

Anomalies and aspects of Pilate's words and INRI

by

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There are some anomalies in the Gospels about the public notice or sign Pilate caused to be written and displayed during our Savior's execution. The *Interlinear Bible Hebrew-Greek-English*, by Jay P. Green translates Pilate's phrase differently in the four Gospels. Two gospels mention the phrase was in three languages; but each is in a different order. Four of the gospels describe the sign with three different words. These anomalies and other aspects are explainable.

The New Testament (NT) in most English bibles are translated from copies of Greek manuscripts (MSS) reliably dated from AD 1 to 5. Pilate's phrase is not found in Hebrew or Latin sources, so it must be deduced in those languages.

There are limitations when translating biblical languages which force a translator to make logical assumptions about a given matter. This includes even mundane things like style of lettering and typical of AD 30. Can an ordinary person make a reasonable facsimile of Pilate's sign?

The answer is yes. To do so only requires access to an English NT Interlinear, various bible versions, Grammars and language histories in the three languages involved, a Concordance such as James Strong's, a computer with ancient letter fonts, Internet access, and a printer with TrueType fonts. These are usual in large libraries.

Some basics about NT bible translations

While the NT in English bibles are a translation from copies of early manuscripts (MSS) in Greek, an increasing number of scholars point to evidence indicating some or all are a translation from originals written in Aramaic and Hebrew. Some books of the Old Testament (OT) are known to be translated from original Aramaic manuscripts (Ezra, Daniel, etc.) and at least two books of the NT are available as English translations of early gospels in Aramaic/Hebrew. Those will be discussed.

A bible translator strives to preserve thoughts of an original language into another language. It is not an easy task. Manuscripts which use the same keywords are classed into certain 'traditions.' Some MSS may contain a copyist error or a gloss. The translator must make decisions about such things, either correcting or excluding them..

The reality is that letter-for-letter, word-for-word translations between the three languages mentioned by Pilate, cannot be made exactly. The languages do not use the same alphabet, they differ in the number of letters and their sound values, in sentence structure, gender, etc.

And, it must be remembered that over centuries the transliteration of our Savior's name from Aramaic/Hebrew into Greek or Latin, and ultimately into English, has resulted in changes to its PRONUNCIATION and SPELLING. But, the original is determinable as will be shown.

How is the sign variously described in the gospels?

The interlinear bible describes the sign in various ways. In Matthew 27:37, it is: the “charge,” in Mark 15:26 and Luke 23:38 it is: the “superscription,” in John 19:19 it is: a “title.” Others use: citation, accusation, writing, etc. It was a sign giving public notice about the execution. The sign was carried by one of the executioners along the route to the execution site for all to read. Once there it was affixed over the head of the condemned person.

Which Gospel record of Pilate’s words were likely on the sign?

The four Gospels record the phrase from Pilate differently. The interlinear translation of the phrase from the gospels are aligned below, according to words that are common:

Matthew	27:37	THIS IS JESUS	THE KING OF THE JEWS
Mark	15:26		THE KING OF THE JEWS
Luke	23:38	THIS IS	THE KING OF THE JEWS
John	19:19	JESUS THE NAZARENE	THE KING OF THE JEWS

Notice that each phrase contains prepositions and a definite article commonly used in Greek, and that the last five words are the same. Some advocate the latter were a deliberate taunt by Pilate to the troublesome Jews, evidenced by his refusal to make the word changes they proffered.

Yet, even allowing for some variance in a translator’s word choice, and known language-to-language translation limitations, why might the phrase in the gospel records not be more similar?

Of the Apostles, only John is recorded as having stood near enough to the torture stake to be spoken to by our Savior (John 19:27). John was also the youngest Apostle, the one who compiled the Epistles of the other Apostles, and afterward, the last to die. For these reasons it is likely the phrase John recorded was vivid in his mind since he mentioned the Savior’s name, where he was from, as well as the alleged taunt. These facts infer that Matthew, Mark, and Luke’s record, which seem incomplete compared to John’s, may simply be their recollection many years after a very traumatic event occurred in their lives.

Was Pilate’s phrase in a given language recorded by a specific Gospel author?

There are some who advocate that, since Matthew was an Apostle to the Hebrews, his gospel would have the phrase in Hebrew recorded more accurately. Further, since Luke addressed a letter to a Greek (“most excellent Theophilus”- Luke 1:3), he would have recorded the phrase in Greek more accurately. But the same offer no explanation why John, a Jew, would have recorded the phrase in Latin more accurately. Inexplicably, the same advocate that Mark’s record, extant only in Greek as the others, would not have been that of *any* of the languages. The reason: “characteristically, Mark’s Gospel is brief because he wrote about things the Savior did, more than what he said.”

Nice theories, but unrealistic. Given the limitations of word-for-word translations, differences in alphabets, sound value(s), etc., and using plain common sense, Pilate's phrase would have been essentially the same in the three languages, as will be shown.

What would have been the likely order of the languages on the sign?

The Greek manuscripts have the order of the languages different, not opposite, as might be a copyist's error. They are:

Luke 23:38 : "...written over him in letters Greek and Latin, and Hebrew"

John 19:20 : "...having been written in Hebrew, in Greek, in Latin."

Interestingly, the New International Version (NIV) bible has John 19:20 as: "...Aramaic, Latin, and Greek." The New American Standard (NAS) does not mention any language order in this verse.

Even though the order of the languages differ in the gospels, it is reasonable to assume the three phrases were lettered in successive rows, from the top down. But in which order?

Luke's account also may simply have been his recollection years after the execution. Because Pilate's words in John 19:19 are more complete, it is logical that John's order of the languages on the sign is the more likely. Other reasons that support this conclusion will be mentioned.

Some aspects about Pilate's words:

(a) Pilate was the top Roman official, educated, and likely multi-lingual. His command was an official proclamation and would likely have been put on papyrus. It is doubtful the official record on papyrus contained the phrase lettered in the Hebrew and Greek language since it would have meant little to a subsequent Roman reader. It also seems likely the lettering on the sign was done by a lower level person skilled in Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. For a lesser known person's execution, it is doubtful that a similar phrase would have been in more than two languages.

(b) Phrases in the three languages would not all have included the equivalent of both 'the' and 'of the,' as in English translations of John 19:19 from the Greek MSS.

(c) The phrases would have been lettered continuously (without space between words), without punctuation, and not in upper and lower case for capitalization..

(d) The direction of the lettering of the phrases varied according to the language. The Hebrew would have been written from the right to left which is common in Semitic languages. Prior to 6 B.C., the Greek would have been written the same way. For a time Greek was written in a style called the Boustrophedon (ox turning) where every other line was started in the opposite direction with the letters also reversed.

This style stopped being used several centuries before AD 30. By that time Greek and Latin were written from left to right. Since the sign was public notice of an execution, it seems unlikely the Romans would have centered the phrases for aesthetic purposes.

(e) The letters we now call ‘Hebrew’ were likely an early form of the Aramaic/Hebrew ‘square script’ introduced by the Prophet Ezra after the Babylonian captivity. The letters would likely be similar to those in a 14-line commentary on the book of Habakkuk found on an artifact at Qumran among the Dead Sea Scrolls. That account was written mainly in Aramaic which common people spoke, especially in the region of Galilee where our Savior and most of the Apostles were from. Hebrew was spoken by the priesthood and was used in religious activities. Later, Hebrew supplanted Aramaic. The Hebrew phrase would not have had vowel points because they did not come into use until about the sixth century A.D.

(f) The Greek phrase would have been written in Uncials (sub-size capital letters). Large letters were not used until about AD 400. The wording would have been in Koine, not Classical Greek. Koine Greek was an international language then as English is now. Visitors to Jerusalem could be expected to carry a report of the execution back to their homes in distant parts of the Roman empire where Koine Greek was also spoken.

(g) The Latin phrase was surely there to be a reminder to the population of the power of Rome; only it could take life. Only sub-height capital letters were used for Latin in AD 30. Lower case letters were not used until about AD 800. It is likely that the official record of Pilate’s words were lettered in the ‘Zierstil style’ with serifs (small tails on the letters) typically on Roman monuments. It is likely the hand lettering was sans serifs.

(h) The location where the execution took place was a prominent place so to be seen by a maximum number of people, thereby being a deterrent. The Hebrew phrase on the sign was obviously for the local population which principally spoke Aramaic and Hebrew.

(i) The letter ‘J’ did not exist in Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, or even in English until about the time of movable-type printing. The 1611 KJV English Bible translation does not contain the letter ‘J.’ It has names spelled: *Ioshua, Job, Jeremiah*, etc., but in the next edition the letter ‘I’ was replaced with the ‘J,’ and the same names were then spelled: Joshua, Job, Jeremiah, etc. The hook shape of the ‘J’ and ‘zh’ sound is from French usage. The letter ‘J’ occupies the 15th place in the English alphabet next to the letter ‘I’ from which it came. The ‘J,’ is the last letter added to the English alphabet, following the ‘U, V, and W.’

(J) The name of our Savior is not, nor was it ever spelled or pronounced ‘Jesus,’ during his life and for about 1500 years afterward.

The Greek phrase

The middle phrase in John 19:20, is only known to have been recorded in Greek. The phrase in Greek would have been the longest in length of the three languages. This is because Greek then had the most letters in its alphabet of the three languages, the Greek phrase included vowels and it included the equivalent of ‘the,’ and ‘of the.’

The Greek phrase shown below in minuscules is from *The Interlinear Bible* by J. P. Green, Sr., Hendrickson Publishers, 1985. The numbers correspond to those in Strong’s Greek Dictionary. The words in the phrase are separated with a space to help the reader. The words underneath the Greek letters show how the phrase commonly appears in the first stage of an English translation on its way to smoothed text as is seen in the sidebar of the TIB:

2424	3480	935	2453
'ιησοῦς ὁ ναζωραῖος ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ιουδαίων	i ē s ō u s ho na z ō r a i ō s ho b a s i l ē u s ton i ō u d a i ō		
iēsous the nazorean the sovereign of the iudean			

The Latin phrase

John 19:20 records that the bottom phrase in was in Latin. It must be deduced because no written examples exist from AD 30. Latin was the language Romans spoke amongst themselves. Having the phrase in Latin was likely ‘standard operating procedure’ for executions by the Romans.

The Latin phrase would have been a little shorter in length than the phrase in Greek. According to various Latin alphabet sources, around the first century there were 23 letters in Latin, all in small size capitals: ABCDEFGHI KLMNOPQRST V XYZ. The letter ‘V’ would have been used, not the letter ‘U’ which later replaced it. The letter ‘I’ would have been used because the letter ‘J’ did not exist until the 15th century A.D. The Greek letters K, X, and Y were initially used only for writing words of Greek origin..

Aspects of the acronym INRI.

According to the The Holy Bible (Douay), Catholic Press, Inc.,1950, the acronym INRI, as commonly seen on early paintings and crucifixes, stands for: ‘Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum.’ Interestingly, Greek Orthodox churches have crucifixes with the acronym INBI because the spelling of the Greek word ‘βασιλεὺς, = sovereign (or king), begins with the Greek letter ‘β.’

Some people advocate the acronym INRI reflects terse, efficient, Roman words devoid of definite articles, etc. But, as the acronym ‘USA’ actually stands for ‘United States of America,’ the unseen preposition ‘of,’ though not written, is understood. INRI seems to be a Latin translation based upon copies of early NT Greek MSS. Accordingly, the Latin phrase likely would have

included article ‘la’ = ‘the’ in English, and ‘de la’ = ‘of the.’ But were they actually there?

Noun declension determines case in Latin. Some linguist are of the opinion the phrase in Latin would likely have been in the Genitive case, not the Vocative. To aid understanding, the phrase below is in TrueType Copperplate Gothic Light font, has space between words. INRI is shown bold.

IESVS LA NAZARENI REX DE LA IVDAEORVM

Recall, in Latin the letter ‘I’ is pronounced as ‘Y.’ Also, the letter ‘V’ was replaced by the ‘U’ and the two letters became distinct. The same letter changes occurred in the archaic English as is seen in the 1611 King James Version bible translation of John 19:19 as:

“...IESVS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE IEWES...”

Again, at the next printing of the 1611 KJV bible, the letter ‘I,’ was changed to the letter ‘J.’ This is but one of many proofs that the name of our Savior was NEVER spelled or pronounced ‘Jesus.’ Then as now, neither the letter ‘J’ or its sound existed in Aramaic, the ‘lingua franca’ in Nazareth and the region of Galilee.

Web sites about INRI and Pilate’s words

A Internet search of ‘INRI’ located many repetitious explanations of the acronym but the website by Colin B. Donovan, STL, of EWTN has the three phrases in a form worthy of study. To aid the reader he utilized English Language Style Rules for the Latin, used vowel points on the Hebrew letters, and put spaces between words.

A website at www.hesemann.watchers.cal/cross.html shows an artifact in the Basilica di Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome, reputed to be the ‘Titulus Croce’ (Title of the Cross). The site explains that according to tradition, the artifact was brought to Rome by the Roman Emperor Constantine’s mother, Helena, in AD 326. The “relics of the True Cross” (a beam and three nails) were supposedly found during the construction of the Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. The tradition says that the artifact is part of the wood board sign over our Savior’s head when he was executed. Helena supposedly had artifact sawed into parts. Only the “Titulus Croce” survives.

Details in the close-up photograph of the ‘Titulus Croce’ indicate the artifact is likely a forgery. The photograph shows groove-like depressions of letters which are identifiable in rows from the top down to be in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin (the order in John 19:20). In addition, there are cracks around the perimeter of the letters indicating some kind of stencil, awl, or scrapper was used. This would not be expected since the likely writing material at the time, chalk, is not hard enough to have made groove-like depressions or caused cracks around the perimeter of letters.

Perhaps wire or thin metal was used to make letters which were then positioned on the board, and struck with a mallet. Even stencils made from fired clay would been hard enough for a one-time

use in the soft wood and would have produced the same impressions and cracks.

The letters in the photograph of the artifact all face toward the left. This is highly suspicious. It could mean that the impressions were made by a forger who did not realize stencils must be made in reverse for their impression to have proper orientation, or did not know that, unlike Hebrew, Greek and Latin were lettered from left to right at that time. The website mentions that perhaps a “Levitine,” accustomed to lettering Hebrew from right to left, might have lettered the other phrases the same way. If so, it infers the forger was Jewish.

If one does a screen print of the image then looks at the back of the paper when against a light, it shows: ...NAZARINVSREX The words are Latin: NAZARINVS, and a part of the word REX are visible. One would think that Helena would have been suspicious of the reversed lettering, even though history shows she was very eager to acquire first century relics.

The Hebrew phrase

John 19:20 records that the top phrase was lettered in [Aramaic/]Hebrew. As mentioned, the phrase in Hebrew must be DEDUCED because no written examples exist from the first century. The phrase would have been similar to John 19:19, however the words would not have been as similar to the Greek as was the Latin.

The Hebrew words would, then as now, have been composed of consonants only (although three consonants could be used as semi-vowels). A student of Hebrew was taught which vowel to mentally insert next to a consonant when reading. The Hebrew alphabet had 22 letters (some say 19 then), the least of the three languages, making the Hebrew phrase the shortest in length.

How would the name of our Savior been pronounced and spelled?

As occurs when doing genealogical research into family names, ultimately one must concentrate on the SOUND of names rather than the spelling. The same is true for understanding our Savior’s name.

Some favor Strong’s 3091 יהוֹשָׁע Y^ehôwshû’ah *yeh-ho-shoo’-ah* (i.e. Joshua) the name of the Son of Nun. His was name O’shua until Moses changed it by adding the Hebrew letter ‘yod’ to the front, which with semi-vowels, caused it to mean ‘Yahweh Saves.’ The present tense of his name is characteristic of the man. However, there is mounting evidence that the name of the Savior which was to come in the future, stems from another word in Strong’s.

The spelling of names transliterated into English must take into account the limitations translators have working from scripture MSS of an early period, the writings of historians, etc., and bibles, reference books, concordances, bible dictionaries, Hebrew grammars, etc., and books that deal with the records and derivation of ancient names. For example, in Greek, the letter ‘s’ at the end of a name indicates masculinity. The result of this grammatical practice is seen in the translated spelling of many names in English bible translations (i.e., Jesus, Judas, etc).

Various sources tend to show that our Savior's name is etymologically linked to ancient Semitic roots. Phoenician, Aramaic, Hebrew, and to a certain extent the early Greek alphabet had similar letters, similar names for those letters, and similar sound values. Many were the same.

Various authors such as Joseph Stallings, *How Yeshu'a became Jesus*, Catholic Digest, January 1991, state that the second (some say fifth) most common name for males in 1st century Judea and Galilee was pronounced "Ye-shu'a."

Strong's Concordance - Hebrew Dictionary shows logically how our Savior's name was pronounced. Notice the PHONETIC pronunciation, FUTURE TENSE, and anglicized SPELLING using the letter 'J,' which Strong's shows in *italics*:

3442 יְשׁוּעָה 'Yêshûwa', *yay-shoo'-ah* from 3091; *he will save; Jeshua*, the name of ten Isr., also of a place in Pal.:*Jeshua* [corresponds to 3443, of Chaldean origin].

The pronunciation for 3442, *yay-shoo'-ah*, is the same for *Jeshua*, correctly spelled **Yeshua**. Strong used the letter 'J' instead of 'Y' in the definition because he based his concordance on the KJV bible of the 1800's. It was the most widely used bible translation at that time.

Repeating, in the original 1611 KJV bible, *Jeshua* was spelled with an 'I' (i.e., *Ieshua*). The 'I' was sounded as if a 'Y.' The 1611 KJV was published **BEFORE** the letter 'J,' whose sound and hook shape came from the French, was included in the English alphabet

Today the name is heard as: yeh-shoo-ah, yeh'shoo-ah, or yah-shoo'-ah. It all depends upon where the emphasis is placed, local speech habits, and background.

A Yahwist missionary in Israel says people there pronounce the name of our Savior as 'yeh-shoo'-ah,' whereas visiting Americans commonly say 'yah'-shoo-ah.' The latter pronunciation is from the spelling 'Yahshua' first seen in the *Holy Name Bible*, by Angelo B. Traina, The Scripture Research Association, Inc., Brandywine, MD 20613, 1983 (now out of print).

An example of the spelling of our Savior's name can be seen in The *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* by George Howard, Mercer University Press, Macon, GA, 1995, page 144. Before writing the book, Professor Howard examined the nine extant copies of an early MSS of the Gospel of Matthew written in Hebrew. He reproduced the best MSS in his book, along with *his* English translation. Howard mentions various historical sources which state that another book of the NT was also known to have been written in Hebrew.

The words of Matthew 27:37 in Hebrew which follow are shown underlined to aid identification with the English translation that follows. The Hebrew words have a space between them because same is seen in a photocopy of that manuscript, but did not vowel points. The name of our Savior in Hebrew letters is shown bold (read right to left):

וְאַחֲרַ הַיְחִי עַל רֹאשׁוֹ מִכֶּחֶךְ אֶחָד שְׁהִיא אֹמֵר זֶה יְשֻׁוּ נְאֹזֶת מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל

In Howard's English translation of Matthew 27:37 below, REMEMBER, Howard used *English Language Style Rules*, commonly found in an English dictionary, for punctuation, capitalization, etc. He also used the word 'Jesus,' which is expected by most readers of English bibles because they are ignorant the letter 'J' did not exist earlier than about 500 years ago..

It is unknown why Howard did not capitalize the word 'king' in the following: "Afterward, they set for him over his head a writing which said:

Jesus of Nazareth, the king of Israel."

Green's Interlinear of Matthew 27:37 which uses Greek MSS, has the same verse as: "This is Jesus the King of the Jews"

Notice:

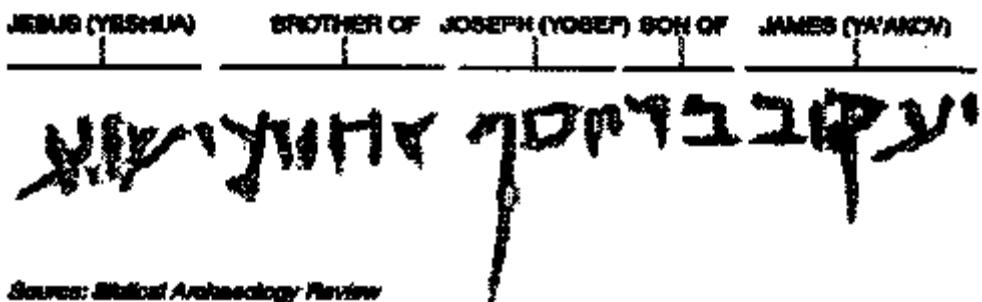
- (a) The words "of Nazareth" is NOT in the Greek MSS of Green's Interlinear, though it is in Howard's translation of the Hebrew MSS
- (b) It is easy to see the spelling of the Savior's name in the Hebrew word string because **אֵשֶׁר**, correlates with Strong's 3442 shown above.
- (c) Howard translates the last word in the Hebrew sentence as 'Israel' (**ישראל**), not 'Jews,' as is usual in English translations.

The reason Howard used quotation marks in **אֵשֶׁר** is unknown at this time. Perhaps a clue to this is in Strong's Preface to his Hebrew Dictionary which may indicate the evolving vowel pointing system later formerly developed i.e., (.) Shuwreq (shoo-rake) **û**, as in *cruel*. The pronunciation marks of Strong's 3442: **יְשֻׁחָנָה** (**Yêshûwa'**) shows emphasis on the last syllable.

A good book which describes in detail the etymology and pronunciation of our Savior's name is: *The Name of the Messiah*, by Larry Acheson, Truth Seekers, 1416 Fairfield Drive, Plano, TX 75074-6010. The book also shows correspondence with George Howard related to certain aspects of words in Howard's book, and provides reference to a catalogue of ossuaries

Ossuaries are bone boxes found in Jerusalem tombs. The catalogue identifies and dates ossuaries, to biblical times. Only one ossuary, which is undated, contains the long form of the name 'Yehoshua,' but most dated ossuaries contain the more recent form of name 'Yeshua' in Aramaic/Hebrew letters.

Recently an ossuary was featured in *Bible Archeology Review* (BAR), December, 2002, that reputedly belonged to: ‘James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus.’ The actual inscription is:



Sources: Biblical Archaeology Review

Noted archeologist Andre Lemaire said the inscription is in Aramaic, and typical of the first century. As can be seen, it is written from right to left, continuous, without vowel points, and of characters like that of other inscriptions in the catalogue of ossuaries. The above translated and transliterated words shown above the inscription uses English Language Style Rules (upper and lower case, space between words, punctuation, etc.).

The same ossuary was again mentioned in BAR magazine, this time the last part of the inscription ‘brother of Yeshua,’ was alleged to be an embellishment. Recent tests prove it was not. The language, the spelling of the name, and shape of the letters are typical of those in AD 30.

How would the Hebrew phrase have been lettered?

The Hebrew phrase would have had the letter ‘ה’ (ha) pronounced ‘hey,’ preceding and connected to the noun to which it refers. Ha is approximately equivalent to the English definite article ‘the.’ There was no Hebrew equivalent for ‘of the.’ A reader mentally inserts ‘of.’

A surprising aspect concerns the word Nazareth and its derivative Nazarene. Neither is found in Strong’s Hebrew dictionary; only in the Greek. Accordingly, the spelling of Nazarene in Hebrew must be deduced for AD 30. C. Missler has it as: ‘nazarei,’ others as ‘nazari,’ ‘nazairs,’ notsri, etc., and M. Hessmann has it as: ‘nozery.’ But Colin Donovan, STL and Webster’s New World Hebrew Dictionary, by Hayim Baltsan, have it as ‘notsree.’ It is the term is used herein.

The normally continuous Hebrew phrase is shown here with space between words and with Strong’s numbers, as applicable. The final letter ‘m’ as required in Hebrew writing, is shown below H3064. Read the translation below the Hebrew words individually, right-to-left:

H3064	H4428	H3442
יְהוּדִים y ^{eh} hudîm	מֶלֶךְ melek	נִצְרֵי notsree

ה

ישׁוּעָה
yêshûwa’

The same phrase shown below has the article ‘ה’ (ha = the) connected to the noun it precedes:

ישוע הנצרי מלך היהודים
hay^chûwdîm melek hanotsree yêshûwa'

As shown on the facsimile of the sign at the end of this article, the actual phrase would not have had a space between words. An unbiased bible translator utilizing English Language Style Rules and the 1st century form of our Savior’s name, probably have render the phrase in John 19:19-20 as:

Yeshua the Nazarene, King the Yehudians

What material was used to letter and make the sign?

The sign was likely a rough-sawn board of an easily cut softwood like Pine. The sawn board was likely smoothed to remove some of the roughness to make lettering thereon more visible. Assuming the board was one piece, the minimum width horizontally would have been determined by the number of letters in the Greek phrase. Probably there were several reusable boards of different sizes to display information about a given execution.

The board selected for our Savior’s execution would have had a vertical height to accommodate the three phrases. It is assumed the letters in each phrase would have been approximately the same height, about two inches. If the letters were the same size as fonts shown herein, the sign would have a ratio of height to length of 1: 4.7. Accordingly, the sign would have been a minimum of 28-30 inches wide, 6 -7 inches tall. It would likely have been about 3/4 to 1 inch thick. This is a reasonable size and would permit the phrases to be seen about 20 feet distant.

The sign would have been lettered then carried to the execution site. There it seems likely the sign would have been attached to the structure before it and the condemned were raised. The Romans used at least four different types of torture structures (T, X, I, and common cross). It is unlikely the person being executed would have been significantly higher than ground level on any type, yet a tall crucifix is commonly portrayed. What is likely?

Romans soldiers were efficient at executions. A tall structure, with the victim attached near the top would have raised the center of gravity to near the top end, making it unnecessarily difficult to raise to a vertical position. As the structure was raised the bottom end would have pivoted over a hole in the ground. As the structure became vertical, it would drop into the hole. It was then wedged in place. If a dead olive tree were available it could have been used and only a cross-beam with the victim attached, raised and tied in place. This would have facilitated matters for the next execution.

How would the sign have been lettered?

The sign was likely lettered using a material which today is called Gypsum.. In its natural state it is a soft whitish rock commonly used for blackboard chalk.

The lettering would have been free-hand, possibly with the palm resting upon the board. The Greek phrase, known likely to be the longest, may have been trial lettered initially to ensure a given size board were wide enough, then cleaned off; or a wider board selected.

The phrase in Hebrew was likely lettered first across the top of the board, starting near the upper right corner. Being the shortest, the Hebrew phrase would have ended well away from the left side of the board. If a tall enough board were available it seems likely the Romans would have written the Hebrew phrase with larger letters than used for the other languages to be more visible to the local population at a greater distance. If so, the chalk would likely have been blunted to make the letters bold.

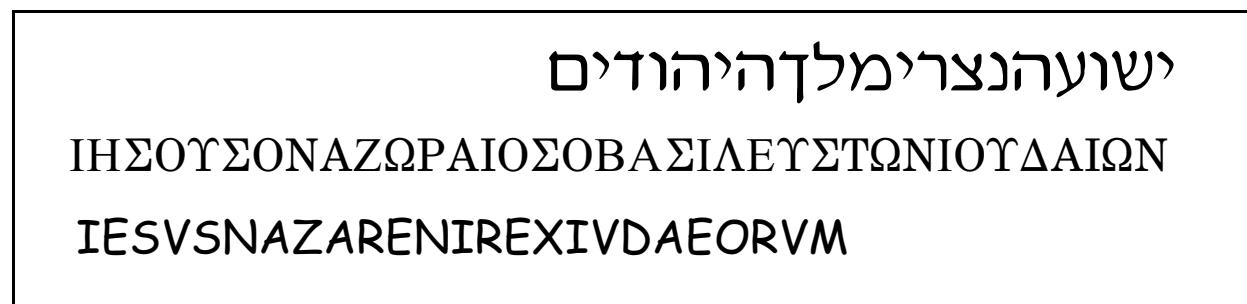
The Greek phrase would have been lettered next, across the middle of the board, and could have spanned the width of the board.

The phrase in Latin was likely lettered across the bottom of the board. It would have ended before it reached the right side, just short of the longer Greek phrase above it. It seems reasonable that the Latin words would have been lettered neatly.

How would the sign have looked?

Putting the above information together, one must next find computer generated fonts which look like hand lettering. No hand lettered Greek font was found so the closest font with small capitals was utilized. Also, no articles or prepositions are shown in the Latin because, while it is logical they were there, no historical support could be cited. Correspondence about that matter to Latin experts, including the Vatican, went unanswered.

According to John 19:19-20, a reasonable facsimile of the sign would look like this:



The following is from: World History for Christian Schools, Second Edition, David A. Fisher, Ph.D., Bob Jones University Press, Greenville, SC, 1994. In Chapter 4, The Roman Empire, page 95., there is a representative of the sign on the torture stake (cross). It is as follows:

ישוע הנצרי מלך היהודים

ΙΗΣΟΥΣ ΝΑΖΩΡΑΙΟΣ Ο ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΤΩΝ ΙΟΥΔΑΙΩΝ

IESUS NAZARÆUS REX ILLE IUDÆORUM

The first word in the Greek string ends in the letter sigma. Perhaps there was no such thing as a final sigma in the first Greek century writing, therefore the two sigma letters would be the same. Compare to others' treatment of this word, and perhaps write a letter to the Baptist Theological Seminary in New Orleans, sending the Professor of Greek a letter with questions.

The Latin string: The inclusion of the word 'ILLE' is not commonly seen. It is an insertion not commonly seen and seems to be either 'of the' or 'the.' Commonly, only the words for INRI are seen. Since the only scriptural manuscripts are in Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek it seems that the Latin string is an adaptation of the Greek string. It may be that Latin does not have equivalent words for the Greek 'O' and 'ΤΩΝ' or it was typical to leave out such equivalents to be brief.