and the need for an IMF loan.[18] He simply ploughed through his speech anyway.

But the answer might be yes, they are "wagging" him, and with historical precedent. In the first third of the first century, the Romans assumed control of Alexandria, which had been the empire's main source of grain for many years. The city had been considered a Greek city (not an Egyptian or even African city), and the Greek population didn't accept the Roman annexation—and especially Rome's preferred treatment of the Jews in Alexandria—with grace or dignity. Generally, "the Greeks expressed their feelings by attacks on Rome's protégés, the Jews," but they also attacked Rome in a more familiar, clever way—with derision, according to Smallwood: "Once in the early 30's a gang of hooligans was organized and paid to insult the Prefect in doggerel verse (none of it, unfortunately, preserved) in the Gymnasium."[19] Our Pilate knows how this other prefect must have felt.

ANOTHER: "And a pick-pocket"—This is the third in a "comedy of threes" gag structure, a setup that falls flat when the participant clearly doesn't understand the rules (doesn't speak the language), as there are no "r" sounds in pick-pocket. In Ep. 4 of *Flying Circus*, a woman will try her hand at a joke like this, and be shamed for it.[20]

PILATE: "Sounds a notowious cwiminal"—There is no Woger or Roger to be released, even though he's attached to a laundry list of crimes, but the confusion as to who might be in Pilate's dungeons is also mirrored in the world of international terrorism in the mid-1970s. By early 1976, Carlos had fled Paris and "disappeared" into the underworld of the terror network, and his visible invisibility became almost mythical: He was seen in London, Paris and Bonn. In fact, the most popular expression with security police everywhere was "Carlos was here!" He became such a phantomlike figure that the idea caught on that Carlos was not a real person. The French believed he had been killed by other terrorists; the Germans said that he was no more than a code word for an

international terror organization; and the Israelis, who hate for their enemies to become legends, advanced the theory that there were four different Carloses.[21] As the city of Jerusalem moved closer to violence and anarchy (well after Pilate's rule), the incidents of street crime increased, and those anti-Romans likely longed for the order the empire had provided.

CENTURION: "Samson the Sadducee strangler . . . Silas the Syrian assassin . . . several seditious scribes from Caesarea . . ."—A list of biblical names picked likely at random, with the "ess" factor significant. Samson is a well-known OT name, while the Sadducees were the other significant political and religious body in Jerusalem. Silas was one of Paul's companions, and Josephus mentions Silas as a general appointed by Josephus himself. Jerusalem was actually ruled by the Syrian Legate during this period, and the governors of Judea depended "on the legate of Syria for help in cases of crisis," as when pilgrims caused problems and likely during any festival in Jerusalem.[22] The "seditious scribes of Caesarea" would have been hard-pressed to be too seditious, since Caesarea was Pilate's actual seat of power. Caesarea was the port city where the Romans installed their "administrative capital and military headquarters," and Herod the Great's palace became the governor's residence, according to Smallwood.[23] Pilate would have lived there most of the year, surrounded by Roman soldiers.

Recent serial-type killers included the Black Panther, the "Monster of Worcester," David McGreavy, who killed and then impaled on a fence three small children he was babysitting in 1973.[24] The Pythons had already sent up the well-known serial killer of their youth, John Christie, who had been hanged in 1953.[25] The "Monster of Florence" (Italy) had claimed a string of victims by the time this film was done, often murdering male/female couples, then mutilating the women. The killer(s) murdered at least sixteen men and women in the Tuscany area between 1968 and 1985, the grisly events covered in many newspapers of the day.[26]

Notes

1. Part of the *Pompeii 79AD* collection mentioned earlier.
2. In Ep. 24 of *Flying Circus*, Art Critic ("Gavin Millar") Cleese is rambling about the poetic gifts of Mr. Neville Shunt, saying at one point "Ecce homo, ergo elk" (*ATW*, 2.24.7).
3. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 63.
4. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 63.
5. True, these statues and busts wouldn't likely cause offense, since they were not part of the Roman cult of worship. But given that the Jews responded so vigorously to the aniconic shields (meaning they bore no graven images, just words celebrating Tiberius), Pilate might have been safe to assume that discretion was the better part of peaceful rule, erecting no Roman imagery where any Jew might have to see it.
6. The Pythons had discussed Israel, Jordan, Tunisia, and Morocco as possible filming locations, each with strengths and weaknesses. Jones worried "that [Tunisia] doesn't really look like the Holy Land," for example, so more props and set decorations were going to be needed. See Palin's *Diaries 1969–1979*, 394. The *Jesus of Nazareth* sets weren't overly populated with Romanesque statues and potentially sacrilegious images, meaning the Pythons didn't borrow every visual inspiration from that recent film.
7. Levine, *Jerusalem*, 172–73.
8. Caryl, *Strange Rebels*, 15.
9. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 166–67.
10. Brandon, "The Trial of Jesus," 257–58.
11. Smallwood, *JURR*, 164n69; this alleged practice is discussed in Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 258–59.
12. Brandon, "The Trial of Jesus," 258.
13. Likely soon after the "Flavian triumph" in 71, when the actions of Vespasian and his son Titus triggered a new Roman dynasty (Brandon, "The Trial of Jesus," 254).
14. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 16–17.
15. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 339.
16. See the *OED* entry "rag, n. 4."
17. Larsen, *MPFC: UC*, 2.174.
18. Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun*, 481–83.
19. Smallwood, "Jews and Romans," 237. The Caesarean Greeks seemed to have a rather clever and wicked sense of humor, too, at one point creating an elaborate parody of the Jewish sacrifice ritual that included birds and a chamber pot. The local Jews were not amused. This all spilled over, and ended with a massacre led by Florus in Jerusalem ("Jews and Romans," 318–19). Many Christians found themselves equally unhappy about the Pythons' humor in *Brian*.
20. The pun "Watteau, dear?" is her "only line," she cries (*ATW*, 1.4.43, and *MPFC: UC*, 1.76).
21. Demaris, *Brothers in Blood*, 62.
22. *JURR*, 147.
23. *JURR*, 145–47.
24. McGreavy was approved for parole in 2016.
25. *MPFC: UC*, 2.5, 9, 17, and 110.
26. "Florence Offer," *Times*, 19 September 1985: 19.

SCENE TWENTY-FOUR
THE CRUCIFIXION QUEUE, PART II

NISUS: "How many have come through?"—Miscommunication again, as the Jailer seems to hear something naughty, instead. It will become clear, though, that these characters are purposely miscommunicating. In *I'm All Right Jack*, Stanley is working his forklift on his first day, when he accidentally uncovers a group of men hiding, playing cards. They snap at him to put the crate back in place and leave them be. Stanley is told these churls are redundant, but can't actually be fired or there'll be a strike action. The Jailer and his Assistant seem to have similar attitudes toward the Romans, and similar job security.

JAILER: "You'll have to sp-sp-sp-speak up, sir"—One man hears what hasn't been said, and one man stutters—miscommunication again. And, as *I'm All Right Jack* has already been mentioned as one of the touchstones for this film for the Pythons, it should be no surprise to learn that one of the characters on the loading dock is also a stammerer: "Then what's 'e doin' on a fu-fu-fu-fu-forklift truck?" "You're right, they fu-fu-fu-fight us on every issue!" "You silly cu-cu-cu-clod!" and "Why don't you tell 'em to fu-fu-fu-photograph something worthwhile?" Unlike the stuttering of the assistant, all of these are meant to hint at a forbidden swear word before the inoffensive word emerges.

Incidentally, one of the tidbits the Pythons (and perhaps especially their de facto historian, Jones) might have culled from their historical sources is from the name of Josephus Flavius's great-grandfather, Simon the Stammerer.[1]

NISUS WETTUS: "It's such a waste of human life, isn't it?"—Perhaps meant to be one of the few voices in the film on the side of humanity, akin to the campaigners against capital punishment in Great Britain. This would have been an alien concept to most Romans, as mentioned earlier. To deny or struggle against the civilizing benefits of the empire, Wiedemann argues, was to display such antisocial tendencies as to warrant removal from civilization—imprisonment, exile, or death.[2] Perhaps Nisus is as "giving" as Augustus,

though, who boasted he would often “save rather than . . . eradicate” peoples who could accept servile status.[3] In this way the “waste of human life” stops, and those like Brian and his crucifixion party could live on in grateful service to the Romans. For Nisus, this doesn’t feel like clemency (he’s a functionary, not a maker of rules), but an ahistorical (or maybe just atypical?) character in a period film. Perhaps he is more like the character Little Horse in *Little Big Man*, an effeminate, likely gay character who is allowed to stay in the village when the men go out to fight. The film was released in 1970, in the wake of Stonewall and the beginnings of the gay liberation movement, so it would be hard to argue there might be a significant contemporary influence. Or even Gregor in Konrad Wolf’s *I Was Nineteen* (1968), a German-born Russian soldier who isn’t like his Soviet comrades—or his German enemies. In other words, these kinds of characters can read more like eruptions of the time in which the film is produced. Nisus, finally, is more liberal Left than he is Roman, but he follows orders well.

BRIAN: “Could I see a lawyer or someone?”—This sounds very twentieth-century, something from the popular *The Sweeney*, or the earlier *Z Cars*. It sounds anachronistic, but it’s not. This is Brian’s first real attempt to exercise his rights, if granted any, as the son of a centurion, and perhaps even as a Roman citizen.[4] In Rome, and since he’s not a slave, his right to a trial would have been almost certain; however, the further away he is from the seat of power, the more likely the whims of the local authority would prevail.[5] It is probably also important whether his would be considered a criminal offense (he *is* caught breaking and entering) or an act of treason or insurrection, rendering his legal rights moot. Pilate clearly sees this as a case of his own judgment being sufficient for conviction and execution, so even if Brian had the name of a lawyer on the tip of his tongue he mightn’t have been allowed representation.

If he were to be granted a criminal trial, Brian might have been allowed a “defense by legal advocates,” according to Richard, and Roman law, at least, was weighted in favor of the defendant, meaning Brian might have had a fighting chance:

> After 149 B.C., in most other criminal cases, the accuser and accused jointly selected jurors from special lists, each pertaining to a different type of crime.[6] Juries might contain as many as seventy-five members. Jurors listened in silence and were forbidden to speak to one another. The presiding praetor restricted himself to insuring an orderly conduct of the trial.[7]

But these magnanimous safeguards applied to a criminal accused—a slave wouldn’t get this treatment, nor would a noncitizen of Rome, nor a citizen

accused of treason. Brian's trial, then, has already taken place, in the court of Pilate.

When the timorous Nisus Wettus asks about a lawyer, what he's more likely asking is does Brian have any money, any resources to afford what would have been an expensive appeals process.[8] The trial procedure laid out above was generally available to the higher born. Brian of course doesn't have the funds for such an appeal,[9] nor to pay any fine that might be offered in place of corporal punishment, so—like those ahead and behind him in the crucifixion queue—he's kind of stuck. Richard does mention that those of "low or slave origin" did have legal avenues in criminal proceedings, as Augustan "urban prefects" who had "judicial knowledge [that] exceeded . . . most praetors" could hear the case: "Although low-born convicts might now be sentenced to gladiatorial schools, mines, or public works projects, there were fewer death sentences than under the republic."[10] This type of hearing would have been available for criminal and civil cases—cases of high treason generally end in death. In ancient Roman law, this high treason (a crime against the state) was known as "*perduellio*," and the guilty were banished or executed, their families forbidden to mourn them. Under Tiberius, coincidentally, the Law of Treason (*lex maiestatis*) was greatly expanded to cover either the murder of or even conspiracy to murder a high-ranking Roman official or hostages, by which Brian can easily be condemned. Punishment for a high-born so convicted would have been swift beheading and confiscation of property; for the low-born, punishment would likely have come via the more painful crucifixion, burning, or wild animal attack.

Bringing the action into the contemporary world, there are at least two interesting parallels. The first involves the case of minicab driver George Davis, mentioned earlier, who was arrested following a bank robbery, then identified by several policemen as being one of the robbers. Davis had an alibi, and he had many witnesses to support that alibi, but the testimony of policemen who were on the scene and who gave chase after the robbery carried the day. Davis's shady past was also on trial (arrests and several minor convictions)—his alibi had been supported by minor criminals like himself. The judge in the case, Mr. Justice Shaw, believed what he believed, like Pilate: "The evidence has demonstrated that you are a member of a very dangerous gang of criminals who were ruthless in what they did."[11] Davis was convicted and went to jail for more than a year before his innocence was proven. When Brian was brought before Pilate initially he was the "one survivor" of his "wowdy webels" who had dared to "waid" Pilate's palace, so Pilate knew of his links to the "very dangerous" PFJ—a

summary conviction and execution is now easy. At this point, it's not likely a lawyer could have helped.

Secondly, as the 1977 trial of the Baader-Meinhof Gang got underway, the defendants refused to recognize the court's authority, refused to cooperate (even to sit down or be silent when told), and generally attacked the proceedings as a political show trial of political prisoners. According to their warden at Stammheim prison, Hans Musser: "The court could only rarely deal with the real matter of the trial. They had to deal with endless petitions, petitions for delay, petitions to see these documents, those documents, a summons for the American president to appear as a witness, and so on."[12] Brian has none of these legal options, it appears, so his trial should proceed apace.[13]

Notes

1. See the entry for Josephus in the *JE*.
2. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 103.
3. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 103–4.
4. There's no guarantee that the legendary "Nortius Maximus"—Brian's biological father—was actually Roman, since there were so many foreign members of the Roman military by this period. His very Roman name is assumed to be "a joke name," remember.
5. As mentioned earlier when Brian was first being interrogated, Roman emperors granted great powers of discretion and judicial authority to regional governors. The fact that Pilate was forced to return to Rome to explain his actions in relation to both the Samaritans and the Jews (compelled by Vitellius) indicates the severe, injudicial, and ruthless nature of Pilate's reign in Judea. See Brandon's "Pontius Pilate in History and Legend."
6. Again, all this is likely moot for a half-Jew accused of seditious activities, especially those that might lead to the injuring or death of a Roman governor's family, and, ultimately, the potential "smash[ing] of the Roman Empire" in a handful of months. Rome's renowned legal largesse isn't applicable in this case, and Brian will be crucified along with 139 other poor souls.
7. Richard, *WWAR*, 50.
8. Pölönen, "Plebeians and Repression of Crime," 239n53.
9. Pölönen, "Plebeians and Repression of Crime," 238–39n53.
10. *WWAR*, 51.
11. "G. Davis, a New Name in Wisden," *Telegraph*, 20 August 1975: 1.
12. *Baader-Meinhof: In Love with Terror*, a.t.
13. Baader and Ensslin were sentenced to life imprisonment for murder and attempted murder on 28 April 1977. Meinhof had taken her life in prison the year before.

SCENE TWENTY-FIVE PILATE'S PASSOVER ADDRESS, PART II

PILATE: "THIS MAN COMMANDS A CWACK LEGION!"—THESE SMALL SCENES ARE PLAYING OUT LIKE EXTENDED MUSIC HALL BITS. VERBAL HUMOR THAT DOESN'T RELY ON THE VISUAL, THESE SET PIECES ARE REMINISCENT OF THE BANTER BETWEEN GUARDS AND KING IN THE TALL TOWER OF SWAMP CASTLE IN *HOLY GRAIL*. BY THIS POINT IN *BRIAN*—WHEN "CRACK" HAS BECOME "CWACK"—PILATE HAS LOST ALL VESTIGES OF AUTHORITY AND RESPECT WITH THE ASSEMBLED CROWD, BUT HE CAN STILL SEND A MAN OFF TO BE CRUCIFIED, AS WELL AS OFFER A REPRIEVE. THE "WAGGING" MOB IS IN NO DANGER, THOUGH.

Pilate: "He wanks as highly as any in Wome!"—Mentioned earlier in relation to the "splitter" Judean Popular Peoples' Front, a "wanker" is either a disliked person (a jerk), or one who masturbates, or both. In the earlier 1970s Waugh would call Heath's Policy Review Staff the "Wank Tank."[1] PRS member Baron Rothschild was "Lord Top Wank."[2]

Notes

1. Waugh, *FCY*, 23 March 1974.
2. Rothschild was a Trinity alum and adviser to Heath and Thatcher.

SCENE TWENTY-SIX
THE CRUCIFIXION PARTY

NISUS WETTUS: "Crucifixion party?"—Here the waiting crucifixion party turns to the Roman soldier as one, like boys hearkening to their headmaster,[1] and each carries a full cross on his shoulders.[2] No one carries just the *patibulum*, as was often the case in especially public crucifixions during this period. In those cases, the rest of the cross—the post, the additional nails and ropes and any tools needed to finish the task—were to be waiting at the site of the crucifixion, according to published rules of the day. The agent in charge of the crucifixion, often a professional undertaker (contracted out by the city's leaders), had to make sure these implements were on hand, according to Cook, quoting the official contract:

> Whoever will want to exact punishment on a male slave or female slave at private expense, as he [the owner] who wants the [punishment] to be inflicted, he [the contractor] exacts the punishment in this manner: if he wants [him] to bring the *patibulum* to the cross, the contractor will have to provide wooden posts, chains, and cords for the floggers and the floggers themselves. And anyone who will want to exact punishment will have to give four sesterces for each of the workers who bring the *patibulum* and for the floggers and also for the executioner. . . . Whenever a magistrate exacts punishment at public expense, so shall he decree; and whenever it will have been ordered to be ready to carry out the punishment, the contractor will have gratis to set up stakes (*cruces*), and will have gratis to provide nails, pitch, wax, candles, and those things which are essential for such matters. Also if he will be commanded to drag [the cadaver] out with a hook, he must drag the cadaver itself out, his workers dressed in red, with a bell ringing, to a place where many cadavers will be.[3]

These would have been rules applied in the larger cities of the empire and Rome, though Jerusalem, as a holy city, might have demanded and been provided different standards. Leaving bodies out overnight, for example, would have been much more challenging anywhere near the temple.

NISUS WETTUS: "We will be on show as we go through the town, let's not let the side down . . ."—An important part of the crucifixion charge and actual execution was the spectacle, the visual proof that crime doesn't pay, especially crimes against the state. The thousands crucified following

Spartacus's defeat, as well as the many crucifixions displayed outside the walls of Jerusalem as the city fell were intended as grim messages.

Most often a sport and/or school phrase, to not "let the side down" meant comporting oneself and playing well (orange sections eaten as the crucifixion party moved through the city wouldn't have been a surprise). British journalists employ the term often, but not only in sporting stories. Pakistani revolutionary Tariq Ali left the UK to return home as the first Bhutto administration began in 1969, hoping that a Pakistan socialist paradise was in the offing. But this "disappointed Trotskyite" met similar hurdles on the path to "freedom" that Reg and the PFJ encounter:

> [Ali] flew home last week on the day that President Ayub Khan's regime capitulated to 15 weeks of revolt. He appears not only to have missed the bus, but also to have found some contrast in the Pakistan left-wing camp. Mr. Z. A. Bhutto,[4] the former Foreign Minister, who led the uprising is somewhat of a revisionist, Mr. Ali has discovered. There is also a "frightening vacuum of revolutionary socialism" in Pakistan and Peking has *let the side down* and supported President Ayub Khan as the guardian against imperialism, he says.[5]

Ali was clearly hoping that China would step up and support his chosen candidate (and version of socialism).

As recently as the first days of Callaghan's administration at No. 10 in April 1976, this same sports-related phraseology was being heard as the new (and tenuously seated[6]) Labour government dealt with its first wage demand from the unions, a demand the government surrendered to completely. "Lapsing into the language of some sheepskin-jacketed football manager," Sandbrook writes, "Callaghan spoke warmly of his pride in 'Denis and all the rest of the lads,' while Michael Foot sent a warm note of congratulations for 'a Herculean feat.'"[7]

CENTURION: "Crucifixion party . . . wait for it"—There were strict, published rules governing the execution of slaves, as noted above. This isn't unlike the "regulations" mentioned by the Cart Driver in *Holy Grail*, though those rules could easily be overlooked, with the help of a cudgel and a few coins. Brian isn't a slave, nor is his mother, but whatever rights he might have had seem to have been overlooked here. As for the military "Wait for it" phrase, the Pythons have used it before, in *Flying Circus* Eps. 4 and 5, borrowing it from the Goons and many British war comedies.[8]

One man, ALFONSO, seems to be making particularly heavy weather of it—The saying "making particularly heavy weather" would indicate that the job at hand isn't all that hard, but it's being made to look harder. This is Chris Langham, who came along as part of the repertory group to fill smaller roles. He

will be seen rather famously much later playing the hopelessly outmatched new minister Hugh Abbot in *The Thick of It* (2005).

SAINTLY PASSER-BY (Jones): "Let me shoulder your burden brother"—This is a "no good deed goes unpunished" moment seen often in the Python world, but it's also specifically a borrow from *Ben-Hur*. In *Ben-Hur* during the long crucifixion walk, Christ—carrying the full cross—falls. (The other two condemned are only shouldering the patibulums.) A Roman soldier grabs a man from the crowd and forces him to shoulder the cross, while Ben-Hur fetches water for the fallen Christ. There's no indication that the man forced into labor has actually taken Christ's place, but that's where the Pythons step in for the joke.

The set and prop designs around this man include a bunch of dangling candles, each either shaped like a cross, or as a man on a cross. They're not a very thoughtful design, having three wicks, so they're silly enough to be here on a Python set. Jeremias notes that the production and trade of souvenirs was an important part of Jerusalem's festival history; many pilgrims wanted to bring home trinkets to represent their devotional visit. Jewelry including signet rings, seals, and head ornaments have been documented, while votive candles (maybe not in the shape of a cross, but maybe so . . .) don't seem out of the question.[9] There is also cloth or animal skin visible with decorative cross shapes cut out of it. These people of Jerusalem are obviously observing the regular and memorable crucifixion parades as part of their Passover celebration. This is all part of the painstaking prop design Gilliam and his crew created for a believable Jerusalem, and which Gilliam was certain wasn't being appreciated.

Notes

1. There was, incidentally, a headmaster-and-class scene planned to start the film, but it found its way out of the finished product. A sex education classroom appears in *Meaning of Life*.

2. It will be seen that there are already crosses in place at the crucifixion site, none bearing victims; it's not clear where all the crosses end up once they are carried outside the city by the crucifixion party.

3. Cook, "Envisioning Crucifixion," 265–66; See also Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 74–75.

4. Bhutto would be executed in 1979. The Pythons mention him as a guest attending the premier of *Holy Grail* (on *The Album of the Soundtrack of the Trailer of the Film of* Monty Python and the Holy Grail). Tariq Ali attended Oxford at the same time as Jones and Palin. Ali was also a potential candidate representing the Radical Alliance in the late 1960s.

5. "Tariq Ali Assesses a Revolt," *Times*, 1 March 1969: 8; italics added.

6. Within hours of Callaghan achieving the PM's office, a Labour junior minister died in hospital, and Labour's majority was gone. As of 6 April 1976, Labour held 314 seats, and all other parties combined for 316, meaning coalition was unavoidable (Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun*, 465–66). This almost evenly matched House also meant that the minutiae of parliamentary democracy—Reg's voice should come to mind now—would have to be employed by its most ruthless and gifted practitioner, Michael Foot, which may at least partly account for the parliamentary fastidiousness the PFJ demonstrates (464).

7. Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun*, 469.

8. Larsen *MPFC: UC*, 1.77.

9. Jeremias, *JTJ*, 9, 29, 104. There is a bit of surviving footage on DVD versions of the film of Palin as a market haggler trying to hawk some of these goods.

SCENE TWENTY-SEVEN

PILATE'S PASSOVER ADDRESS, PART III

PILATE: "No Weubens. No Weginalds. No Wudolph the Wed Nosed Weindeer!"—"Reuben" and "Reginald" are here simply because they begin with "r," but "Rudolph" and the following "Spencer Tracy" are bare-faced irruptions of modernity like the *Star Wars* bit earlier.[1] The Rankin and Bass version of *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* had been a staple on holiday television since 1964; the popular children's book made its debut in 1939, and the song appeared a decade later. The Fleischer Brothers had produced a cinematic cartoon for Rudolph in 1948, as well. The stop-motion animated short was running on virtually every regional BBC station on 24 December 1976, for example.

Hollywood icon Spencer Tracy had died in 1967; he's included because his name offers three "ess" opportunities for Biggus.

JUDITH: "Release Brian!"—Bob Hoskins and the mob are just teasing Pilate and Biggus, but Judith actually knows of a prisoner she wants released, and she also knows how to work the Jerusalem crowd, clearly. Wiedemann writes that this is nothing new in the empire, especially given the all-important nature of games, contests, and vocal crowds: "Suetonius tells us that during Vespasian's reign, his son, as Praetorian Prefect, arranged for partisans of his to be distributed among the theatre audience to demand the execution of individuals whom Titus suspected of opposing him."[2] Judith is simply taking the crowd's good-natured animus to poke and prod their betters and turning it to her purpose, and it works.

PILATE: "Very well. I shall welease Bwian!"—So Pilate decides to release the only man in custody—that we know of—who is actually guilty of a capital crime. No thieves or other brigands are offered, just Brian. This complicates the depiction of the much-battered prefect, especially in his biblical decision to allow Jesus to meet his fate, allegedly knowing he was innocent. The Pythons

haven't simply replicated the events of the Passion here, placing Brian in Jesus's place throughout, and calling it square. Their character is caught up in the religious and revolutionary fervor of the period, both well documented historically, glancing across the messianic touchstones from Gospel stories of Jesus's ministry and death. This was too close for comfort for those who would protest the film and call it blasphemous. The problematized Pilate is an interesting Pilate, though, and was being argued in academic circles, in Passion plays, and on editorial pages of the postwar period. This Pilate seems to be relying on rules as opposed to laws, which will ring familiar in a moment. In an article looking at the expectations Christians should have of themselves in relation to "world order," the *Times* correspondent quoted Karl Barth, "perhaps the greatest theological master since Augustine, [who] spoke astringently about the behaviour of Pontius Pilate":

> He suggested that when Pilate pronounced Jesus innocent, yet handed him over, he did what all politicians do and what has belonged to the actual achievement of politics in all times: he tried to maintain order, and his own position of power, by surrendering the clear law, for the protection of which he had been installed. In him, the state abandoned its legal basis and was given over to a clique.[3]

Granted, the Pythons' version of Pilate never seems to be truly worried about losing control to the extent that his rule might be threatened; the historical Pilate was outnumbered and far from the support of Rome, or even Syria. The Pythons' version of the man is willing to give a Passover gift to the braying mob, any prisoner they want, and is also willing to put up with their "wagging" him if it means making good on his feast-time promise. This is a version of Pilate who does not sentence Jesus, nor does he give Jesus over to religious authorities knowing he will be killed. This Pilate isn't the Pilate of (most) history, the man who washed his hands to pass responsibility away from himself.

It's clear the Pythons meant to keep a distance between their Pilate and the Pilate of the Gospels (no scourging, no washing of hands, etc.), though as one of only two historical characters depicted in the film, Pilate's actions are fairly traditional—his job is to keep order in this province of the Roman Empire. In this, the Pythons are echoing to a degree the conclusions of a recent and controversial book by Haim Cohn, *The Trial and Death of Jesus* (1968). The Israeli politician, jurist, and author argued that it was Pontius Pilate and the Roman forces—and not the Sanhedrin—who tried and executed Jesus.[4] Our Pilate decides Brian's culpability and sentence on his own, which he had the authority to do, historically. One-hundred-and-thirty-nine men (and women) besides Brian will be crucified, yes, meaning Pilate has approved their sentences,

but Brian is treated as indifferently as any of them, the indifference, and perhaps fairness, of law, equally applied.

Notes

1. Reuben is a name that fits, being a Hebrew name; Reginald is popular, though anachronistic, with Reg here in the film, but also other political types Reginald Maudling, Reg Birch—discussed earlier—and Reg Prentice, all in newspapers of the day. Significantly, MP Reg Prentice had left Labour for the Conservatives in 1977.

2. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 167.

3. "The Christian Commitment to World Order," *Times*, 16 April 1966: 10.

4. A typical academic review of the book calls its conclusions "provocative" and its hypotheses "bold," though the book's "weaknesses" outweigh its strengths (Peter Richardson, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 265–67). See also "Shifting the Blame from the Jews to the Romans," *Times*, 10 April 1971: 12. There existed a significant cottage industry in the post-1948 years, encouraged by the new state of Israel, for Jewish scholarship that lessened or removed total blame for the crucifixion from the Jews, while leading up to this new world, Jewish artists like Marc Chagall created more Jewish versions of the crucifixion to problematize the otherwise Christian symbolism ("Resurrecting Chagall's Jewish Jesus," *ArtNews*, 10 September 2013). To a certain extent, the Pythons are also participating in this endeavor of reexamination and rehabilitation.

SCENE TWENTY-EIGHT

LOOKING FOR BRIAN ***WITH THE CRUCIFIXION QUEUE— MR CHEEKY SEEMS UNDETERRED BY THIS SIGHT—*** THE CRUCIFIXION PARTY HAS NEARLY REACHED WHAT THE SCRIPT IS CALLING “CALVARY” (KNOWN AS “GOL’GOTHA” IN MOST OF THE GOSPELS), AND WHERE *IN SITU* CROSSES CAN BE SEEN. THE CROWD ALONG THE WAY IS POLITELY APPLAUDING AND SMILING, AS IF THIS IS A CHEERY PARADE OR AN INVESTITURE PROCESSION. MR. CHEEKY IS WAVING AT THE APPRECIATIVE CROWD, PROMPTING THE CENTURION TO CUFF HIM.

MR CHEEKY—“I might have to give up being crucified . . .”—As it turns out, Mr. Cheeky has escaped crucifixion before, and he will do so again today,

thanks to the Romans' interest in the number of those crucified and not necessarily who they are.

In Pilate's jail—

Both the JAILER and his ASSISTANT indicate, as in charades, they're thinking of a "small word"—No becomes "n'yes," even as the Centurion storms out. More importantly, these two have obviously been toying with their Roman overseers, pretending to be mute, deaf, mad, and unable to communicate without a stutter. Cheeky taunts his abuser because he knows there's nothing worse than what already faces him—a slap is a small price to pay for some fleeting satisfaction. This is of a piece with Matthias calling crucifixion a "doddle," the crowd laughing at Pilate's and Biggus's expense, and the assembled mob not saving another authority figure, the religious official, from stoning earlier in the film.

SCENE TWENTY-NINE
THE PFJ RESOLVES

Inside MANDY'S kitchen . . .—The PFJ are likely meeting here due to Brian leading the "Fifth Legion" to their hideout earlier. There isn't any indication that this is actually Mandy and Brian's house—Matthias seems to be padding about in the background, not Mandy—excepting the scenic description.

REG: ". . . get on with it . . ."—This is connected by a sound bridge to the previous scene, where the Jailers are getting on with their story after the Centurion has left. They've passed the "get on with it" motion with "one abstention," and they can now act. In *Holy Grail*, Dingo's aside to the camera in Castle Anthrax is met with a "Get on with it!" from most of the cast, those already seen and those yet to appear.[1] In *Flying Circus*, the classic "Dead Parrot" sketch ends with the Colonel interrupting the "silly" proceedings and demanding they all "Get on with it!" to the next sketch—and they do.[2]

All this dithering means that the PFJ might be the Pythons' version of Tariq Ali, who was jibed at by other activists as "the revolutionary who has missed his first revolution."[3] *Daily Mail* columnist Vincent Mulchrone also dismisses Ali in February 1969 as a "lovable," "upper class" revolutionary who exhibits a "limpet-like devotion to our neo-Fascist land, repressive State machine and all"—which sounds very much like the PFJ and their attachment to the Roman version of Jerusalem.[4]

As for the continued time wasting on parliamentary procedure evident in everything the PFJ tries to do, British governance provided myriad examples for the Pythons to lampoon. In November 1975, Bernard Donoughue attended a meeting of his "constituency general management committee in North St Pancras," and he is attending for the first time as a General & Municipal Workers Union delegate (thanks to his position as adviser to PM Wilson). Donoughue sums up the three-hour meeting curtly, and recognizably: "As usual most of the time was spent passing resolutions denouncing the government."[5] A

later meeting with this same constituency group he'd bemoan as wasted time listening to "wankers."

An interesting version of this parliamentary procedure fiddling comes from the final Wilson administration, when Benn was secretary of state for industry, and was at his most Dennisean—demanding workers' control of industry. Donoughue writes on the eve of an industrial debate:

> Before leaving I put in a green paper memo to the PM warning him that Benn's proposals on the Industry Act, to come up tomorrow at the Industry Cabinet committee (IDV), were a dangerous step to the left and a significant reinterpretation of the White Paper. Because he wants (1) powers to direct a new NEB, (2) £1,500 million for acquisitions and (3) powers for compulsory acquisition without going through full parliamentary procedures. This must be stopped.[6]

In this case Donoughue and the PM would use procedure to curb Benn's overreach. Reg doesn't use a knobkerrie against "the feminists" or even as a face-or even lifesaving device—he's just incapable of proceeding without a vote being taken.[7]

Notes

1. Larsen, *BAFHG*, 338–39.
2. Larsen, *MPFC: UC* 1.127–42; *ATW* 1.8.106.
3. “Tariq Ali Assesses a Revolt,” *Times*, 1 March 1969: 8.
4. “. . . Lickspittle Running Dog of the Neo-Fascist Society,” *Daily Mail*, 6 February 1969: 6.
5. Donoughue, *DSD*, 1.578.
6. *DSD*, 1.234.
7. Francis convinces Reg to convene without “a seconder,” which gets them out the door.

SCENE THIRTY
TOWARD CALVARY

To the crucifixion hill—

WORKER removes a desiccated corpse from a cross outside the city walls—We've already seen workers like this earlier, removing fresh body parts from the arena floor at the Colosseum. This setting is again Sousse, Tunisia,[1] one used by both *Brian* and *Jesus of Nazareth*. The looming, crenellated sandstone walls can be seen behind Brian as he carries his cross toward the others already in place. The Ribat monastery structure dates from the eighth century, but looks ancient enough to have been around much earlier, which is likely why Zeffirelli chose the location, as well, rather than shooting in Israel.[2] As they'd done for *Holy Grail*, the Pythons shot at select angles and with careful compositions so as to miss the bustling city around the monastery-fortress, capturing the stone walls and passageways instead. This Ribat structure is the backdrop for the earlier "Stoning" scene, as well.

The Pythons chose as a location this very identifiable landmark even though it was seen only months before in *Jesus of Nazareth*. An earlier sequence, when Pilate is addressing the jeering crowd, was also shot at an iconic, recognizable (even when re-dressed by Gilliam) wall of the large, inner courtyard of the Ribat monastery, the very same wall seen in *Jesus of Nazareth*, and for the very same scene—Pilate's *attempts* to speak to the Passover crowd. The Pythons used the large wall (with the staircase bisecting the wall diagonally) as their set for Pilate's porch, essentially. In Zeffirelli's film, that same wall with the diagonal staircase is in the far background; Pilate (Rod Steiger), his back to the camera, is seen in silhouette as he addresses the assembled crowd. It's worth mentioning because this is just the kind of practice the Pythons had said they wanted to avoid as they made *Holy Grail*—dressing up and then just acting silly, like a *Carry On* film. The Pythons knew they might encounter and even use some of the same vistas and buildings the much more somber Zeffirelli film employed (as well as local craftsmen and even extras), and worried about the inevitable comparisons. Once they reached the Tunisian locations for the eight-week shoot,

however, they went ahead and used those same sets, and likely still hoped they weren't creating a less jiggle-and-giggle version of *Carry on Cleo*.

With the Roman soldiers—

The CENTURION marches through the market, pushing anyone out of his way—This scene is borrowed from the Zeffirelli version. As Christ carries his crossbar on his shoulders through the streets, the Romans clear the way of both supporters and jeering onlookers. When (in *Brian*) one Jerusalemite yells back "Bloody Romans!" at the Centurion, the Centurion pauses long enough to threaten him with crucifixion: "Watch it! There's still a few crosses left." The man has already scarpered, and the other soldiers don't leap to arrest the man, so maybe the threat isn't terribly real. In *Jesus of Nazareth*, as the phalanx of soldiers struggles through the streets with the condemned Christ, some citizens actually try and interfere. These are threatened with drawn weapons. Over the tumult can be heard the Centurion's cries: "Out of the way unless you want the same!" and "You want to die as well?"

At the crucifixion hill—

BIG NOSE: "You Roman git!"—Mr. Big Nose is right back where we first met him, as are many of the people we initially saw at the Sermon on the Mount—now threatening to punch a Roman, Parvus. A "git" is a fool, a "contemptible person," and we've seen a "Mr. and Mrs. Git" in Ep. 21 of *Flying Circus*, and it will be used by the man in the "Abuse" department in the "Argument Clinic" sketch, Ep. 29.[3] The soldier tells this "Jewish turd" to shut up.

BIG NOSE: "I'm not Jewish. I'm a Samaritan!"—He doesn't react to being called a turd, just being mistaken for a Jew. This is perhaps a spot-on indication of just where Pilate finally went wrong. After his several dustups with the Jews over sacrilegious offenses (including the bringing of Roman cultus objects into the Holy City), Pilate likely didn't have much leeway with either his subjects or his Roman employers. His slaughter of Samaritans as they attempted to reach Mt. Gerizim was the last straw. An embassy was sent to Vitellius, "who was now president of Syria," and Vitellius, obviously believing the reports of Pilate's cruelty (and, more importantly, his inability to keep order), sent Marcellus to replace Pilate.[4] Keeping the peace in Judea was at this time clearly more important than crushing the Jews' spirits. Pilate was ordered to report to Rome as quickly as possible, and his term as prefect came to a close.

GREGORY: "Under the terms of the Roman occupancy . . ."—These may not have been written down, but various procurators and prefects over Judea knew that observing Jewish religious and social customs made for a much more

manageable populace. These "terms" would have included allowing Jews their particular mode of worship (to one god), access to their temple, the continued sanctity of that temple, significant religious and civic control over citizens, freedom from quartering, and no expectation of devotion to the Roman cultus or to serve in the Roman army.

GREGORY: ". . . we are entitled to be crucified in a purely Jewish area"—As the Samaritans claimed a direct ancestral relation to the ancient Israelites, and that "their temple on Mount Gerizim, and not the temple at Jerusalem, was the covenanted sanctuary of the God of Israel . . . there was a deep-rooted hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans, whose territory lay between Judaea and Galilee," writes Brandon. "Like the Jews, the Samaritans also looked for the coming of the Messiah."[5] It's no surprise, then, that Gregory and his wife would demand a crucifixion alongside Jews only.

Also, even though they'd had to take or help take the city twice, in 63 and 37 BC, both battles quite bloody, the Romans had conceded much to the Jews as part of their eventual occupation and administration. Letters or delegations from Jewish leaders to Pilate's Syrian Legate superior or even to Rome and the emperor often resulted in official and semiofficial remonstrations to the prefect.

PHARISEE: "Pharisee separate from Sadducees . . ."—At the time the Pharisees were popularly divided into seven types, including those who were falsely humble, those who worshipped with "impure motives," those who always counted their good deeds, *etc*.[6] The Pythons don't offer any identifiable Pharisee or Sadducee, with the noted exception of the Official at the stoning, but there are reasons they would not want to be crucified near each other:

> The Sadducees, jealously guarding the privileges and prerogatives established since the days of Solomon, when Zadok, their ancestor, officiated as priest, insisted upon the literal observance of the Law; the Pharisees, on the other hand, claimed prophetic or Mosaic authority for their interpretation . . . at the same time asserting the principles of religious democracy and progress.[7]

The possibility that a Pharisee or Sadducee would be crucified might be remote, unless they took their religious (and democratic) beliefs to the ultimate degree of sedition. Josephus records that in the first century BC, Jannaeus crucified hundreds of Pharisee rebels, killing them in front of their families.[8] It might have been more difficult for Pilate to follow through on such an execution, given the volatile situation in Jerusalem during the time of Jesus.

VOICE: "And Swedish separate from Welsh . . ."—The silly subtitles for *Holy Grail* were made in faux-Swedish, and Jones is the troupe's only Welshman. This nationality ghettoization sounds silly, and is likely meant as

such, but the Roman Empire encountered and enslaved peoples from dozens of regions, including Scandinavia and across Britain. Mannix reports that one prisoner, captured with a Germanic army, was "a Norseman, a giant with long blond hair and a beard."[9] This prisoner, armed with "an enormous two-handed sword," fought to victory in the ring against trained gladiators, and was only defeated when, succumbing to hubris, he accepted a challenge from the motivated son of a soldier who'd been killed by Germanic tribes in the north.[10]

CENTURION: "There's a hundred and forty of you lot to get up . . ."—Mass executions were part of the Roman spectacles, and became more frequent as the empire struggled to sustain itself abroad and at home:

> Wholesale crucifixions in the arena became a major attraction, and the crowd would lay bets on who would be the first to die. As with every betting sport, a lot of time and trouble was devoted to fixing the business. By bribing an attendant [like the Pythons' centurion, Parvus], you could arrange to have a certain victim die almost immediately, last an hour, or live all day. If the spikes were driven in so as to cut an artery, the man would die in a few minutes. If driven so as to break the bones only, the man would live several hours. Occasionally, though, a victim would cross you up. He might deliberately pull at the spikes to make himself bleed to death or even beat his brains out against the upright. You could never be sure.[11]

A footnote from Whiston's edition of *Wars of the Jews* affixes blame to the Jews: "Reland very properly takes notice here, how justly this judgment came upon the Jews, when they were crucified in such multitudes together, that the Romans wanted room for the crosses, and crosses for the bodies of these Jews, since they had brought this judgment on themselves by the crucifixion of their Messiah."[12] This "they only have themselves to blame" idea seems to have been prevalent among at least non-Jewish cultures across the years.

CENTURION: "Belt up!"—Another bit of Royal Air Force slang—meaning shut up—that had become part of the English-speaking lexicon after World War II. The five English Pythons grew up in the immediate postwar period. Unintelligible banter ("flipped over his Betty Harper's") heard from RAF men was the subject of a sketch in Ep. 43 of *Flying Circus*.

BRIAN: "You don't have to do this . . . you don't have to take orders"—During this period the pacifist Pat Arrowsmith was being arrested over and over again for leafletting and demonstrating against nuclear proliferation, war, and the British presence in Northern Ireland.[13] During arraignments she would lecture the judge on how "disaffected" British troops had become while deployed in Northern Ireland, essentially saying they shouldn't have to take orders and didn't want to fight.[14] The pacifist voices of the day often tried to talk past the military leaders and governments and directly to the soldiers, a sort of putting-daisies-in-

gun-barrels scenario. Brian is trying to appeal to the humanity of the centurion in front of him, a man who only has one job to do—get one-hundred-and-forty people onto crosses. Unfortunately the centurion likes "taking orders," and Brian and others will be jobs that get done.

With the PFJ—

The REVOLUTIONARIES meanwhile are marching . . . rather like a trade union delegation . . .—Not "rather like," but *precisely* like. This scene is borrowed directly from *I'm All Right Jack*, though without direct attribution. The first such scene occurs early in the film, just after it's been reported to the chief steward that there is a suspected time-and-motion man infiltrating the work force. Following Mr. Kite closely, the Works Committee marches to confront this new man, rounding corners neatly and marching in lockstep. The Committee then marches, shoulder-to-shoulder, to the personnel manager (Terry-Thomas), there threatening a work stoppage if the time-and-motion study continues. In the end, just like in *Brian*, an equilibrium is reached, where the agitator, in that case Windrush, is eventually removed and both management and labor return to the peaceful status quo.

MR. CHEEKY (Idle): "Couple days up here, lots of people get rescued . . ."—The 1965 Hugh Schonfield book, *The Passover Plot*, actually posited Jesus's *faking* his own martyrdom. Schonfield writes that the revolutionary Jesus planned to be nailed to the cross, that the vinegar he was given was mixed with a sedative so that he could appear to "die," and then be rescued from the cross by his fellow insurrectionists.[15] There was a film of the same name that appeared in 1976, starring Donald Pleasance and Zalman King as Pilate and Jesus (Yeshua), respectively. In the film, Jesus decides, at Judas's urging, to accept a more militant role, like Brian, and help lead the Jewish resistance to Roman rule, plotting "a three-pronged attack on the Roman occupation."[16] Both Christian and Jewish organizations reacted negatively to the proposed film, and it received limited distribution.[17]

Mr. Frisbee isn't worried, clearly, as he's been through this before. Many Jews, having reached this point—knocking at the threshold of death—were as unafraid as Mr. Frisbee, but for very different reasons. Horsley (1979) points out that if the victim was alive during a time of "intense eschatological anticipation," meaning the general belief was that "God's final age of peace and justice was actually imminent," then torture and even death were almost welcome markers on the path to God's presence.[18] Josephus mentions that "in case of success"—where the Jews stood their religious ground and died "well"—

> "the Jews would have laid the foundations of prosperity [*eudaimon*]," [which,] translated from Hellenistic style into the language of Jewish apocalypticism, would mean that Judas and Zadok proclaimed that by carrying out the eschatological will of God they would participate in bringing about the final Kingdom of God.[19]

Josephus also records an event he witnessed involving the "rescue" of men from their respective crosses. Following the siege of Jotapata, Josephus was able to wrangle a kind of pardon from the Roman authorities,[20] including Vespasian and his son, Titus, and he set about gathering his friends and family from various states of bondage (including those held or hiding in the temple in a vanquished Jerusalem). After reconnoitering "a certain village called Thecoa" for Titus, Josephus recorded the following in *The Life of Flavius Josephus*:

> As I came back, I saw many captives crucified, and remembered three of them as my former acquaintance. I was very sorry at this in my mind, and went with tears in my eyes to Titus, and told him of them; so he immediately commanded them to be taken down, and to have the greatest care taken of them, in order to their recovery; yet two of them died under the physician's hands, while the third recovered.[21]

Even if not "rescued," corpses on crosses were guarded closely across the empire. Families of those crucified would make attempts to retrieve their loved ones' bodies for the giving of last rites followed by a proper burial, two ordinances the Romans wanted to deny their condemned. One example from the fictional writing of Petronius, provided by Cook:

> In Petronius' novel a virtuous matron of Ephesus buries her husband, who had died naturally. A soldier was guarding crosses (of crucified robbers *latrones*), lest anyone take the body for burial. . . . The soldier persuades her to take food and then seduces her. While on his errand the parents of one of the crucified men, "seeing that the watch was ill-kept, took their man down in the dark and administered the last rite to him. The soldier was eluded while he was off duty, and next day, seeing one of the crosses without its corpse, he was in terror of punishment."[22]

In this version of the oft-told tale, the matron actually suggests replacing the missing corpse on the cross with the body of her dead husband—she didn't want to lose her new lover to prison or exile or worse. Hearing the tale, others thought the woman should have been placed on the cross, instead.[23]

MR. CHEEKY: "My brother usually rescues me . . ."—This phenomenon—almost consequence-free recidivism—has historical precedent, and in this time period. The Judean procurator Festus[24] arrested *sicarii* whenever his forces could find them. Rather than follow the Roman legal procedure of a speedy trial and an even speedier execution, Festus "allowed some Sicarii to be ransomed by their relatives," according to Kotker. "In order to pay Festus, the other Sicarii attacked and robbed the rich." The next step can be guessed, and is brilliant:

“They handed the money over to Festus, and the imprisoned assassins were set free to continue their crimes until they were caught again.”[25] These sicarii obviously understood how the corrupt Roman legal system worked, and they (and the procurator) turned it to their advantage. Mr. Frisbee III understands how a sentence to the crosses works, and, as long as his randy brother delivers, he’ll soon be free to carouse again.

MR. CHEEKY: “. . . if he can keep off the tail for more than twenty minutes . . . randy little bugger, up and down like the Assyrian Empire”—The Assyrians did manage to create an enormous empire “up and down” Egypt, the Middle East, Asia Minor, and the Caucasus. The Bridgekeeper in *Holy Grail* uses Assyria as a question, and sends Robin to his death after an incorrect answer.[26] To be “randy” is to be sexually overactive, while “little bugger” is slangy but affectionate.

MR. CHEEKY: “. . . ‘Allo . . . your family arrived, then?”—Interesting use of the term, though Mr. Frisbee has just finished mentioning his own brother, so he may just assume that these are Brian’s actual family members. Reg will address Brian as “sibling Brian.”

Also, Brian’s PFJ family doesn’t include Judith, the only actual female member of the movement. For narrative purposes she must come next, of course, before Brian’s mum, so that his sacrifice on the cross can be juxtaposed against *everything* he’s surrendering in his nearly willing martyrdom. The treatment of Judith throughout the film—she is an “Other,” always—is influenced by another powerful and ultimately polarizing political woman mentioned earlier, Marcia Williams, later Baroness Falkender. Williams had been at Harold Wilson’s elbow since 1956 and right through 1976, serving as his personal and then political secretary. Her quicksilver personality and vitriolic temper combined with a grasping political acquisitiveness (and Wilson’s seeming inability to separate himself from her) alienated many inside No. 10, in the Labour Party, and in the halls of British government. As the Wilson administration ended in 1976, it was widely believed that Williams had created the infamous Honours List, known as the “Lavender List,” for the PM, rewarding *her* friends and business associates—some of whom later faced criminal charges and censure. Rumors that her kitchen cabinet actually ran the country during Wilson’s tenures remain alive today. Clearly, she was much feared, and much disliked. Donoughue reports that Arnold Goodman, one of Wilson’s political advisers, would say very little about her (she sued detractors often, vigorously, and successfully); in July 1977 Goodman told Donoughue: “But for Marcia, Harold

Wilson would have been a good Prime Minister—not a great one, but a good one."[27] *Private Eye*'s Waugh was certain that "the terror of Lady Forkbender" had driven Wilson "mad."[28] Williams and Margaret Thatcher were the most visible female political figures of the Pythons' youth and then adulthood, when powerful and deadly female terrorists also occupied the headlines.

REG: "Hello, sibling Brian"—According to intimate Donoughue, PM Wilson would often distinguish between those who wanted to be closest to his ear, "draw[ing] the line between what [HW] calls the 'family' and the civil servants."[29] Wilson's family also included the mercurial Marcia Williams, who almost singlehandedly held the Labour government hostage in April 1974, when she felt her influence on Wilson slipping.[30] Donoughue recorded his feelings after one particularly vitriolic phone conversation with Williams:

> It was absolutely ridiculous that a Labour government elected to help millions of people, and its PM, should be totally absorbed in comforting and being attacked by one woman. She is suffering terribly. . . . Her insistence on attacking all who try to help her, on insisting that they put her before everything else, is intolerable. I have now been through every emotion—sympathy for her, anger at the press, irritation with her, and now, finally and totally, exhaustion and being fed up and wanting to wash my hands of it.[31]

When Judith burst into the PFJ's meeting after Brian has been arrested for the second time, interestingly, she also was treated like "that bloody woman," the oft-ignored or put-up-with Margaret Thatcher. Judith is at least right about Brian's situation, and right about what the PFJ could do, if they chose.

On the cross, Brian is clearly part of the PFJ family, but he's about to be allowed to embrace his role as martyr to the cause, so the family can move on without him. This is reminiscent of the mind-set seen in terror groups of the 1960s, Farrell writes:

> Some very recent research on terrorist organizations (not including the Japanese Red Army) has demonstrated that group cohesiveness and identification are dominant factors in explaining behavior. Isolation from society, compartmented decision making, and dedication to a cause tend to reinforce and sustain the life of the group—even after goals and objectives have been attained. Group survival becomes the sustaining force of the movement, regardless of any political rhetoric espoused.[32]

So the PFJ unit has withdrawn and regrouped and will survive this debacle, Brian's loss certainly acting to refocus the group in their "continuing struggle."

REG: ". . . we are not in fact the rescue committee"—Marighella's *Minimanual* offers bold and quite assured support for such rescues, for "liberation of prisoners," those "ideological comrades" who have, in "the daily struggle against the enemy, [been] subject to arrest," and who likely face "unlimited" prison sentences in dungeons or on work farms.[33] Brian is on a cross

in plain sight, and the Roman sentries flee at the first sign of the Judean Peoples' Front, meaning he's no longer even being guarded. His friends aren't compelled to act, though, leaving it to Brian to get the escape ball rolling, if he can. Marighella applauds this self-initiative, as well: "The imprisoned guerrilla views the prisons of the enemy as a terrain which he must dominate and understand in order to free himself by a guerrilla operation." He concludes: "There is no jail, either on an island, in a city penitentiary, or on a farm, that is impregnable to the slyness, cleverness and the firepower of the rebels."[34] What Marighella hadn't foreseen is the terrorist group who also happens to adhere strictly to *Robert's Rules of Order*, the parliamentary system employed and rigidified by the British trade unions over the years, and the even more leader-free syndicalist movements where "the elemental mass meeting of the workers" might slow down or prevent any real action at all.[35] Fred Kite and his shop stewards are the exemplars here, and the PFJ have taken the lesson. These PFJ delegates would have to lawfully consider any such change, a new "delegation of function," which would likely take much, much longer than Brian has to live on the cross. So Brian is going to be allowed to seal his martyrdom with his death, which often happened in these desperate situations. In the more contemporary cases of the Japanese Red Army and the Baader-Meinhof Gang, the fates of the Lod Airport massacre[36] survivor Kozo Okamoto, as well as RAF leader Andreas Baader, were handled quite differently.

First, to Germany. A fan of Nechaev, Lenin, and Marighella,[37] Baader had been convicted for an arson bombing in 1968, and had fled sentencing before being captured in April 1970. In May 1970 he was serving out his sentence when, during a phony "book interview" arranged by journalist and RAF associate Ulrike Meinhof, Baader's RAF colleagues rescued him from police custody at gunpoint, seriously wounding one man.[38] This was Meinhof's initiation into the activities of the terror group. The gang would flee the country for a spate of terrorist training in Jordan, then return to bomb buildings and rob banks.

As a member of the JRA, Kozo Okamoto was likely the best-known terrorist of the period, later being eclipsed only by Carlos. Okamoto had been the sole surviving terrorist, like Brian, and he was paraded through a show "trial," like Brian, and then condemned, like Brian. In July 1976 the Entebbe hijacking participants, German and Arab nationals, had demanded that Okamoto be released from an Israeli prison in return for safe release of the mostly Israeli hostages. Writing when these wounds were still fresh (in 1977), Dobson and Payne described why Okamoto was targeted by his comrades-in-arms:

“Okamoto has become something more than just a Japanese terrorist. He has become part of terrorist mythology, the only survivor of the bloodiest atrocity ever carried out by the PFLP. Like the Russians with their spies, it has become a matter of honour and credence with the PFLP to get him out of prison.”[39] Brian fits the bill here, but he will not be rescued from the cross; instead, he becomes a post-probationary martyr. Likely, Brian’s willingness to actually follow through on the PFJ’s violent anti-imperialist agenda was more troubling, to Reg, Francis, and the lot, than the specter of the continuation of Roman rule, with its admitted perquisites. Back at Entebbe in July 1976, the terrorist’s demands for Okamoto and other prisoners were duly taken into account, and then the Israeli government launched a massive rescue operation, killing all terrorists, more than thirty-three Ugandan soldiers, and rescuing more than one hundred hostages.[40] The Israelis had also expended a great deal of time and energy tracking down and eliminating those connected to Black September and the 1972 Olympics massacre.[41] The PFJ certainly fear the Roman version of that revenge, and decide to not invite the attention.

REG: “. . . however, I have been asked to read the following prepared statement on behalf of the movement”—This is the moment where Reg and the PFJ officially abandon Brian to his fate, where Reg turns aside from his oft-stated goal: the immediate overthrow of Rome. In November 1967 Harold Wilson experienced a similar *volte-face*. After months of refusing to consider, talk about, or even have a misty plan ready for the devaluation of the pound—characterizing it as “nonsense,” and seeing it as potentially a personal and national disgrace[42]—the hard economic facts finally forced the government’s hand. Chancellor Callaghan quickly put together a “round of cuts” that might make the embarrassing move actually efficacious, and Wilson announced the devaluation on 18 November.[43] Like Reg, Wilson climbed down from his hobbyhorse as soon as it became politically (and for Reg, physically) dangerous. Wilson, whom Andrew Marr characterized as “curiously chirpy” after this very public humiliation—the sacrosanctity of the pound had long been “essential to his strategy”—would carry on the economic fight in a very Reg-like manner.[44] This “abandonment of principles” quirk came to characterize Wilson, Bernstein notes in his book *The Myth of Decline*. Wilson’s “reluctance to try to master Labour’s divisions on two key issues when they first threatened party unity”—trade union reforms in the 1960s and entry in to the EEC in the early 1970s—meant his eventual turnabouts in both areas rang false:[45]

> In both instances, he backed away from the risks of splitting the party that a showdown would have entailed. In doing so, however, he also repudiated policies that he had supported. These retreats helped to shape a view of Wilson as a man of no principles. While this judgement is not entirely fair, it is clear that preserving the unity and so the political viability of the Labour Party transcended all other issues for him. (233)

Reg has adopted the same tack, moving past overt revolutionary activity that now threatens his comrades' (and his own) safety, now happy to express revolutionary ideals in the form of proclamation, not agitation. In doing so, the core of the PFJ—including, likely, Judith—remain undivided and uncrucified: Reg has saved the Party.

It's also been clear all along that the PFJ is only effective as a revolutionary body by proxy, meaning newer, more motivated "probationary" members will carry out insurrectionary actions while the core of the cell remain free to plan revolutions, discuss procedures, and parse gender references. Most of the twentieth-century guerrilla groups structured themselves similarly, with wound-up acolytes given arms or suicide devices, then sent out to commit mayhem.[46] Attrition thus necessarily (and negatively) affected the longevity of most of these groups. Brian was set on this path by Reg's suggestion of "a little job" to make his bones—an eruption of Roman negative attention and retribution followed, sending Brian to the cross and the PFJ back into the safety of parliamentary procedure and whispered revolutionary invective. After Labour went down to defeat in the 1959 General Election, Aneurin Bevan[47] made his now-famous statement lamenting this kind of self-defeating activity: "The trade unionist votes at the polls against the consequences of his own anarchy."[48] In between elections the unions had stirred the political pot, demanding more and more, and Labour (under opposition leader Hugh Gaitskell), had promised a mutually exclusive "more spending" and "no new taxes" future. Political historian Vernon Bogdanor comments on voters' eventual at-the-polls epiphany: "I think that this is a very powerful point: people who pressed harder for wages, when it came to the election, were shocked by what happened and voted Conservative."[49] The Tories won, increasing the Conservative majority and winning a third straight election. With this official parchment Reg and the PFJ are voting at the polls "against the consequences of their own anarchy," tamping down the unwanted Roman attention and reestablishing the *status quo ante*. Conservative PM Macmillan's avuncular talk leading up to the 1959 election, reminding the British people that they'd "never had it so good," certainly resonates here with Reg and his siblings. Life was indeed quieter and safer before the firebrand Brian took up the revolutionary gauntlet, so the PFJ "vote" to return to that good

life, even if it means living under the rule of the "bloody Romans" and their improved, diabolically comfortable infrastructure.

REG: "We, the People's[50] Front of Judea brackets Officials end brackets . . ."—This is an unusually positive ending for a terror group of this period. The Romans actually prided themselves on their ability to stamp out these insurrections almost as they happened, the minimum requirement being the decapitation of the movement. When the armed Samaritans followed their erstwhile prophet up Mount Gerizim, Pilate's troops were there in force to quash the action—dozens of battlefield executions took the lives of all leaders. When Judas of Galilee rebelled against the Roman census and many followed him, Roman reprisals meant "the leaders perished, and the revolt was crushed."[51] For the PFJ, however, it is the newest (and most reasonably violent) member Brian who is captured and killed; the "[Officials]" are allowed to live on, perhaps a nod to their collective lack of threat credibility to Rome's supremacy.

Brandon wonders whether the Jewish historian Josephus suffered from his own conscience in a similar manner, as he related the story of the Zealots in an unflattering way.[52] Josephus fought for the Jews and Jerusalem, yes, but he also eventually surrendered, went over to the Roman side, and became something of an apologist for Titus, Vespasian, and the Romans' right to rule their empire. Reg doesn't tear down Brian, but he clearly doesn't align himself with his acolyte—he's not willing to climb onto a cross next to him, or take his place. Reg's conscience can be assuaged by simply vowing to carry on Brian's fight. Josephus has his own conscience to deal with, according to Brandon:

> A renegade, who prospered in the service of his nation's conquerors, Josephus naturally sought to denigrate those who had led Israel into revolt. But that was not all: Josephus was uncomfortably conscious that the Zealots had sacrificed themselves and their nation, inspired by an uncompromising religious faith that he himself did not possess. In self-justification, therefore, he sought to misrepresent their motives.[53]

Again, Reg isn't tearing down, but he is misrepresenting Brian's motives—nowhere does he acknowledge that Brian started all this for the love of Judith.

REG: ". . . brackets Officials end brackets"—This official phraseology—"brackets . . . end brackets"—is yet another borrow from *I'm All Right Jack*, where the reading aloud of an official communication involved the inclusion of "brackets" where found. Stanley has been sent to almost a dozen companies for placement, and he's failed at every interview. The placement center director is writing a letter to Stan, detailing the failure: "with Mr. Bartlett, Managing

Director of the British Corset Company, brackets Foundation of the Nation closed brackets Limited."

REG: ". . . on this, the occasion of your martyrdom"—The PFJ will comport themselves as any parliamentary body would, observing the agreed-upon rules even if it means Brian must be surrendered to "martyrdom." So over the course of the film the PFJ have moved from demanding the forceful overthrow of the largest empire in the world to being satisfied with a continuation of the status quo—something they sniffed at earlier, when discussing Jesus's sermon—their contradictory behavior moving them from epic to mock epic, which is a Python trope. In discussing the rise of the new powers in 1979—including Thatcher and her market agenda, a Polish pope challenging the Soviet system, the Islamic Iranian Revolution, etc.—Caryl reminds that "it was easy to underestimate just how much these leaders had actually absorbed from their opponents on the utopian Left." Already admitting that the Roman Empire has given Jerusalem and Judea much, the PFJ acknowledge this cultural and political absorption, casting their reactionary colorings into a new hue. If, as Caryl writes, "A conservative can be defined as someone who wants to defend or restore the old order," as Reg seems ready to admit now, "a counterrevolutionary, by contrast, is a conservative who has learned from the revolution."[54] The PFJ have certainly learned from their revolution, and Brian is the exemplar of what happens to counterrevolutionaries. As often is the case, the Pythons can have it both ways. Their more modernist characters, always partly out of their time, can take advantage of both history and historical fiction—these are the kinds of characters who can lose and still claim a win, without self-contradiction (think of *Holy Grail*'s de-limbed Black Knight, e.g.). The synthesis Caryl sees in the appropriation of useful elements from the "utopian Left" by Khomeini, Deng, and even Thatcher is called by one historian "revolutionary traditionalism," a Pythonesque phrase to be sure.[55] Reg and the PFJ can continue their traditional activities and still consider themselves revolutionaries.

Bruce Anderson puts a finer point on it, writing about Margaret Thatcher and the so-called "Essex Man," the unseen, unheralded masses who elected Thatcher in 1979 and kept Labour at bay for eighteen years:

> She had a visceral hostility to the modern state and to those who tried to live off it. Her appeal was to the striving, the sharp-elbowed, the successful; they were the only people she understood. Had she been asked the question: "Chronic illness apart, if anyone fails in life, is it his own fault?" she could only have given one honest answer: yes. *But most of the population are not strivers; their fear of failure would always inhibit them from hazarding everything for success. They also have a contradictory*

attitude towards the state. Happy to stand on their own feet when the tax cuts came round, they also wish to be protected.[56]

Reg and Francis and Stan are strivers who are also keen to stay alive; Brian strove and is now paying the price. At this moment, the PFJ have striven enough, they've tasted failure and don't like it, and, as it turns out, the oppressive Roman state has benefits for all the people of Jerusalem, dampening insurrectionary fervor—outrage suppressed by a "contradictory attitude." If the postwar Welfare State is the oppressive empire, then fighting against cradle-to-grave protections might eventually seem contradictory; if heartless Thatcherism is the oppressor, then the cold light of freer markets and a reduced government mean life becomes dicey again, another painful contradiction. Both play a part in *Life of Brian*.

REG: ". . . excluding those concerned with drainage, medicine, roads, housing, education, viniculture . . ."—Reg and the PFJ have already mentioned most of these, excepting "drainage" and "housing," meaning there are two *more* benefits of living as part of the Roman Empire. They've crawled through evidence of one of these Roman architectural wonders in the "Caesar Augustus Memorial Sewer," likely based on the impressive Cloaca Maxima drainage tunnels in Rome. This system channeled annual runoff, removed waste from the city, and drained the regional marshes—it was truly one of the wonders of ancient Roman engineering.

Reg also mentions housing, but the Romans don't seem to have been as keen on building homes for Jews as administrative and public service works, especially in Jerusalem. Many of the common folk lived outside the city, and many who lived in the city were attached to the city and religious governments.

REG: ". . . and hermaphrodites"—Likely just a nod to the emerging sensitivity to "Others" in this decade—meaning, for the Pythons, yet another group to make fun of—but the hermaphrodite was in the (satirical) news, and recently. In an April 1976 column for *Private Eye*, Claud Cockburn writes of "Britain's first hermaphrodite Prime Minister," known as "Snazeby." Snazeby came to power after Callaghan's four-year term ended,[57] and was generally well-received, especially after effective public relations work:

> Cynics and doubters were routed further when the Snazeby PRO squad discovered that many of the most notable people in history had been hermaphrodites in their time. A striking instance was that of Cleopatra, who, researches showed, was also Anthony, thus explaining many ambiguities of conduct.[58]

Only Dr. Henry Kissinger "expressed disgruntlement" at having to deal with a hermaphrodite as a head of state, according to Cockburn. In the September 1977 issue of *Private Eye*, Auberon Waugh announces the emergence of a new

publication, *Gay Worker*, to "cater for a ready-made market among male and female homosexualists of left wing or revolutionary leanings." He concludes, inviting Stan/Loretta types to consider applying for the post of business manager: "The successful applicant will be a Gay, left-wing, a member of NUPE, NALGO, SOGAT and SLADE,[59] possibly of lower class origins, possibly not. By first preference, the applicant should be of neither sex, *but hermaphrodites will not be excluded on those grounds alone*."[60] The inclusion of characters like Stan/Loretta (a man who wants to be a woman and "have babies"), and then Reg's enlightened grouping of "Jews of both sexes and hermaphrodites" reminds us not only that sex and gender gags abound in middle school humor, but of the ever-present threat of the Python narrative moving sideways, distracted by the wrong infant savior, a street preacher's unfinished sentence, or the need to distinguish those in the Roman Empire whose work has actually benefited the Jews.

There are, incidentally, surviving images of Hermaphroditus at Herculaneum, as well as Pompeii, there in both the House of the Centenary and the House of the Dioscuri. The latter image is part of the celebrated *Pompeii AD79* exhibition in London.[61]

REG: "Your death will stand as a landmark . . ."—Brian is being promoted to martyr here (he was probationary before, after the failed palace raid). While in hiding beneath the city of Jotapata, Josephus was also nudged toward martyrdom by his fellows. Vespasian had sent emissaries to convince Josephus to safely emerge and talk, and Josephus, after praying, felt compelled by the Lord[62] to accept Vespasian's invitation, and to "not go over to the Romans as a deserter of the Jews, but as a minister from [God]."[63] When Josephus's fellow freedom fighters hear of his decision, they likely questioned his "revelation" and offer him a choice of suicide or murder:

> "How soon hast thou forgotten thyself! How many hast thou persuaded to lose their lives for liberty! Thou hast therefore had a false reputation for manhood, and a like false reputation for wisdom, if thou canst hope for preservation from those against whom thou hast fought so zealously, and art however willing to be preserved by them, if they be in earnest. But although the good fortune of the Romans hath made thee forget thyself, we ought to take care that the glory of our forefathers may not be tarnished. We will lend thee our right hand and a sword; and if thou wilt die willingly, thou wilt die as general of the Jews; but if unwillingly, thou wilt die as a traitor to them." As soon as they said this, they began to thrust their swords at him, and threatened they would kill him, if he thought of yielding himself to the Romans.[64]

So while Josephus's companions do applaud his impending martyrdom, it's on their own terms, and even by their own hand that they'd like it accomplished.

Reg's whole-hearted commitment to the revolutionary cause (here, of course, the PFJ's proxy is Brian) rings familiar. One of the earliest active anarchists in France, Paul Brousse echoes Reg, announcing that "propaganda by deed" was the answer to eventually winning the struggle, even if death was the only foreseeable outcome: "[Defeat] does not matter; the idea will march on, will put on flesh and sinews, and live in the eyes and on the faces of the people, who will shout for joy as it passes."[65] Brian's "supreme sacrifice" makes him a "true martyr," and so it's actually much more efficacious for the future of the movement if he stays on the cross and completes his martyrdom. Iviansky notes, importantly, that Brousse, "one of the early activists and ideologists of anarchism," would also "quickly abandon it," which sounds Reg-like.[66]

In this Reg and the PFJ sound very much like Tacitus, the republican-minded but realistic historian of Rome. Reg will continue to quietly work for "the cause," but within the system as dictated by the Romans; he's seen that full commitment means (Brian's) suffering and death, so verbal and spiritual commitment should remain the path of choice. And while Tacitus hated autocracy, he understood that it "had become a necessary evil" in the lawless present, and that "the most prudent and virtuous course of action lay in the middle ground between futile rebellion against the tyrant and complicity in his crimes ('a path . . . between abrasive obstinacy and disgusting groveling')," Richard concludes.[67] Reg and the PFJ have finally been outed as what they really are, a kind of new ideas group—a Fabian Society or IEA (Institute for Economic Affairs) or even CPS (Center for Policy Studies)—period research organizations that talked a good game of revolution but kept boots safely off the ground.[68] Caryl writes that Anthony Fisher, the founder of the IEA, understood "that what the Communists referred to as 'propaganda and agitation' stood at the center of the IEA's mission"; Reg seems to understand this careful delimitation of activities, as well, perhaps now better than ever. And this isn't a jab at Reg's dedication to the cause, either. In England, a demonstrably free society, the Fabians and the IEA didn't face arrest and imprisonment for their socialist and capitalist agendas, respectively. In a violently repressive society like the Roman Empire (or the Soviet Union or China or dozens of Third World countries in the 1960s and 1970s), great sacrifices accompany nonaligned thought and action—Reg and the PFJ are actually quite brave as they vow to "continue the fight" in Brian's memory. In *Holy Grail* Arthur retreats from the French-held castle to live and fight another day; here, Reg and the PFJ announce their "continuing

struggle to liberate the parent land," and leave Brian to his own admirable destiny.

More contemporarily, the postwar, welfare state period saw the Conservatives take power from the Left in 1951, 1970, and then 1979, winning general elections in those years. Keith Joseph (and later Margaret Thatcher) would complain that rather than voicing the strongly conservative oppositions to Labour's expansion of the socialist agenda, the Tory campaigns (like in 1951) promised tradition and stability, meaning the welfare state apparatus installed after 1945 remained largely intact. The expanding socialist state was left alone or even increased after the elections of 1951, 1955, 1959, and 1970, when the Conservatives won, sometimes even increasing their margins of victory. This made no sense to Thatcher or Joseph, Thatcher calling it a "two steps forward with a half step back"[69] approach that simply ensured Labour's measures remained in place, and Tory attempts to curb these advances were quickly repealed by the following (and bolder) Labour administration. Joseph concurred, speaking in 1974:

> This is no time to be mealy-mouthed. Since the end of the Second World War, we have had altogether too much socialism. There is no point in my trying to evade what everybody knows. For half of the 30 years, Conservative Governments, for understandable reasons, did not consider it practicable to reverse the vast bulk of the accumulating detritus of socialism which on each occasion they found when they returned to office. So we tried to build on its uncertain foundations instead.[70]

It's clear here at the foot of Brian's cross that Reg and the PFJ have adopted this same safer, less turbulent approach to revolution. The oppressive Roman Empire cannot be overcome in fits and starts, and the price for failure is death, so discretion becomes the better part of valor. For the Conservative governments, the popular welfare state couldn't be undone in one go or even by regular bloodletting, the price for attempting such a thing was certain political death (or a trip to the wilderness, where prophets belong), leaving only valorous discretion for the boxed-in but resolute Tories, who at Party Conferences would read out their own proclamations about the "continuing struggle." Rather than poke the sleeping Roman Empire with a pointed stick, the better solution is to leave Brian on the cross, allowing him his martyrdom, and to build their revolution on the "uncertain foundations" of the regrettable, comfortable, but continuing Roman occupancy.

(draft) **REG: ". . . this supreme sacrifice, whereby you have supplied our cause with a true martyr, in whose proud memory we can continue the fight against the Roman Imperialist aggressors . . ."**—This surrender (or tactical

retreat) by Reg and the PFJ might be connected to the five-year struggle by the Labour Party to achieve Scottish devolution. Donoughue notes that both Wilson and Callaghan had undertaken the steps necessary to see devolution through, securing referenda, polling, advertising, and so on, but that when the time came for a vote (2 March 1979), the Scottish people rejected the measure—they didn't even reach the 40 percent minimum for votes cast. Wrote Donoughue on the day of devolution's failure: "The Scots might have told us during the past five years that they did not really want devolution."[71] When Reg and the PFJ finally get their chance to "do something," when Judith alerts them that "something's actually happening," they punt as well, perhaps corrupted, as the Scots would be generations later, by the "subsidies and handouts" provided by the state;[72] it's access to the dole and subsidized lifestyles for the Scots, and "sanitation and medicine and education and irrigation and public health and roads and a freshwater system and baths and public order" for the people of Jerusalem and the PFJ. Donoughue concludes:

> It is terrible that devolution has ended in this mess. We have worked at it for five years, with the Scots always, in general, saying they wanted it. Most of us in London, including the PM, did not. The polls have shown 2-1 in favour of our middle-of-the-road proposals. So we have worked to convert many sceptics in our own Party, in the Cabinet and in Parliament. We have had to mollify the English regions. We have lost one bill and fought it through the House a second time. Then suddenly the Scots change their minds. And we are left holding the baby.[73]

And Brian is left on the cross, though he's a hero to the movement.

They regroup a little way away, take their shoes off, wave them in the air, turn and sing . . .—(PSC) What they actually do here is once again copy a moment from *I'm All Right Jack*. As the Chief Shop Steward and his associates confront their boss, Major Hitchcock, for the first time (about the alleged blackleg, Windrush), they turn away for a moment, regroup ("Withdraw and consult"), and whisper about their plans. The PFJ say their goodbyes, wish Brian the best, move off, and also regroup. More like the gathering of shop stewards, though, Reg obviously calls for a vote of support for what they're about to do: sing "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow." Mr. Kite and friends consult twice, come to an agreement, and announce that the new man Windrush must *not* be fired even if he is incompetent, as that would amount to "victimisation." Also, Reg and the PFJ do not take off their shoes as their sign of agreement—they're not the mob seen earlier who followed the shoe, the gourd, *etc.* Perhaps the Pythons themselves were confused by this point.

ALL: "For he's a jolly good fellow"—A valediction sung by Harold Wilson's No. 10 staff to the resigning PM on his last day in office, 5 April 1976.[74] Wilson was serenaded this way a number of times, often by admiring constituents or just happy voters across Britain.[75] Wilson had also been serenaded *back* into office in 1974 the very same way. Also, the refrain is a staple it seems, being sung between 1965 and 1978 at funerals, for favorite cricketers, tennis players and retirees (including union leader Jack Jones), at football matches and for returning MPs, for Ian Smith and Enoch Powell and Ted Heath and even Margaret Thatcher.

The more political song of choice during this period would have been the "Red Flag," a sort of anthem of the Labour Party for many years, often sung to celebrate Labour legislative victories, and especially within earshot of angry Tories.[76]

When the British finally abandoned Aden in November 1967, the send-off included a bowdlerized version of Thomas Gray's *Elegy*, and a Royal Marines' band playing, appropriately, "Fings Ain't Wot They Used to Be."[77]

BRIAN *(still hurling abuse at the REVOLUTIONARIES)*: "You bastards!"—Brian finally realizes he's been left to his own devices by his siblings, and is understandably bitter. The other shoes waiting to drop include goodbyes from both Judith and Mandy, when Brian is truly forsaken. Again, minorities of the Welsh, Scottish, and Irish peoples had worked and hoped for "devolution" or even total separation from the United Kingdom for many years, with Callaghan's administration fielding one of the more significant devolution[78] attempts. Westminster legislation supporting Scottish devolution came to a head in February 1977, just as Jones and Palin, for example, worked together on their *Life of Brian* scenes.[79] PM Callaghan supported devolution half-heartedly, according to Donoughue, and only because he owed his administration's majority to continuing support from the SNP.[80] The bill was volatile from the beginning, and likely doomed to failure, given the Tories' (and defecting Labourites') continuing demands for a united United Kingdom. Hundreds of amendments were presented by ministers (of all factions) and many hours spent on the bill before it was (appropriately) "guillotined" in February 1977. Writes Donoughue: "The PM was quite relaxed. He said he does not mind losing the bill providing we get the credit in Scotland for 'having tried to get devolution.' I think that is his preferred outcome."[81] Reg stands at the foot of Judea's version of the guillotine, assuring Brian and siblings of the PFJ that enough has been accomplished for credit to be given, meaning Brian's glorious martyrdom and

the PFJ's ability to continue the fight. Many pundits of the day seemed to have guessed Callaghan's two-fold strategy, surmising in print that Labour had to at least try and push devolution through parliament.[82] "We have not lost anything provided we handle it right," Callaghan would tell Donoughue, in a very Reg-like way, later that same night.[83] Donoughue would later describe this odd political scenario—manipulating a loss into less obvious loss—as "the reality of a minority government," and that the government was "humiliated but not defeated."[84] Reg employs this very same logic.

BIG NOSE: "I'm Brian!"—This is the Pythons' *Spartacus* moment, though their version is a self-serving one, where everyone on a cross claims to be Brian to escape the cross. The Pythonesque moment is when Brian just misses his opportunity to save himself by acknowledging his own name. This is where the idea for the film began—a man who bounces from biblical set piece to scriptural moment, always just out of step with history.

MAN (Jones): "The Judean Peoples' Front!"—Yelled as Otto's brigade is spotted approaching the crucifixion hill. The suicide squad isn't named this in the printed scripts.

Remember also that there were more and less feared revolutionary factions in the real world, as well. In Japan, home to significant political zealotry as a result of both the war and the presence of US troops and influence after the war, both the more mainstream Japanese Communists and Marxist Japanese Socialists groups had denounced the student-led (and beyond reasonably violent) Red Army and its splinters.[85] The Angry Brigade targeted symbolically, avoiding collateral damage as much as possible, while Carlos threw bombs into public places, the Red Army killed indiscriminately at the Lod Airport, and the IRA detonated bombs to kill and maim as many as possible. Some terror groups would clearly have been more feared than others.

OTTO: "Crack suicide squad"—There was an actual terrorist cadre calling themselves the Seventh Suicide Squad who attacked the Athens airport in August 1973 with machine guns and grenades, killing five and injuring fifty-five.[86] Al-Fatah would disavow this squad, initially, as being "imaginary and non-existent."[87] Idle's vocal part has been dubbed by Palin, likely due to poor sound quality from the original scene as shot. Postproduction of the Python films tended to fall to Jones, Palin, and Gilliam; it was perhaps just much easier for Palin to step into the dubbing session rather than wait for a scheduled visit by Idle.

With immaculate precision they all run themselves through, including Otto—In earlier drafts, Otto's squad had already done this, but it turned out they were all pretending.

There are actually a handful of historical moments similar to this one. When the wealthy Roman Symmachus was trying to stage an especially over-the-top version of the games in 401—"to put on some really good shows to restore national morale"—he had trouble finding wild animals, trained horses for chariot races, competent chariot drivers, and especially trained gladiators. According to Mannix: "He managed to purchase twenty-nine Saxon prisoners, supposed to be terrific fighters, but the prisoners never got out of the gladiatorial school. [Rather than fight for the Romans' amusement] they strangled each other until there was only one man left—and he beat his brains out against the wall."[88] Symmachus would admit in a letter that the "best private security" likely could not have prevented "this desperate group of men" from killing each other, and was ready to replace them with "a display of African wild animals."[89] Otto and his cadre's mass suicide are treated just as indifferently here.

Josephus reported that his companions entered into a suicide pact rather than be captured by or surrender to the Romans; Josephus was able to talk the last man out of the pact, and two survived to emerge.[90] Josephus's account is the only record we have of this miraculous escape. Also, the sicarii remnants and many women and children died by murder-suicide at Masada in 73, refusing to surrender to the Romans. Likely the suicide deaths of RAF members Baader, Ensslin, Raspe, and Meinhof, as well as the shootout death of student activist Georg von Rauch in 1971 would have raised these Germans to "martyr" status.

In the documentary *Archaeological Exploration of Masada* (1991), archaeologist Neil Silberman discusses the mixing of fact and fiction (especially useful in 1965, as the Israelis felt the need for a rousing national story):

> I think that it's fairly clear by now that Josephus, like many classical authors, was giving a melodramatic ending to a great epic. The theme of suicide as a heroic ending for classical histories was common to people throughout the Greek and Roman world. In that, Josephus was really doing nothing new, but giving an accepted end to his literary tale.

The revolutionary fervor across time has often produced groups or individuals seemingly ready to destroy themselves, though usually not before accomplishing their goal—a specific terroristic attack, for example. Russian "utopian socialist" Nikola Ishutin preached a committed, fanatical line, more Otto than Reg-like, and expected much of his followers:

> Their aim was to kill members of the government and big landowners. Lots were to be cast among the revolutionaries to establish who was to carry out the assassinations. The terrorist should live under an assumed name, break all ties with family, give up his friends, and forgo marriage. He should cut himself off from his own comrades and find his friends in the underworld. On the day appointed for the assassination, he was to disfigure his face with chemicals to avoid being recognized. In his pocket he would carry a manifesto explaining his motives, and once he had carried out his attempt, he was to poison himself.[91]

Laqueur notes that even Ishutin, though, balked at an assassination attempt on the tsar, and most of his like-minded friends were more like the wetter PFJ—they "preferred propaganda and the establishment of schools and cooperatives" in the fight against imperialist Russia.[92]

It's also possible that given the recent grisly news from Jonestown, Guyana, it was easier to reduce these Otto/suicide scenes in the finished film. On 18 November 1978, the troubled, charismatic leader Jim Jones convinced (or compelled) hundreds of his followers to drink sedatives and poison, ending their lives in the jungles of northeastern South America. The Pythons were watching the first rough version of the completed film in mid-November, and Palin reports that the Otto sequences were feeling "dangerously like a cameo sketch."[93]

BRIAN: "You silly sods . . ."—This may be Brian's moment where he is less concerned with himself, and more with the others who have just killed themselves in front of him. This is the moment where Brian perhaps finally understands the hopelessness of the "struggle" he's been part of, if just for a few days. Discussing the "failure of revolution" as witnessed across time, Thomas Greene lists the typical explanations to account for these failures, a list that should read quite familiar: "The same is true of efforts to explain the failure of revolution: inadequate leadership, weak organization, a remote ideology, the narrowness of the movement's membership base, inappropriate economic and social conditions, the legitimacy and effectiveness of the existing political system—all may be cited to explain why defeat was inevitable."[94] The rather sad, even resigned look on Brian's face indicates he sees quite clearly why the PFJ and his own actions led them to this point, and this before both his hoped-for girlfriend and his mother appear to offer their goodbyes.

Taken in turn, Greene's sobering points can be affixed to the Peoples' Front of Judea's and Brian's actions throughout the film. Reg represents "inadequate leadership" at its nadir, given that he favors talk over action, is alarmed when meaningful acts are perpetrated, and allows his parliamentary fixation to overcome any "sibling" sentiment, leaving the movement's one true and purposeful acolyte to die on a cross. The "weak organization" that is the PFJ

features a nominal leader, Reg, who hides at the first sign of danger, and this same organization invites members who merely hate the Romans "a lot." This same weak organization sends a "thank-you" committee as opposed to a "rescue committee," for example. The "remote ideology" is remote because it is at least partly removed from its time, taken from nineteen hundred years in the future. The PFJ as presented is clearly modeled on terrorist groups of the 1960s and 1970s, and their revolutionary zeal and shortcomings are sent up throughout the film. The PFJ possesses a demonstrated inability to expand membership (surviving membership, that is) beyond the handful of core members, underscoring the "narrowness of the movement's membership base." The PFJ can even claim a member who *does not* share the group's dedication to death before slavery—there is "Uh, one" who won't "gladly suffer" a glorious death for the cause. Part of the reason for this lack of total commitment and for the small size of this cadre can be attributed to the "inappropriate economic and social conditions" displayed in the film—as depicted, neither the administration of the Romans nor the daily life of the busy city seem particularly onerous or burdensome. Public order must be maintained, yes, and the Romans can be heavy-handed, but starving masses aren't part of the cityscape. A very healthy-looking, agile Ex-leper begs at one of the city gates, and he manages to get a donation, as well. What's more, on at least two occasions the PFJ completely undermine their own revolutionary foundations by acknowledging how much the Romans have done for the city, and therefore, for the Jews. From improved public health to education to public order and viticulture, life is better under the Romans. The remaining "difficulties" seem hard to get worked up over, hence, the PFJ's increasingly half-hearted cris de coeur as the narrative moves along, limping toward Brian's eventual martyrdom. Finally, as the PFJ themselves point out, the Roman Empire is the real deal. The "legitimacy and effectiveness of the existing political system" is reinforced as the various revolutionary groups are dealt with beneath Pilate's palace early in the film, then Brian is relentlessly tracked down, arrested, and finally executed for crimes against that political system. And even after these atrocities, there is no public hue and cry, no groundswell of *lumpenproletariat* support to assist in the overthrow of the empire. The Baader-Meinhof gang, the Japanese Red Army, the Weathermen, and the SLA all ran up against this same wall of public insouciance. In democratic countries boasting fairly stable economies, as has been demonstrated, these revolutionary groups failed to convince the masses that there was anything much to rebel against.

JUDITH: “Thank you, Brian. I’ll never forget you”—The fact that Brian has been left on the cross by the PFJ, Otto’s squad, now Judith, and soon even his mother, might not be as cruel or absurd as it seems. After the fall of Masada in 73, which culminated in the mass suicide of the last revolutionary Jews in Palestine, it was assumed by many Jews “that the Jewish religion was also destroyed,” Kotker writes. “Some Jews mourned so deeply that they refused to eat meat or drink wine until the Temple was rebuilt. . . . Some refused to bring children into a world of such unhappiness and uncertainty.”[96] Surviving rabbis would admonish the faithful to grieve, but within reason, saying “it was wrong, even sinful, to mourn too deeply,” or to purposely not have children.[97] They were to remember the Lord’s commandment of happiness, to be fruitful and multiply, which is very forward-looking. Perhaps the PFJ and the others, even Mandy, are moderating their grief similarly, which does prepare the audience and everyone on the crosses for the upbeat closing musical number. Essentially, the defeated Jews were being asked to look on the bright side of life.

MANDY: “. . . go ahead . . . be crucified . . . see if I care”—Well, if the Mandy-Brian relationship is meant to be metaphoric for Israel—“As a mother comforts her child, so I [God] will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem” (Isa. 66:13)—then no one’s being watched after, and no one is getting comforted. This turnabout is standard for the Pythons’ version of God’s love to His people.[95] (Remember, He was an obstreperous, shirty God in *Holy Grail*, prone to shortness, anger, and punishments.) This is hardly the crucifixion scene in *Spartacus*—though it’s meant to remind us of it—where Spartacus’s wife, Varinia, and his “free” son look up at him longingly, cinematically. Varinia begs Spartacus to “Please die,” a bit more poignant than Mandy’s sorrowful “Go ahead, be crucified, see if I care.”

Notes

1. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 496.
2. Palin reports that the Pythons had actually been invited to shoot in Israel, and had also considered Jordan and Morocco (*Diaries 1969–1979*, 494).
3. Larsen, *MPFC: UC*, 1.331; see entries for "Argument Clinic" in Ep. 29 (2.40–49).
4. Josephus, *AJ*, 18.4.1–3 (Whiston, 380); Josephus goes on to say that Vitellius went immediately to Jerusalem, released the citizens from certain taxes, and gave them back the priestly vestments.
5. Brandon, "Pontius Pilate in History and Legend," 528.
6. Jeremias, *JTJ*, 114 and 114n22.
7. *JE*, "Pharisees."
8. *AJ*, 13.14.2 (Whiston, 285).
9. Mannix, *TAD*, 27–28.
10. *TAD*, 28.
11. *TAD*, 132.
12. 5.11.1n19 (Whiston, 563).
13. Arrowsmith—CND cofounder and Radical Alliance candidate—was fined £2, for example, in 1962 for "obstruction" as she campaigned to "ban the bomb" ("Pat Arrowsmith Fined £2," *Daily Mail*, 8 May 1962: 9).
14. From *Wildcat Inside Story, Disaffection, 1797 to 1974*, available at theanarchistlibrary.org.
15. "Jesus 'Planned His Crucifixion': New Theory in Book," *Sunday Times*, 17 October 1965: 3.
16. "Gospel of the Guerrilla," *Sunday Times*, 14 March 1976: 14.
17. A little more than a month after this controversy erupted, the Pythons officially decided to do a "Life of Christ" film (Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 310–11). *The Passover Plot* was actually nominated for a costume design Academy Award; it's a beautiful, flawed, compelling film.
18. Horsley, "The Sicarii," 443.
19. Quoted in Horsley, "The Sicarii," 443.
20. This "pardon" has led many to assume Josephus had gone over to the Roman side, betraying the Jewish people, a charge Josephus denies vehemently.
21. *Josephus*, 20–21.
22. Cook, "Envisioning Crucifixion," 278.
23. Cook, "Envisioning Crucifixion," 278.
24. Porcius Festus was procurator from 59 to 62.
25. Kotker, *HLTJ*, 111.
26. Larsen, *BAFHG*, 471.
27. Donoughue, *DSD*, 2.222; see also Sandbrook's *White Heat* and *Seasons in the Sun*, as well as Joe Haines's 2001 reprint of his 1976 book *Politics of Power*.
28. Waugh, *FCY*, 3 November 1975.
29. *DSD*, 1.122.
30. The press had been hounding her (and her family) for alleged land speculation (known as "the Slagheap Affair") and influence-peddling exploits, and Wilson was doing his best to keep his government clear of the mess. See Sandbrook and Donoughue. Just over a month later Wilson offered Williams a life peerage, likely hoping to quiet her and free himself from her clutches (*DSD*, 1.125). The press explosion echoed for years after she became Lady Falkender.
31. *DSD*, 1.97.
32. Farrell, *BRJ*, 41–42.
33. Marighella, *Minimanual*, 60.
34. Marighella, *Minimanual*, 60–61.
35. See the discussion of Tom Brown and syndicalism in *BAFHG*, 129.

36. Discussed earlier in “The PFJ Plan Their Raid,” “In the Court of Pontius Pilate,” and “Hiding with the PFJ.”

37. Burleigh, *BRT*, 233.

38. Aust, *The Baader-Meinhof Complex*, 58–61.

39. Dobson and Payne, *Carlos Complex*, 185.

40. “Israel Rejoices at the Success of Raid to Free Entebbe Hostages,” *Times*, 5 July 1976: 1.

41. Operation “Wrath of God” (or “Bayonet”) had begun in fall 1972, and was still in force in 1979. Many of the targets were only distantly connected to the original attack, if at all, but were killed on principle (see *BRT*).

42. *BAFHG*, 60–61, 67n107–8, 133, 408.

43. The devaluation amounted to a 14 percent drop in the value of the pound. This embarrassment would cost Callaghan his position; Callaghan would still become the King’s First Minister in 1976, leading the country until 1979.

44. Marr, *HMB*, 299.

45. Bernstein, *Myth of Decline*, 233.

46. Ilich Ramírez Sánchez is an example of a figure who both planned and then carried out such acts of terror, rendering him infamously as “Carlos,” and putting him on “most wanted” lists around the world. Carlos would eventually be hunted to ground and incarcerated. Reg and the PFJ want to avoid this kind of denouement.

47. Bevan had established the NHS when serving as minister of health in the postwar Attlee government. In 1959 he was serving as shadow foreign secretary.

48. Bogdanor, “Collapse of the Postwar Settlement,” a.t.

49. Bogdanor, “Collapse of the Postwar Settlement,” a.t.

50. Here the printed script (in book form) has spelled “People’s” differently than most other places in the script. Likely a typo. As seen in the *Holy Grail* script, the spelling of “Launcelot” (or “Lancelot”) depended on who was typing that scene.

51. Brandon, “The Zealots,” 634.

52. The mentions of Zealots in the Gospels are also clearly more pro-Roman, written at a time when cultivating that stance was more beneficial than antagonizing the Romans by praising the Zealots as freedom fighters (Brandon, “The Zealots,” 637).

53. Brandon, “The Zealots,” 637.

54. Caryl, *Strange Rebels*, xiv.

55. Caryl, *Strange Rebels*, xiv.

56. “The One Thing Wrong with the Essex Man,” *Spectator*, 29 March 1997: 10; italics added.

57. Callaghan’s term had just begun when Cockburn wrote the satirical article and would end just over three years later, in May 1979.

58. *Private Eye*, 16 April 1976: 14.

59. These are, in order: National Union of Public Employees, National and Local Government Officers Association, Society of Graphical and Allied Trades, and Society of Lithographic Artists, Designers and Engravers. These all unions Waugh and *PE* have tilted with (and been sued by).

60. 30 September 1977: 17; italics added.

61. *Pompeii AD79*, 70.

62. Critics wonder whether he was listening to the voice of the Spirit, or a voice of self-preservation; Brian will wonder about the PFJ’s motivations as they leave him on the cross.

63. Josephus, *WJ*, 3.8.3 (Whiston, 515).

64. *WJ*, 3.8.4 (Whiston, 515).

65. Quoted in Iviansky, “Individual Terror,” 45.

66. Iviansky, “Individual Terror,” 45.

67. Richard, *WWAR*, 187–88.

68. Caryl, *Strange Rebels*, 162–64. Caryl mentions that both the IEA and CPS, though more conservative

and certainly formed in opposition to the sitting Labour governments and the welfare state in general, kept themselves unallied to any party, to be ideologically pure *and* protect their charitable status in the eyes of Inland Revenue (164). Reg is equally pragmatic.

69. From a *Daily Telegraph* article penned by Thatcher (30 January 1975), and quoted by Bogdanor in "Thatcherism, 1979–1990."

70. Quoted in Bogdanor's "Thatcherism, 1979–1990," a.t.

71. Donoughue, *DSD*, 2.453.

72. This is one of Donoughue's lamentation sections, which crop up more often as the days of his government in power wane.

73. *DSD*, 2.453.

74. Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun*, 428.

75. See for example: "More Enthusiasm Than in 1964," *Times*, 31 March 1966: 12; "Labour Women in Militant Mood," *Times*, 18 May 1967: 2.

76. "Same Old Song," *Daily Telegraph*, 30 January 1971: 10.

77. Brendon, *DFBE*, 513.

78. The "devolving" of administrative power from Westminster to, for example, Ulster, Cardiff, or Edinburgh, where (sub)national parliamentary bodies could undertake "domestic" issues while remaining legally "British."

79. They were chatting about the comedic potentials of an affected Pontius Pilate character, for example (Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 367).

80. Deaths of sympathetic ministers and unhelpful by-elections had erased Labour's majority on Callaghan's very first day as prime minister. A fragile coalition kept Labour in power, but to a certain extent lashed the major party to the whims of the fringe. See Sandbrook and Donoughue for more on this fascinating period.

81. *DSD*, 2.152.

82. The *quid pro quo* nature of Callaghan's support is made clear in, for example, "Callaghan Stands Firm" *Sunday Times*, 8 August 1976: 2, as well as John Grigg's "For Whom the Tumbrils," *Spectator*, 12 February 1977: 4.

83. *DSD*, 2.152.

84. *DSD*, 2.165. In 1979 a referendum offering a Welsh Assembly was rejected by almost 80 percent of Welsh voters; Irish independence continues to be a matter of bloodshed to this day.

85. See Richard Harris, "A Kamikaze Touch Returns to Japanese Extremism," *Times*, 1 June 1972: 14. This article also connects the rootless violence of the Japanese leftists to the PLO; rootless because, unlike the Middle Eastern guerrilla organizations, the Red Army had no manifesto for the overthrow of an occupying power or call for radical change at home ("no cause worthy of their dramatic dying" in Japan), so were striking piecemeal and abroad, instead.

86. Dobson and Payne, *Carlos Complex*, 134.

87. "Israel Court Jails for Seven Years," *Times*, 9 August 1973: 5.

88. *TAD*, 139.

89. From Shaw's *Spartacus and the Slave Wars*, 50; see also Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 91.

90. *WJ*, 3.8.5–9 (Whiston, 515–16).

91. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 46.

92. Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 45–46.

93. Palin, *Diaries 1969–1979*, 510. Palin does not mention the Jonestown massacre in his diaries.

94. Greene, *Comparative Revolutionary Movements*, 2–3.

95. King and Stager, *LBI*, 49.

96. *HLTJ*, 135.

97. *HLTJ*, 135.

SCENE THIRTY-ONE

“ALWAYS LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE OF LIFE”

MR. FRISBEE III: “Cheer up, Brian. You know what they say”—In the intervening years this song has taken on a life of its own, finding its way onto football terraces, including Aston Villa, Manchester United, and Sheffield Wednesday, and as the closing number in the successful musical play *Spamalot* and the *He’s Not the Messiah* oratorio. Anecdotally, it’s also sung at many, many funerals.

MR. FRISBEE III: “Don’t grumble, give a whistle”—In the 1940 home front documentary *London Can Take It*, five long weeks of the Blitz haven’t dampened the spirits of Londoners, says the narrator: Doctor Joseph Goebbels said recently that the nightly air raids have had a terrific effect on the morale of the people of London. The good doctor is absolutely right. Today the morale of the people is higher than ever before. They are fused together not by fear, but by a surging spirit of courage the like of which the world has never known. . . . They would rather stand up and face death, then kneel down and face the kind of existence the conqueror would impose upon them.[1]

Frisbee’s is a particularly British song, calling for smiling stoicism in the face of ultimate adversity, here a sort of “Jerusalem Can Take It” declaration. During the worst of the Blitz, songs were often sung in air raid shelters and down on Tube platforms—ostensibly to calm the children and drown out the horrors above—particularly English songs like “White Cliffs of Dover,” “There’ll Always Be an England,” and even “Knees Up Mother Brown.”[2] “If you’re up to your neck in hot water,” the wartime Vera Lynn song went, “be like the kettle and sing.”[3] Idle was likely inspired by this popular song, “Be Like the Kettle and Sing,” from the wartime film *We’ll Meet Again* (1943), as some of the lyrics attest: Tell that umbrella man he’s just an also ran Think of a kid on a swing

When you’re up to your neck in hot water, Be like the kettle and sing.

You’ll find that life’s always got a funny side So come over on the sunny side

You'll find that life's always got a rainy side So come over on the sunny side
And wear a great big smile

It makes your life worthwhile
You'll have the world on a string
When you're up to your neck in hot water, Be like the kettle and sing.

In the film, a performance is underway as German bombs are falling outside, and the audience is frightened. The emcee isn't "getting over," the girls backstage fear, as he tells the conductor to strike up a song so that the audience can sing. "Pretend you're in the bathtub!" he coaxes as the music vamps. No one sings. "Don't be bashful, just let yourself go!" Young Vera begins to sing offstage, then is pulled front stage, and by the time she reaches the lines: "When your troubles are boiling over consult this recipe / Everybody can be in clover, happy as can be," the audience is singing along merrily, drowning out the falling bombs outside. Everyone then sings together, on stage and in the audience: When all the skies are grey, and it's a rainy day Think of the birdies in spring

When you're up to your neck in hot water Be like the kettle and sing.

When the song finishes the raid is over, and the "all clear" sounds. Idle as Frisbee is simply singing through the Blitz, showing the pluck that the English have exhibited since those dark days.

MR. FRISBEE III: "Just purse your lips and whistle . . ."—Whistling was a fairy common portion of many music hall songs, but this idea that whistling can lift spirits and make tasks bearable is more particular. One likely source is the well-known Frank Churchill and Larry Morley song "Whistle While You Work," from Walt Disney's *Snow White* (1937). We also can't forget the "Colonel Bogey March" sections from *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), where British troops marched into a prisoner of war camp blowing their patriotism through pursed lips.

MR. FRISBEE III: ". . . you come from nothing. You're going back to nothing. What have you lost? Nothing!"—This sounds like a *creatio ex nihilo* argument, and it's a concept we've not heard in the film. A supernatural being, Jesus, is presented at the beginning of the film ("He is the son of God"), suggesting something beyond and before this life, and Brian's "followers" are keen to find out the secret to eternal life, which they believe truly exists. Brian even preaches about a God who watches over his birds, flowers, and children on Earth, and it sounds as if he might even believe it. Brian later preaches self-reliance, asserting that no earthly master should be followed. He does this without denying the existence of God or an afterlife, so Mr. Frisbee is the voice of, perhaps, the new faith in the 1960s and beyond, when the concept of a caring, watchful, "up there somewhere" kind of god took a real hit. This isn't the 1 Timothy citation, either, where "we brought nothing into this world, and it is

certain we can carry nothing out" (6:7), though it might be the human, stoical version of this concept coming from a man nailed to a cross and facing the end of his earthly existence. As the victims dance on crosses at the end of the film, then, crucifixion is truly a doddle, and the Centurion would have shaken his head at this disturbing, "oddball" behavior.

MR. FRISBEE III: "See? The end of the film"—The man on the cross can see the beginning of the titles. Cf. Plautus's fourth-wall breaking (context smashing) in his plays, where characters know they are in plays, and where actors speak about the producer's role, and so on. For example: "When Chrysalis triumphs, he tells the audience, which is expecting the clever slave to deliver the standard, grandiose, satirical speech employing the language of a conquering general, that he refuses to do so because this comic bit has been overdone and abruptly leaves the stage."[4]

MR. FRISBEE III: "Incidentally, this record is available in the foyer"—Like a concert, where tour memorabilia and records could be had on the way out of the show. The Pythons had recently finished a wildly popular series of shows in New York, which is likely where the elided popstar Sermon on the Mount came from.

MR. FRISBEE III: "Who do you think pays for all this rubbish?"—EMI was on board to fund the film, but got cold feet when the Christian backlash began to be predicted. George Harrison and HandMade Films stepped in to put together funding.

MR. FRISBEE III: "I told them: 'Bernie, I said to him, they'll never make their money back'"—The film actually made about five times its production budget, which would be considered a box office success. Sales of the album for the film could also be factored in, as well as sales of the book, and later videotape and DVD sales.

"If you have enjoyed seeing this film, why not go and see La Notte?"—This is a bit of captioning at the end of the credits. Mentioned in Ep. 29, the film was directed by Michelangelo Antonioni, and premiered in 1961.[5]

Notes

1. Narrated by Quentin Reynolds.
2. “Britain at War: Singing through Air Raids,” *Telegraph*, 30 October 2008; “Life in an Air-Raid Shelter,” *WW2 People’s War*, BBC; Freedman, *Whistling in the Dark*. The Goons used bits of these songs, as well.
3. Freedman, *Whistling in the Dark*, 132.
4. Richard, *WWAR*, 200.
5. Larsen, *MPFC: UC*, 2.46.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

"1978–1979: Winter of Discontent." Libcom.org. https://libcom.org/history/1978-1979-winter-of-discontent.

Abel, Lionel. "Seven Heroes of the New Left." *New York Times*, 5 May 1968.

Ackerman, Susan. "Women in Ancient Israel and the Hebrew Bible." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*. April 2016. http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-45?rskey=qlpgfF&result=1.

Aldrete, Gregory S. *Floods of the Tiber in Ancient Rome*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007.

Ames, Cody Scott. "Herodian Judea: Games, Politics, Kingship in the First Century BCE." *Journal of Ancient History and Archeology* 2, no. 2 (2015): 5–15.

"Ancient Roman Toilets Did Not Improve Sanitation." *Popular Archaeology* 11 (June 2013).

"The Anger of the Middle Class." *London Times*, 11 January 1975: 13.

The Angry Brigade. "Communique 5." theanarchistlibrary.org.

Annan, Thomas. *The Photographs of Old Closes and Streets of Glasgow 1876/77*. New York: Dover, 1977.

Aust, Stefan, *The Baader-Meinhof Complex*. London: The Bodley Head, 2008.

Avigad, Nahman. *Archaeological Discoveries in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem: Second Temple Period*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1976.

Baader-Meinhof: In Love with Terror. Dir. Ben Lewis. BBC, 2002.

Barnes, Clive. "Stage: Screaming and Intact, 'Monty Python Live!'" *New York Times*, 16 April 1976: 11.

Bauckham, Richard. "For What Offence Was James Put to Death? In *James the Just and Christian Origins*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 1999.

Bauman, Richard A. *Human Rights in Ancient Rome*. London: Routledge, 2000.

Beckett, Andy. *When the Lights Went Out: Britain in the Seventies*. London: Faber and Faber, 2009.

Behind the Fridge. Peter Cook and Dudley Moore. Dir. Peter Faiman. 1971.

Bell, J. Bowyer. *The Secret Army: The IRA*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983.

———. *Terror Out of Zion*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977.

Benn, Tony. *Conflicts of Interest: Diaries 1977–80*. London: Hutchinson, 1990.

Ben-Sasson, Haim Hillel. *A History of the Jewish People*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976.

Bentwich, Norman. *Josephus*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1914.

Bergson, Henri. *Laughter: An Essay on the Comic*. Ed. Wylie Sypher. New York: Doubleday, 1956.

Bernstein, George L. *The Myth of Decline: The Rise of Britain since 1945*. London: Pimlico, 2004.

Beveridge, William. *The Beveridge Report: Social Insurance and Allied Services*. London: HMSO, 1942.

Black, Lawrence, and Hugh Pemberton, eds. "The Winter of Discontent in British Politics." *Political Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (2009): 553–61.

Black, Lawrence, Hugh Pemberton, and Pat Thane, eds. *Reassessing 1970s Britain*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013.

Bogdanor, Vernon. “The Attempt to Construct a Socialist Commonwealth.” *Britain in the 20th Century*. Gresham College Lectures, 2011–2012.
———“The Character of the Postwar Period.” *Britain in the 20th Century*. Gresham College Lectures, 2011–2012.
———. “The Collapse of the Postwar Settlement, 1964–1979.” *Britain in the 20th Century*. Gresham College Lectures, 2011–2012.
———. “Thatcherism, 1979–1990.” *Britain in the 20th Century*. Gresham College Lectures, 2011–2012.
Booker, Christopher. *The Seventies: The Decade That Changed the Future*. New York: Stein & Day, 1980.
Borg, Marcus, and John Dominic Crossan. *The Last Week: A Day-by-Day Account of Jesus’s Final Week in Jerusalem*. San Francisco: Harper, 2006.
Borowski, Oded. *Daily Life in Biblical Times*. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003.
———. *Every Living Thing: Daily Use of Animals in Ancient Israel*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1998.
Bough, Jill. *Donkey*. London: Reaktion Books, 2011.
Brandon, S. G. F. *Jesus and the Zealots: A Study of the Political Factor in Primitive Christianity*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967.
———. “Josephus: Renegade or Patriot?” *History Today* 8:12 (1958): 830–36.
———. “Pontius Pilate in History and Legend.” *History Today* 18, no. 8 (1968): 523–30.
———. *The Trial of Jesus of Nazareth*. New York: Stein and Day, 1968.
———. “The Trial of Jesus: The Enigma of the First Good Friday.” *History Today* 16, no. 4 (1966): 251–59.
———. “The Zealots: The Jewish Resistance against Rome.” *History Today* 15, no. 9 (1965): 632–41.
Brendon, Piers. *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire, 1781–1997*. New York: Vintage, 2010.
Brown, Raymond E. *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave*. New York: Yale University Press, 1998.
Burke, Edmund. “Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*.” *Daedalus* 105, no. 1 (Winter 1976): 127–35.
Burleigh, Michael. *Blood and Rage: A Cultural History of Terrorism*. New York: HarperCollins, 2009.
Caillois, Roger. *Pontius Pilate*. New York: Macmillan, 1963.
Calabro, David. “Gestures of Praise: Lifting and Spreading the Hands in Biblical Prayer.” In *Ascending in the Mountain of the Lord: Temple, Praise and Worship in the Old Testament*, ed. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, 105–21. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2013.
Carlton, David. *Britain and the Suez Crisis*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988.
Carr, Gordon. *The Angry Brigade*. Dir. Gordon Carr. BBC and PM Press, 1973.
———. *The Angry Brigade: The Cause and the Case*. London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1975.
———, dir. *The Angry Brigade: The Spectacular Rise and Fall of Britain’s First Urban Guerilla Group*. Hole in the Wall Productions, 1973.
Caryl, Christian. *Strange Rebels: 1979 and the Birth of the 21st Century*. Philadelphia: Perseus, 2013.
Castle, Barbara. *The Castle Diaries 1974–1976*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1980.
Catanzaro, Raimondo. *The Red Brigades and Left-Wing Terrorism in Italy*. London: Pinter, 1991.
Chapman, Graham. *A Liar’s Autobiography: Volume VI*. London: Methuen, 1980.
———, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, and Michael Palin. *Monty Python’s “The Life of Brian” (of Nazareth)*. New York: F. Jordan Books, 1979.
———. *Monty Python and the Holy Grail (Book)*. New York: Methuen, 1977.
———. Monty Python’s Flying Circus*: All the Words, Vols. 1 and 2*. London: Methuen, 1989.
Chilton, Bruce D., and Craig Allen, eds. *James the Just and Christian Origins*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 1999.
Christian Believing. Church of England Doctrine Commission. London: S.P.C.K., 1976.
Churchill, Winston. “The End of the Beginning.” Churchill Society. http://www.churchill-society-

london.org.uk/EndoBegn.html.
Clareson, Thomas. *Understanding Contemporary Science Fiction*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990.
Cleese, John. *So, Anyway*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2014.
Cockerell, Michael. *The Lost World of the Seventies*. BBC 2, 2012.
———. *Roy Jenkins: A Very Social Democrat*. BBC, 1996.
Cohen, Jennie. "A Wise Man's Cure: Frankincense and Myrrh." *History* 27 June 2011. http://www.history.com/news/a-wise-mans-cure-frankincense-and-myrrh.
Cohn, Haim. *The Trial and Death of Jesus*. New York: Kvat, 1968.
Cook, John Granger. "Crucifixion as Spectacle in Roman Campania." *Novum Testamentum* 54 (2012): 68–100.
———. "Envisioning Crucifixion: Light from Several Inscriptions and the Palatine Graffito." *Novum Testamentum* 50 (2008): 262–85.
Cook, Wendy. *So Farewell Then: The Untold Life of Peter Cook*. New York: HarperCollins, 2006.
Coopey, Richard, and Nicholas Woodward, eds. *Britain in the 1970s: The Troubled Decade*. New York: St. Martin's, 1996.
Cowley, Philip, and Matthew Bailey. "Peasants' Uprising or Religious War? Re-examining the 1975 Conservative Leadership Contest." *British Journal of Political Science* 30, no. 4 (Oct. 2000): 599–629.
Crosland, C. A. R. *The Future of Socialism*. New York: Macmillan, 1957.
Cullman, Oscar. *Jesus and the Revolutionaries*. New York: Harper and Row, 1970.
Cumming, George, and Stephen Sayles. "The Symbionese Liberation Army: Coming Together, 1973." *History Compass* 9, no. 6 (2011): 485–97.
Cupitt, Don, and Peter Armstrong. *Who Was Jesus?* London: BBC, 1977.
Dal Masio, Cinzia. *Pompeii: The Art of Loving*. Milan: 24 ORE Cultural, 2012.
David, Ariel. "Ancient Romans, Jews Invented Trash Collection, Archaeology of Jerusalem Hints." *Haaretz*, 29 June 2016.
Davies, R. W. "Police Work in Roman Times." *History Today* 18, no. 10 (1968): 700–707.
Demaris, Ovid. *Brothers in Blood: The International Terrorist Network*. New York: Scribner's, 1977.
Denham, Andrew, and Mark Garnett. *Keith Joseph*. Oxford: Routledge, 2014.
Dennan, James, and Paul McDonald. *Unemployment Statistics from 1881 to the Present Day, Labour Market Trends*. London: The Government Statistical Service, January 1996.
Dimont, Max I. *Jews, God and History*. New York: Signet, 2004.
Dobson, Christopher, and Ronald Payne. *The Carlos Complex*. London: Coronet Books, 1978.
———. *The Terrorists: Their Weapons, Leaders and Tactics*. New York: Facts On File, 1979.
Donoughue, Bernard. *Downing Street Diary: With Harold Wilson in No. 10*. London: Pimlico, 2006.
———. *Downing Street Diary: With James Callaghan in No. 10*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2008.
Doré, Gustave. *The Divine Comedy: The Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso*. Trans. L. G. White. New York: Pantheon Books, 1948.
———. *The Doré Bible Illustrations*. Introd. by Millicent Rose. New York: Dover, 1974.
———. *Masterpieces from the Works of Gustave Doré*. Ed. Edmund Ollier. New York: Cassell Publishing, 1887.
Dowty, Alan. *Israel/Palestine*. Cambridge: Polity, 2012.
Doyle, Julian. *The Life of ~~Brian~~ Jesus*. Leicester: Matador, 2011.
Eckstein, Harry. "Terror as a Weapon of Political Agitation." *Internal War, Problems and Approaches* (1964): 71–99.
Edersheim, Alfred. *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*. New York: James Pott & Co., 1881.
Ehrman, Bart D., and Zlatko Pleše, eds. *The Apocryphal Gospels*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
———. *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*. San Francisco, CA: Harper, 2005.
Eisler, Robert. *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist*. London: Methuen, 1931.

Emmerich, Anne Catherine. *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ*. London, New York: Burns & Oates, 1890.
Engen, Darel Tai. "The Economy of Ancient Greece." In *Economic History Net Encyclopedia*, ed. Robert Whaples. 31 July 2004. http://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-economy-of-ancient-greece/.
Erickson, Lynda. "Youth and Political Deference in England." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 10, no. 3 (September 1977): 573–95.
Evans, Craig A. *Jesus and His World: The Archaeological Evidence*. Louisville, KY: WJK, 2012.
Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1967.
———. *The Fanon Reader*. Ed. Haddour Azzedine. London: Pluto Press, 2006.
———. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 1966.
Farrell, William R. *Blood and Rage: The Story of the Japanese Red Army*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1990.
Fernandez-Armesto, Felipe. *Civilizations: Culture, Ambition, and the Transformation of Nature*. New York: The Free Press, 2001.
Ficacci, Luigi. *Piranesi: The Complete Etchings*. Köln, Germany: Taschen, 2000.
"First UK Hijacking: Questions Raised." *Flight International*, 16 January 1975.
Flanders, Judith. "Slums." British Library. https://www.bl.uk/voices-of-science/sitecore/content/home/romantics-and-victorians/articles/slums.
Follain, John. *Jackal: The Complete Story of the Legendary Terrorist, Carlos the Jackal*. New York: Arcade, 2011.
Freedman, Jean R. *Whistling in the Dark: Memory and Culture in Wartime London*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999.
Freese, Brett Leslie. "Medicinal Myrrh." *Archaeology* 49, no. 3 (May/June 1996). http://archive.archaeology.org/9605/newsbriefs/myrrh.html.
Freud, Sigmund. *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*. Tr. Joyce Crick. New York: Penguin, 2002.
Fromm, Erich. *The Fear of Freedom*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952.
Fuchs, Jacob. *Horace's Satires and Epistles*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1977.
Garfield, Simon. *Private Battles: Our Intimate Diaries*. London: Ebury Press, 2007.
———. *Our Hidden Lives: The Remarkable Diaries of Postwar Britain*. London: Ebury Press, 2004.
Garnett, Mark. *From Anger to Apathy: The Story of Politics, Society and Popular Culture in Britain since 1975*. London: Vintage, 2008.
Gaskill, Alonzo. "The 'Ceremony of the Shoe': A Ritual of God's Ancient Covenant People." In *Our Rites of Worship*, ed. Daniel L. Belnap. Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2013.
Gershuny, Theodore. *Soon to Be a Major Motion Picture*. New York: Henry Holt, 1982.
Geva, Hillel, ed. *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994.
Gilliam, Terry. *Animations of Mortality*. London: Eyre Methuen, 1978.
———. *Gilliam on Gilliam*. Ed. Ian Christie. London, New York: Faber and Faber, 1999.
———. *Gilliamesque*. New York: Harper Design, 2015.
Gillmeister, Heiner. *Tennis: A Cultural History*. London: Leicester University Press, 1997.
Goldberg, G. J. "The Popularity of John the Baptist." http://www.josephus.org/JohnTBaptist.htm#Popularity.
Grant, Michael. *Gladiators*. New York: B&N, 1967.
———. *The History of Ancient Israel*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1984.
Grant, Ted. "Labour's Programme—1964–70: Disaster Was a Warning." *The Militant*. https://www.marxists.org/archive/grant/1972/09/programme.htm.
Greene, Elizabeth. "Women Present, No 'Second Fiddle' in Roman Military." *Western News*, 5 February 2015. http://news.westernu.ca/2015/02/women-present-no-second-fiddle-in-roman-military/.
Greene, Thomas H. *Comparative Revolutionary Movements*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974.

Greer, Germaine. *The Female Eunuch*. London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1970.
Guelich, Robert A. "The Matthean Beatitudes: 'Entrance-Requirements' or Eschatological Blessings?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95, no. 3 (Sep. 1976): 415–34.
Haas, N. "Anthropological Observations on the Skeletal Remains from Giv'at ha-Mivtar." *Israel Exploration Journal* 20, nos. 1–2 (1970): 38–59.
Haines, Joe. *The Politics of Power*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1977.
Hammerton, J. A. *Wonders of the Past*, 2 vols. New York: Wise and Company, 1952.
Hankoff, L. D. "Religious Healing in First-Century Christianity." *Journal of Psychohistory* 19, no. 4 (Spring 1992): 387–407.
Hansen, Søren, and Jesper Jensen. *The Little Red Schoolbook*. London: Stage 1, 1971.
Harrison, Tony. *Tony Harrison: The Mysteries*. London: Faber and Faber, 1985.
Hay, Colin. "Narrating Discourse: The Discursive Construction of the 'Winter of Discontent."' *Sociology* 30, no. 2 (May 1996): 253–77.
"The History of Plumbing in Jerusalem." *Plumbing and Mechanical*, July 1989.
Hendrix, Holland L. *Jews and the Roman Empire*. PBS *Frontline*, 1998.
Hewison, Robert. *Monty Python: The Case Against*. New York: Grove Press, 1981.
Hitchens, Peter. *The Abolition of Britain*. London: Continuum, 2008.
Hobsbawm, Eric. "The Forward March of Labour Halted?" *Marxism Today* (Sep. 1978): 279–86.
Hofstader, Richard. *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1966.
Holland, Tom. *Rubicon: The Triumph and Tragedy of the Roman Republic*. London: Little, Brown, 2003.
Hope, Valerie M. "Contempt and Respect: The Treatment of the Corpse in Ancient Rome." In *Death and Disease in the Ancient City*, edited by Valerie M. Hope and Eireann Marshall, 104–27. Florence, KY: Routledge, 2000.
Horace. *Horace's Satire and Epistles*. Tr. and ed. Jacob Fuchs. New York: Norton, 1977.
Horsley, Richard A. "Josephus and the Bandits." *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 10, no.1: 37–63.
———. "The Sicarii: Ancient Jewish 'Terrorists'." *Journal of Religion* 59, no. 4 (Oct. 1979): 435–58.
———. "The Zealots: Their Origin, Relationships and Importance in the Jewish Revolt." *Novum Testamentum* 28, no. 2 (1986): 159–92.
Horvath, Tibor. "Why Was Jesus Brought to Pilate?" *Novum Testamentum* 11, no. 3 (July 1969): 174–84.
Hubbard, David. *The Skyjacker—His Flights of Fantasy*. New York: Macmillan, 1971.
Hughes, Geoffrey. *An Encyclopedia of Swearing*. London: Routledge, 2015.
Humphry, Derek, and David Tindall. *False Messiah: The Story of Michael X*. London: Hart Davis, 1977.
Husband, R. W. "The Pardoning of Prisoners by Pilate." *American Journal of Theology* 21, no. 1 (January 1917): 110–16.
I'm All Right Jack. Dir. John Boulting. Charter Film Productions, 1959.
Iviansky, Ze'ev. "Individual Terror: Concept and Typology." *Journal of Contemporary History* 12, no. 1 (January 1977): 43–63.
Jay, Douglas. *The Socialist Case*. London: Faber and Faber, 1937.
Jenkins, Peter. *Anatomy of Decline: The Political Journalism of Peter Jenkins*. Eds. Brian Brivati and Richard Crockett. London: Indigo, 1995.
———. *Mrs. Thatcher's Revolution: The Ending of the Socialist Era*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988.
Jeremias, Joachim. *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969.
Jessop, Bob, and Russell Wheatley, eds. *Karl Marx's Social and Political Thought, Vol. V*. London: Routledge, 1999.
"Jews and the Roman Empire." In *From Jesus to Christ*. PBS Frontline. April 1998. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/portrait/jews.html.
Jewish Encyclopedia. http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/.
Johnson, Kim Howard. *Monty Python's Tunisian Holiday: My Life with Brian*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008.

Joseph, Keith. “The Stockton Lecture: Monetarism Is Not Enough.” The Centre for Policy Studies. London: Chichester & London, 1976.
Josephus: Complete Works. Trans. William Whiston. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1960.
Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. New York: Vintage International, 1990.
Judt, Tony. *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945*. New York: Penguin, 2005.
Kemna, Friedhelm. “Death of a Nightingale.” *Encounter*, September 1974: 60–62.
Kemp, Arnold. *Confusion to Our Enemies*. London: Neil Wilson, 2012.
King, Philip J., and Lawrence E. Stager. *Life in Biblical Israel*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.
Kokosalakis, Nikos. “The Political Significance of Popular Religion in Greece.” *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 64, no. 1 (1987): 37–52.
Koloski-Ostrow, Ann. *The Archaeology of Sanitation in Roman Italy: Toilets, Sewers, and Water Systems*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015.
Korb, Scott. *Life in Year One: What the World Was Like in First-Century Palestine*. New York: Riverhead, 2010.
Kotker, Norman. *The Holy Land in the Time of Jesus*. New York: American Heritage, 1967.
Krassner, Paul. “The Parts Left Out of the Patty Hearst Trial, Parts 1 and 2.” disinfo.com.
———. *Patty Hearst and the Twinkie Murders*. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2014.
Lalvani, Kartar. *The Making of India: The Untold Story of British Enterprise*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016.
Lansford, Tyler. *The Latin Inscriptions of Rome: A Walking Guide*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.
Laqueur, Walter. *Terrorism: A Study of National and International Political Violence*. London: ABACUS, Sphere Books, 1978.
Larsen, Darl. *A Book about the Film* Monty Python and the Holy Grail. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.
———. *Monty Python, Shakespeare and English Renaissance Drama*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2003.
———. Monty Python’s Flying Circus: *An Utterly Complete, Thoroughly Unillustrated, Absolutely Unauthorized Guide to Possibly All the References from Arthur “Two Sheds” Jackson to Zambesi*. Lanham, MD: Taylor Trade, 2013.
Lasky, Melvin J. “Ulrike Meinhof and the Baader-Meinhof Gang.” *Encounter*, July 1975: 9–23.
Lawrence, Benjamin. “Servi Poenae.” In *The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery*, edited by Junius P. Rodriguez, 577–78. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1997.
Lee, Stephen J. *Aspects of British Political History 1914–1995*. London: Routledge, 1996.
Levine, Lee I. *Jerusalem: Portrait of the City in the Second Temple Period*. Philadelphia: Jewish Historical Society, 2002.
Levy, Leonard Williams. *Blasphemy: Verbal Offense against the Sacred, from Moses to Salman Rushdie*. New York: Knopf, 1993.
Lifshitz, B. “Inscriptions latines de Césarée (Caesarea Palaestinae).” *Latomus* 22, no. 4 (October–December 1963): 783–84.
Ligasor, Tim. “The Art of Attrition: The Erosion of Peoples Temple and Jim Jones.” http://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page_id=29409.
Lindvall, Terry. *God Mocks: A History of Religious Satire from the Hebrew Prophets to Stephen Colbert*. New York: New York University Press, 2015.
Little, Alan M. G. *A Roman Bridal Drama at the Villa of the Mysteries*. Kennebunk, ME: Star Press, 1972.
London Can Take It. Dir. Humphrey Jennings and Harry Watt. 1940.
Look Back at Grunwick. Concord Media, 1980.
MacDonald, William. *The Architecture of the Roman Empire*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965.

Madan, Rev. M. *Juvenal and Persius*. Dublin: Brett Smith, 1820.
Magness, Jodi. *Stone and Dung, Oil and Spit: Jewish Daily Life in the Time of Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2011.
———. "What's the Poop on Ancient Toilets and Toilet Habits?" *Near Eastern Archaeology* 75, no. 2 (June 2012): 80–87.
Maier, Paul L. "The Fate of Pontius Pilate." *Hermes* 99, no. 3 (1971): 362–71.
———. *Pontius Pilate*. New York: Doubleday, 1968.
Malik, Sarita. *Representing Black Britain: Black and Asian Images on Television*. London: Sage, 2002.
Mannix, Daniel P. *Those about to Die*. New York: Ballantine, 1958.
Marcuse, Herbert. "Interview with Herbert Marcuse." *Modern Philosophy: Marcuse and the Frankfurt School*. Interviewer Bryan Magee. London: BBC, 1978.
Marighella, Carlos. *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla*. St. Petersburgh, FL: Red and Black, 2008.
Marin, Pater. "Meditations on the Jesus Movement: Children of Yearning." *Saturday Review* 58, no. 2 (6 May 1972): 58–62.
Marr, Andrew. *A History of Modern Britain*. London: Macmillan, 2007.
Martin, Ernest L. *New Evidence of the Site of the Temple in Jerusalem*. Review response. Associate for Scriptural Knowledge. http://askelm.com/temple/t001211.htm.
Marwick, Arthur. *British Society since 1945*. London: Penguin, 2003.
McDonald, Fiona. *The Popular History of Graffiti: From the Ancient World to the Present*. New York: Skyhorse, 2013.
McKeown, J.C. *A Cabinet of Roman Curiosities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
Miller, Casey, and Kate Swift. *Words and Women*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1976.
Milligan, Spike. *The Goon Show Scripts*. New York: St. Martin's, 1972.
Mitchell, Piers D. "Human Parasites in the Roman World: Health Consequences of Conquering an Empire." *Parasitology* 144, no. 1 (2017): 48–58.
Montefiore, Simon Sebag. *Jerusalem: The Biography*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2011.
Monty Python and the Holy Grail. Dirs. Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones. 1974.
Monty Python's Life of Brian. Dir. Terry Jones. 1979.
Monty Python's the Meaning of Life. Dir. Terry Jones. 1983.
Monty Python's And Now For Something Completely Different. Dir. Ian MacNaughton. 1971.
Moorehead, Caroline. "The Captive Mind." *London Times*, 12 January 1980: 6.
Morgan, Kenneth O. *Britain Since 1945: The People's Peace*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
———. *Callaghan: A Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
———. *The Oxford History of Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
———. "Symbiosis: Trade and the British Empire." *BBC History* 17 February 2011. http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/empire_seapower/trade_empire_01.shtml.
Morris, James. *Pax Britannica: The Climax of Empire*. London: Penguin, 1968.
Muddiman, John, and John Barton. *The Oxford Bible Commentary: The Gospels*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
Murray, Peter. *Piranesi and the Grandeur of Ancient Rome*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1971.
Nash, David. *Blasphemy in the Christian World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
Neufeld, Edward. "Hygiene Conditions in Ancient Israel." *Biblical Archaeologist* 34, no. 2 (May 1971): 41–66.
The New Partridge Dictionary of Slang. New York: Routledge, 2006.
Newton, Michael. *The Encyclopedia of Kidnappings*. New York: Facts On File, 2002.
O'Hehir, Andrew. "Insane Time and Place." *Salon*, 18 August 2016. http://www.salon.com/2016/08/18/patty-hearsts-america-what-american-heiress-gets-wrong-and-right-about-an-insane-time-and-place/.
Orsini, Alessandro, and Sarah J. Nodes. *Anatomy of the Red Brigades*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011.

Palin, Michael. *Michael Palin Diaries 1969–1979: The Python Years*. London: Thomas Dunne Books, 2007.
Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*. 1964.
Pathrapankal, Joseph M. "Jesus: Freedom-Fighter or Prince of Peace?" *Indian Journal of Theology* 24, nos. 3–4 (July–December 1975): 79–86.
Paul VI. *Marialis Cultis*. 1974. papalencyclicals.net.
Pearce, Edward. *Denis Healey: A Life in Our Times*. London: Little, Brown, 2002.
Pellison, Maurice. *Roman Life in Pliny's Time*. Philadelphia: George Jacobs, 1897.
Penny, Nicholas. *Piranesi*. London: Bloomsbury, 1978.
Petronius. *Satyricon*. Tr. Alfred R. Allinson. New York: Panurge, 1930.
"Pharisees: Their Dress." *Bible History Online*. http://www.bible-history.com/pharisees/PHARISEESDress.htm.
Philo. *The Embassy to Gaius*. Trans. F. H. Colson. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962.
Piranesi, G. B. *Etchings by G.B. Giovanni Batista Piranesi, 1720–1778*. London: P. & D. Colnaghi and Co., 1973–1974.
———. *Piranesi: Etchings and Drawings*. Ed. Roseline Bacou. Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1975.
Pitchford, Mark. *The Conservative Party and the Extreme Right, 1945–1975*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011.
Pölönen, Janne. "Plebeians and Repression of Crime in the Roman Empire: From Torture of Convicts to Torture of Suspects." *Revue Internationale des droits de l'Antiquité* 51 (2004): 217–57.
Pompeii AD79. Bristol: Imperial Tobacco Ltd., 1977.
Porter, Bernard. *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism 1850–1983*. Essex: Longman, 1984.
Prawer, Joshua. *The History of Jerusalem*. New York: New York University Press, 1996.
Radin, Max. *The Jews among the Greeks and Romans*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1915.
The Red Army/PFLP: Declaration of World War. Dir. Masao Adachi and Kôji Wakamatsu. Lebanon, 1971.
Rawson, Hugh. *Wicked Words*. New York: Crown, 1989.
Reich, Ronny. "The Question of the Biblical 'Zinnor' and Warren's Shaft." https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFmCfbnOh_g.
Reich, Ronny, and Eli Shukron. "Light at the End of the Tunnel: Warren's Shaft Theory of David's Conquest Shattered." *BAR*, January/February 1999: 22–33, 72.
Reisner, Robert. *Graffiti*. New York: Parallax, 1967.
Ricciardi, Alessia. *After La Dolce Vita: A Cultural Prehistory of Berlusconi's Italy*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012.
Richard, Carl J. *Why We're All Romans*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010.
Roberts, Andrew. *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples since 1900*. New York: HarperCollins, 2009.
Roberts, J. M., and Odd Arne Westad. *The Penguin History of the World*. New York: Penguin, 1976, 2013.
Rodriguez, Junius P. *The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery*. 2 volumes. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1997.
Roller, Duane W. *The Building Program of Herod the Great*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
The Roman Empire in the First Century. Hugo Godwin, researcher; Bruce Robinson, writer. PBS. Devillier Donegan, 2001.
Rosenblatt, Samuel. "The Crucifixion of Jesus from the Standpoint of Pharisaic Law." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 75, no. 4 (December 1956): 315–21.

Rothwell, Kenneth S. “Roman Polanski’s *Macbeth*: Golgotha Triumphant.” *Literature/Film Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (Winter 1973): 71–75.
Sabbagh, Karl. *Britain in Palestine: The Story of British Rule in Palestine 1917–1948*. Stroud, UK: Skyscraper, 2012.
Safrai, Ze’ev. *The Economy of Roman Palestine*. London: Routledge, 1994.
Sallust. *Catiline’s War*. London: Penguin, 2007.
Sandbrook, Dominic. *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles*. London: Little Brown, 2005.
———. *Seasons in the Sun: The Battle for Britain 1974–1979*. London: Allen Lane, 2012.
———. *State of Emergency: The Way We Were: Britain 1970–74*. London: Allen Lane, 2010.
———. *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties*. London: Abacus, 2007.
Sanders, James A. “The Dead Sea Scrolls—A Quarter-Century of Study.” *Biblical Archaeologist* 36, no. 4 (December 1973): 109–48.
Sandnes, Karl Olav. *Belly and Body in the Pauline Epistles*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
Sapir, Boris, ed. *“Vpered!” 1873–1877: From the Archives of Valerian Nikolaevich Smernov*. Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel, 1970.
Schain, Martin. *The Marshall Plan: Fifty Years After*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.
Schiffman, Lawrence H. “Inverting Reality: The Dead Sea Scrolls in the Popular Media.” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 12, no. 1 (2005): 24–37.
Schlaeger, Hilke. “Vernunft gegen Gewalt Studenten, Professoren, Polizei: in Berlin, Heidelberg und Frankfurt zum Beispiel.” *Die Zeit*, 17 January 1969.
Schneer, Jonathan. *The Balfour Declaration: The Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*. Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2012.
Schreiber, Mark. *Shocking Crimes of Postwar Japan*. Tokyo: Yenbooks, 1996.
Schürer, Emil, *et al. The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*. London: Bloomsbury, 1973.
Scott, Jonathan. *Piranesi*. New York: Wiley-Academy, 1975.
Seaford, R. A. S. “The Mysteries of Dionysos at Pompeii.” In *Pegasus: Classical Essays from the University of Exeter*, edited by H. W. Stubbs. Exeter: University of Exeter, 1981.
Seldon, Anthony, and Kevin Hickson, eds. *New Labour, Old Labour: The Wilson and Callaghan Governments, 1974–79*. London: Routledge, 2004.
The Seventh Seal. Dir. Ingmar Bergman. 1958.
Shanks, Michael. *The Stagnant Society*. London: Penguin, 1972.
Shaw, Brent D. *Spartacus and the Slave Wars*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001.
Shepherd, John. *Crisis? What Crisis? The Callaghan Government and the British ‘Winter of Discontent’*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013.
———. “Labour Wasn’t Working.” *History Today*, January 2009: 43–49.
Sherman, A. J. *Mandate Days: British Lives in Palestine, 1918–1948*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997.
Silberman, Neil Asher, and Eric M. Meyers. “The Politics of First-Century Judea.” *Archaeology* 47, no. 6 (November/December 1994): 30–41.
“Simeon bar Giora.” Jewish Virtual Library, http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/simeon-bar-giora.
Simon of the Desert. Dir. Luis Bunuel. 1965.
Smallwood, E. Mary. “Jews and Romans in the Early Empire: Part I.” *History Today* 15, no. 4 (1965): 232–39.
———. “Jews and Romans in the Early Empire: Part II.” *History Today* 15, no. 5 (1965): 313–19.
———. *The Jews under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian*. Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1976.
Smith, Jason E., and Andre Moncourt, eds. *The Red Army Faction: A Documentary History*, Vol. 1, *Projectiles for the People*. Montreal: Kersplebedeb, 2009.

———. *The Red Army Faction: A Documentary History*, Vol. 2, *Dancing with Imperialism*. Montreal: Kersplebedeb, 2009.
Smith, Morton. "Zealots and the Sicarii, Their Origins and Relation." *Harvard Theological Review* 64 no. 1 (January 1971): 1–19.
Smith, William. *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*. London: John Murray, 1875.
Sounes, Howard. *The Seventies: The Sights, Sounds and Ideas of a Brilliant Decade*. London: Simon and Schuster, 2007.
Stanton, Graham. *The Gospels and Jesus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
Stevenson, Walter. "The Rise of the Eunuchs in Greco-Roman Antiquity." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5, no. 4 (April 1995): 494–511.
Stillman, Edmund, ed. *The United Kingdom in 1980: The Hudson Report*. New York: Halsted Press, 1974.
"Stoke Newington 8 Defence Group: A Political Statement." https://hackneyhistory.wordpress.com/2012/01/10/stoke-newington-8-defence-group-a-political-statement/.
Sugarman, David. "Melville in Jerusalem." *Tablet*, 16 August 2012. http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/books/109333/melville-in-jerusalem.
Taylor, Joan E., ed. *Jesus and Brian: Exploring the Historical Jesus and His Times via "Monty Python's Life of Brian."* London: Bloomsbury, 2015.
Thatcher, Margaret. Margaret Thatcher Foundation. http://www.margaretthatcher.org.
Thiessen, Gerd, and Annette Merz. *The Historical Jesus*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.
Thomas, Donald. *Villain's Paradise: A History of Britain's Underworld*. New York: Pegasus Books, 2006.
Thompson, Harry. *Peter Cook*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997.
Thompson, John O. *Monty Python: Complete and Utter Theory of the Grotesque*. London: BFI, 1982.
Timmers, J. J. M., and A. Van Der Heyden. *The Glory of Rome*. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1975.
Tiratsoo, Nick, ed. *From Blitz to Blair: A New History of Britain since 1939*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1997.
"A Tomb in Jerusalem Reveals the History of Crucifixion and Roman Crucifixion Methods." *Bible History Daily*, 22 July 2011.
Tomlinson, Jim. "The Politics of Decline." In *Reassessing 1970s Britain*, ed. Lawrence Black, Hugh Pemberton, and Pat Thane. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013.
Toner, Jerry. *The Day Commodus Killed a Rhino*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014.
Toye, Richard. "'The Gentleman in Whitehall' Reconsidered: The Evolution of Douglas Jay's Views on Economic Planning and Consumer Choice, 1937–1947." *Labour History Review* 67, no. 2 (August 2002): 185–202.
"TUC: History Online." http://www.unionhistory.info/timeline.
Tuchman, Barbara. *Bible and Sword: England and Palestine from the Bronze Age to Balfour*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1984.
Turner, Alwyn W. *Crisis? What Crisis? Britain in the 1970s*. London: Aurum, 2008.
Tzaferis, Vassilios. "Crucifixion—the Archaeological Evidence." *Biblical Archaeology Review* 11, no. 1 (1985): 44–53.
Varon, Jamie. *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
Vermes, Geza. *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus*. London: Penguin, 2004.
Vikman, Elisabeth. "Ancient Origins: Sexual Violence in Warfare, Parts I and II." *Anthropology & Medicine* 12, no. 1 (April 2005): 21–31, 33–46.
Vinen, Richard. *Thatcher's Britain*. London: Simon & Schuster, 2009.
Von Ehrenkrook, Jason. "Effeminacy in the Shadow of Empire: The Politics of Transgressive Gender in Josephus's Bellum Judaicum." *Jewish Quarterly Review* 101, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 145–63.

Wasson, Donald. “Roman Citizenship.” *Ancient History Encyclopedia*. http://www.ancient.eu/article/859/.
Watson, Bruce. “For a While, the Luddites Had a Smashing Success.” *Smithsonian* 24, no. 1 (April 1993): 140–54.
Waugh, Auberon. *A Turbulent Decade: The Diaries of Auberon Waugh 1976–1985*. Ed. Anna Galli-Pahlavi. London: Private Eye, 1985.
———. *Four Crowded Years: The Diaries of Auberon Waugh 1972–1976*. Ed. N. R. Galli. London: Private Eye, 1976.
Weekend. Dir. Jean-Luc Godard. 1967.
We’ll Meet Again. Dir. Philip Brandon. Columbia British Pictures, 1943.
Wharton, Ken. *Wasted Years, Wasted Lives: The British Army in Northern Ireland*, vol. 2. Solihull, UK: Helion, 2014.
Wheen, Francis. *Strange Days Indeed—The 1970s: The Golden Age of Paranoia*. New York: Public Affairs, 2010.
White, Lawrence G. *The Divine Comedy*. New York: Pantheon, 1948.
Whitehead, Phillip. *The Writing on the Wall: Britain in the Seventies*. London: Michael Joseph, 1985.
Wiedemann, Thomas. *Emperors and Gladiators*. Oxford: Routledge, 1992.
Williamson, Adrian. “The Case for Brexit: Lessons from the 1960s and 1970s.” *History & Policy*. 5 May 2015.
Williamson, G. W., ed. *Josephus: The Jewish War*. London: Penguin, 1970.
Wilmut, Roger. *From Fringe to Flying Circus*. London: Methuen, 1980.
Wise, Michael, *et al. The Dead Sea Scrolls*. San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 2005.
WW2 People’s War. “Dunstable Town Centre” and “Life in an Air-Raid Shelter.” BBC. http://www.bbc.co.uk/.
Yadin, Yigael. *Excavation of Masada*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1965.
———, ed. *Jerusalem Revealed*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1975.
Zeitlin, Solomon. “The Crucifixion of Jesus Re-Examined.” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 31, no. 4 (April 1941): 327–69.
———. “The Crucifixion of Jesus Re-Examined (Continued).” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 32, no. 2 (October 1941): 175–89.
———. “The Idolatry of the Dead Sea Scrolls” *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 48, no. 3 (January 1958): 243–78.
———. “History, Historians and the Dead Sea Scrolls” *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 55, no. 2 (October 1964): 97–116.
Zias, Joseph, and Eliezer Sekeles. “The Crucified Man from Giv‘at ha-Mivtar: A Reappraisal.” *Israel Exploration Journal* 35, no. 1 (1985): 22–27.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Darl Larsen was born and raised in central California and has been part of the film faculty at Brigham Young University since 1998. He took degrees at UC Santa Barbara, Brigham Young University, and Northern Illinois University. He is professor in the Media Arts department and the Center for Animation at BYU, teaching film, animation, screenwriting, and popular culture studies. He has written extensively in the area of Monty Python studies and his books include *Monty Python, Shakespeare, and English Renaissance Drama* (2003) as well as Monty Python's Flying Circus: *An Utterly Complete, Thoroughly Unillustrated, Absolutely Unauthorized Guide to Possibly All the References* (Scarecrow Press, 2008; Revised, Taylor Trade, 2013) and *A Book about the Film* Monty Python and the Holy Grail: *All the References from African Swallows to Zoot* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2015). Larsen lives in Provo, Utah, with his family.