

## Chapter Nine

### Hasmonaean and Herodian Judaea and the Coming of Rome

#### **Aristoboulos (104-3 BC) and Iannaios Alexander (103-76 BC)**

At John Hyrcanus' death in 104 BC his powers were inherited by his oldest son, Aristoboulos. The traditions that were passed down about Aristoboulos are not complimentary. The Hasmonaean family was by this time already a dysfunctional family, much in the mold of ruling families elsewhere in the Near East. Aristoboulos was fearful of the plots against him by other members of the family, and imprisoned most of his brothers as well as his mother (who supposedly starved to death in prison). He was said to have loved his brother Antigonos, but when Aristoboulos fell ill and Antigonos came to call on him the royal bodyguard struck down and killed Antigonos, possibly in a misunderstanding about his intent. At that, Aristoboulos' illness took a turn for the worse, and he vomited blood and died. Despite these lurid stories and although he ruled for only a year (104-3 BC), Aristoboulos is important because - at least according to Josephus - he presumed to do what his illustrious father had not done: he assumed the diadem and took the title, "King (*basileus*) of Judaea." If Josephus was right about that, Aristoboulos was the first king that Judaea had had in almost five hundred years. The formal title capped the revival of Judaeian independence and of a deep national pride among the Judaeans of the homeland.

When Aristoboulos died his mother - Queen Alexandra - saw to it that Iannaios Alexander (Aristoboulos' younger brother) was released from prison and was made king. About his title there is no doubt, since he inscribed it on his coins. Alexander was as energetic a military man as was his father, Hyrcanus. And like his father he depended at least in part on foreign mercenaries. Although he was defeated in his attempt to take Ptolemais, Alexander succeeded in taking all the port cities of Palestine (he was ruthless in his treatment of Gaza, which had long held out against him). While taking over Palestine he was careful to keep on friendly terms with the Ptolemaic queen of Egypt, lest she fear for her own realm and call upon the Romans to stop his aggression.

How Alexander was regarded by his own Judaeian subjects is not clear. Some of them certainly revolted against him, and after defeating the rebels and capturing several hundred of the survivors he had them publicly crucified in Jerusalem (Josephus adds that as the rebels were hanging on their crosses Alexander ordered that their wives and children be brought out and slain before the eyes of the dying men). The Pharisees claimed that on his deathbed Alexander counseled his queen - Salome Alexandra - that if she were solicitous of the Pharisees she would be able to rule Judaea without trouble. Evidently Alexander himself had not been so solicitous of them, but there is little evidence that he was overtly anti-Pharisaic in his actions or deportment.

#### **Queen Salome Alexandra (76-67 BC)**

That Alexander was succeeded by his widow rather than by one of his sons may cause

some surprise, since according to their traditions the Judaeans had only once before been ruled by a queen, and she -Athaliah - was said to have been a Baal worshiper. When Alexander died in 76 BC Salome Alexandra took over as ruler because their oldest son, Hyrcanus, was in some way impaired. His younger brother, Aristoboulos, was quite fit for the throne, but to pass over the older brother in favor of the younger would have caused controversy and possibly civil war. Hence, the coronation of Salome Alexandra.

As a woman, however, Salome Alexandra could not be the High Priest, and she therefore appointed Hyrcanus to that position, the duties of which he seems to have been able to discharge with appropriate dignity and piety. Presiding over the Sanhedrin was also a function that no woman should perform, and Salome therefore placed her brother in that sensitive post. Salome Alexandra was not a warrior queen, but the Hasmonaean kingdom was strong and secure enough - and the Seleukids and Ptolemies were both weak enough - that no serious military action was required. In her internal policies Salome Alexandra catered to the Pharisees, who were - says Josephus - much admired by the common people of Judaea. When places in the Sanhedrin were vacant she filled them with Pharisees rather than with Sadducees, and with *soferim* ("scribes") rather than priests, so that in Pharisaic and Rabbinic tradition the reign of Salome Alexandra was looked back upon as a Golden Age.

### **Hyrcanus II (67-40 BC) and the Coming of Rome**

Already High Priest in his mother's reign, Hyrcanus was clearly marked as her successor on the throne, and that choice was supported by Pharisees and presumably by most of the population. The Sadducees, however, saw an opportunity to regain their dominance by backing Aristoboulos, and even before Salome's death Aristoboulos was in control of parts of Judaea. When the queen died in 67 BC and Hyrcanus II assumed the kingship a civil war broke out. Hyrcanus II was quickly routed, and Aristoboulos usurped the throne and the High Priesthood. Although Hyrcanus seems to have settled into retirement without further ado, two years later he was persuaded by one of his advisors, Antipater of Idumaea, to try to regain his former powers. Antipater had secured the alliance of Aretas, the Nabataean ruler of Petra, and with that assistance Hyrcanus returned to Jerusalem and almost recovered the kingship.

By this time, however, a new and much more formidable player had appeared on the scene. The Romans had been instrumental, as we have seen, in the decline of the Seleukid kingdom, and they were much interested in preventing a strong kingdom from arising out of the Seleukid ruins. Such a thing had happened in Pontus, along the Black Sea, where Mithridates had meteoric success in the 80s BC, at one time extending his rule through most of Anatolia and even venturing to the Greek mainland. The Romans fought two wars against him, and in 65 BC the Roman proconsul Pompeius annexed Pontus and its neighbor, Bithynia, as a Roman province. Armenia too had emerged as a regional power by the first century BC. In 93 BC Tigranes I of Armenia had overrun Cappadocia, and in the 70s had taken over most of Syria. Allied with Mithridates, unfortunately, Tigranes was obliged to side with him against the Romans. In 69 BC a Roman army marched into Armenia and defeated Tigranes at his capital, Tigranocerta. At that the Parthians too attacked Armenia. The Roman senate decided, under the circumstances, not to annex Armenia, but to make it a buffer state between the Roman province of Pontus and the Parthians' powerful empire based in northwestern Iran.

In 64 BC, after finishing his work in Pontus, Pompeius brought his proconsular army south into Syria. The Roman senate was pleased to make Syria, rich in cities and in potential tribute, a Roman province. Pompeius accordingly summoned the two Seleukids who still claimed to be king and announced to them that neither was to have a royal career. With such ignominy did the Seleukid kingdom come to an end. Pompeius set up a Roman provincial administration in Antioch, and agreed with the Parthians that the Euphrates river would mark the border between their empire and Roman Syria, which because of its strategic location was to become one of the most important of all the Roman provinces.

As the new arbiter of power in the Levant, Pompeius was approached by the several Levantine states, the most important of which were the Hasmonaean kingdom of Judaea and the Nabatean kingdom of Petra (at Petra the spoken language was Arabic, although the kings used Aramaic for inscriptions and diplomacy). Pompeius received several delegations from Jerusalem, the two most impressive each supporting one of the Hasmonaean contenders for the throne. The delegation assembled by Hyrcanus II and his advisor Antipater, which was favored by the Pharisees and - presumably - the *hasidim* in the countryside, argued that Pompeius should restore the kingdom of Judaea to Hyrcanus II. The other delegation, among whom Sadducees were prominent, urged that Aristoboulos was the more competent of the two brothers, that he was in fact already king, and that Pompeius should recognize him as such. Pompeius decided in favor of Hyrcanus II, perhaps because he was likely to be more placid than his brother. With Pompeius' blessing Hyrcanus returned to Jerusalem as king.

That was not the end of it, however. The next year (63 BC), when Pompeius had taken his legions south of the Dead Sea to intimidate Aretas the Nabatean, Aristoboulos foolishly attempted to take back the kingship by force. Pompeius broke off his operations at Petra, hurried back to Jerusalem, and laid siege to the temple precinct, where Aristoboulos' partisans had taken refuge. The siege was prolonged for three months before Pompeius' legions broke into the precinct and eliminated the rebels.

Once in control of the temple (and of all the rest of Jerusalem), Pompeius decided to make a demonstration of Roman power. The Roman governing class was by this time secular enough to have made Julius Caesar - an Epicurean - its Pontifex Maximus, and Pompeius was ready enough to violate temple protocols for political purposes. The Jerusalem temple, however, was "defended" from impurity by the most elaborate system of safeguards.<sup>1</sup> Four surrounding courtyards screened those who visited the temple. Anyone except a menstruating woman could enter the outer or first courtyard, but the second was open only to Judaeans and - if not "defiled" - to their wives. Access to the third court was restricted to Judaeans who had been purified, and the fourth court and the temple itself could be entered only by priests wearing their ritual vestments. So far as gentiles were concerned, inscriptions in Aramaic, Greek and Latin were posted in the first courtyard, warning them - on pain of death - to proceed no further.<sup>2</sup> Other than Antiochos IV, even the Seleukid kings had complied with this religious scruple, but Pompeius decided to show the priests and everyone else in Jerusalem that a Roman proconsul went wherever he wished. He and his bodyguard of lictors entered not only all four courtyards but the temple itself, and even the Holy of Holies, which only the High Priest was permitted to see. For this arrogance Pompeius was damned in Judaeans' tradition.

More substantive than Pompeius' entry into the temple was his decision, eventually ratified by the senate, to reduce by about a third the size of the Judaeian state and to abolish the title of "king" for the Hasmonaean ruler. The Greek cities in the northeast were declared independent of Judaeian control and were put into an alliance called the Decapolis. Pompeius likewise detached from Judaea the cities on the Palestinian coast, from Gaza to Dor, and gave them a limited autonomy. He set both the Decapolis and the Palestinian cities loosely under the jurisdiction of the Syrian province. Although he reinstated Hyrcanus II as High Priest and as the political leader of Judaea, Pompeius instructed him henceforth to style himself not as *basileus* but as "ethnarch." The reduced title was in itself a daily reminder to the inhabitants of Judaea that their state was now a client of Rome, and that any provocation might be answered by still more grievous measures. Hyrcanus II, ethnarch of Judaea, held his position only at the pleasure of the senate and the people of Rome.

How some inhabitants of Judaea reacted to Pompeius' ending of their autonomy and his insult to their pride is shown most clearly in the eighteen *Psalms of Solomon*.<sup>3</sup> This pseudepigraphic work was composed soon after Pompeius was beheaded, upon his arrival in Egypt, whither he had fled after his defeat by Julius Caesar at the Battle of Pharsalus (August of 48 BC). An important theme of the *Psalms of Solomon* is the wickedness of Pompeius. The author looks back on the episode of Pompeius' entry into Jerusalem and into the temple, and then celebrates his death, with Pompeius' body tossed about in the waters of the Nile. In *Psalms* 2, for example, he describes the dreadful time when "alien nations ascended Thine altar, They trampled it proudly with their sandals." But the author remonstrated with the Lord, and asked for punishment of those aliens who had dishonored Jerusalem:

And I had not long to wait before God showed me the insolent one  
Slain on the mountains of Egypt,  
Esteemed of less account than the least, on land and sea;  
His body, too, borne hither and thither on the billows with much insolence,  
With none to bury him, because He had rejected him with dishonour.<sup>4</sup>

So intense was Judaeian hatred of Pompeius that 163 years after his death the Judaeians of Alexandria broke into his tomb, seized his bones and threw them into the Mediterranean, finally taking vengeance upon the gentile who had violated the temple's sanctity and had reduced Judaea to a Roman satellite.

When Pompeius stripped Hyrcanus II of his kingship and demoted him to the position of ethnarch, the proconsul also confirmed the role of Antipater the Idumaeian as Hyrcanus' advisor and manager. Whatever defects of mind or temperament Hyrcanus II may have had, from 63 until 40 BC he was able, with the astute Antipater at his side, to dispense both his secular and his religious obligations well enough to maintain his credibility with most of the people in Judaea. Occasional revolts and riots required Roman intervention, but Antipater carefully steered Hyrcanus into policies and actions that satisfied the Romans. Even when Marcus Crassus raided the Jerusalem temple early in 53 BC, taking - says Josephus - two thousand talents of gold in order to finance his great expedition against the Parthians, Hyrcanus and Antipater were able to keep their subjects from erupting against the Romans (when Crassus was slain by the Parthians a few months later, and his army virtually destroyed, a predictable analysis was that Adonai used

the Parthians to punish the temple-robber). The most pressing problem for Hyrcanus II and Antipater was the “Aristoboulos faction,” which was nourished by anti-Roman sentiment in the client state. Aristoboulos and his immediate family were removed to Rome in 62 BC, to march in Pompeius’ triumph, but in 56 BC Aristoboulos and his young son Antigonos escaped from Rome and returned to the Palestinian coast. After attracting much attention in Judaea, Aristoboulos was seized and returned to Rome. When Julius Caesar seized Rome in 49 BC he freed Aristoboulos and sent him to the Levant, along with two legions, in order to cause trouble for both Hyrcanus II and for Pompeius, now Caesar’s opponent in a civil war. The news of Aristoboulos’ imminent arrival created a stir in Judaea, but before he got there he was killed (as was his son Alexander) by Pompeius’ partisans.

In short, from 63 to 40 BC Hyrcanus II continued as ethnarch and High Priest, and this was a remarkable feat. He maintained the position straight through the breakdown of the Roman Republic, the civil war between Pompeius and Julius Caesar,<sup>5</sup> the dictatorship and death of Julius Caesar, and the subsequent civil war between the senatorial leaders (Brutus and Cassius) and the *populares* leaders (Octavian and Marcus Antonius).<sup>6</sup> He was successively the client of Pompeius, of Julius Caesar, of Cassius, and then of Octavian and Marcus Antonius. The decisions, however, were almost always made by Antipater, who solidified his personal base by putting his two oldest sons into positions of power. These were Phasaël and Herodes (the latter was a traditional Greek name, but thanks to transmission of the French *Hérode* into Middle English, has for a thousand years been completely de-hellenized as “Herod” in English-speaking Christianity). Antipater had Hyrcanus appoint - with Roman approval, of course - Phasaël as governor of Jerusalem and Herodes as governor of Galilee. When Antipater was murdered in 42 BC, the two sons took over as managers of Hyrcanus II.

### **The Parthian intervention and the rise of Herodes the Great**

At the death of Antipater the Sadducees and others in Judaea who were unhappy with Hyrcanus II promoted an alternative Hasmonaean candidate: Antigonos, lone surviving son of Aristoboulos and nephew of Hyrcanus. Antigonos, who also went by the Hebrew name Mattathiah when the situation required, was a capable young man and quickly attracted a popular following that threatened Hyrcanus’ position. Phasaël and Herodes drove off Antigonos and his partisans, and in appreciation - or because he was told to do so - Hyrcanus gave his only granddaughter, the prima donna Mariamme, to Herodes in marriage.<sup>7</sup>

Thwarted in his first (or second) attempt at a coup d’etat, Antigonos found powerful backers and then tried again. From across the Euphrates the Parthians had looked on with great interest as the Roman state descended into repeated civil wars in the 40s BC. They saw the Roman crisis and the ferment in Judaea as a fine opportunity for them to expand their empire into Syria and through the southern Levant. The Parthians had had a distant but friendly relationship with Judaea for a century. This was so because when they took Mesopotamia in the 140s BC the Parthians suddenly found themselves with hundreds of thousands of Judaeans subjects (in addition to the much smaller number of Judaeans in Parthia itself). The population of Mesopotamia was divided among Judaeans, Hellenes, and traditional Mesopotamians who still worshipped the old gods. The Hellenes, not surprisingly, were defenders of the Seleukid regime, and the Parthians had little chance of winning their affections. Most Judaeans of

Mesopotamia, on the other hand, had never much liked the Seleukid kings and were happy to see the Parthians take control of Mesopotamia. The Parthians did their best to keep the good will of the Mesopotamian Judaeans, and some of the Parthian kings were benefactors of the synagogues. The Parthians had no particular religious orientation of their own (Zoroastrianism was not yet the “national” religion of Iran), and were pleased to accommodate the aniconic and monolatrist religion of the Judaeans.

In 40 BC the Roman state was ruled by the Triumvirate of Marcus Antonius, Octavian (later to become Caesar Augustus), and Lepidus, but even though they were more or less in control of the Roman state, the Triumvirs still had influential enemies who hoped to see the Triumvirate overthrown and the government of Rome returned to the senate. These “anti-Caesarian” Romans, who had followed Brutus and Cassius and who were not yet resigned to the collapse of republican government, tried wherever possible to foment trouble for the Triumvirs. Marcus Antonius seemed especially vulnerable. Although he was in charge of the Greek-speaking east, and so of the Levant, he was himself captivated by Cleopatra, the Ptolemaic queen of Egypt. Antonius accordingly spent much of his time in Alexandria, far from the provinces that he was supposed to be governing. Capitalizing on his negligence, republican Romans urged the Parthians to cross the Euphrates and destabilize Judaea. The Parthians did so, sending a mounted force through Syria and then following the coast road south to Judaea and Palestine.

When they entered Judaea the Parthians brought with them Antigonus/ Mattathiah, the son of Aristoboulos, and they presented him to the people of Judaea not as their ethnarch but as their *king*. The Sadducees and most other Judaeans greeted the Parthian cavalry and Antigonus with enthusiasm: the people regarded the Parthians as liberators from the suzerainty of the Romans, and welcomed Antigonus both because he would have the royal title and because he was far more competent and charismatic than his uncle, Hyrcanus II. When the Parthians entered Jerusalem Phasaël was killed and Hyrcanus was arrested and mutilated: the Parthians or - so says Josephus - Antigonus himself cut off Hyrcanus’ ears, thus rendering him unfit to hold the office of High Priest, and shipped him off to Babylon.<sup>8</sup> Herodes escaped to Arabia, whence he made his way to Egypt and finally to Rome. In Jerusalem, the Parthians saluted Antigonus as both High Priest and king. After a lapse of 23 years Judaea was once more a kingdom.

Antigonus’ reign was brief. The Triumvirate could of course not allow the Parthians to make Judaea a satellite. They accordingly began making plans to recover what the Parthians had taken, and Herodes quickly became a part of those plans. Upon his arrival in Rome, late in 40 BC, Herodes urged the Triumvirs that with some military and financial support he could drive Antigonus and his backers out of Jerusalem, and make Judaea once more a dependable Roman vassal. Antonius and Octavian presented Herodes to the senate, reminded the senate what he and his father had done for Julius Caesar and for Rome, and asked that Herodes be declared king of Judaea. When he left the senate session, walking between the two Triumvirs, that is what he was.

Since Herodes was not a Hasmonaean and since his family had been Judaeans for only a generation, some Judaeans opposed his kingship. But he was both the advisor and the prospective grandson-in-law of Hyrcanus II, and he had supporters among the Pharisees in Jerusalem. And other than Antigonus, there was no real alternative.<sup>9</sup> With a mercenary army

and help from two of Antonius' generals, Herodes fought to recover Judaea. In 37 BC he entered Jerusalem in triumph and a Roman general crowned him as king of Judaea. Antigonos was shipped off to be executed by the Romans.

### **Herodes the Great (37-4 BC)**

“King Herod” (73-4 BC) is one of the world's great villains, the wicked king who tried to murder the baby Jesus. Reviled in Christianity and condemned in Rabbinic Judaism, the real Herodes has been largely forgotten. A first-hand account by his advisor, Nikolaos of Damascus, has not survived, but is conveyed second-hand by Josephus, writing three generations after Herodes' death. Most of the very long first book of Josephus' *Judaean War* is devoted to the reign of Herodes, and most of the second book recounts the tumultuous months that followed Herodes' death in 4 BC, when Augustus abolished the monarchy in Judaea. In the *Judaean Antiquities*, written by Josephus in the 90s, the reign of Herodes fills most of Books 14-17. As a result, more is known about Herodes than about any other king who ruled in Jerusalem.

In describing Herodes' public life Josephus casts the king in an heroic role. Here we see Herodes the builder, the diplomat, and the intrepid warrior and commander: an excellent strategist and tactician, he led his troops by example, expert with the bow and javelin and as good a rider as any man in Judaea.<sup>10</sup> But when Josephus recites the king's sordid family life, his chapters read like a Greek tragedy, the tragic hero striking out at those around him and finally dying miserably and unloved. Josephus' account suggests that Herodes was both rash and ruthless, murdering or executing many (especially in his own family) whom he supposed were threats to his position. His public actions and policies, on the other hand, benefitted Judaea and other parts of the Greek east, and were widely admired in their day. He was, in many ways, the last of the great Hellenistic kings.<sup>11</sup>

Herodes' most important project, throughout his reign, was to keep on the side of the Romans, and more specifically of the right Romans. From 37 until the late 30s BC that meant staying on good terms especially with Antonius, the Triumvir in the east, and to a lesser extent with Octavian (Lepidus lost his army and his significance in 36 BC). Herodes' loyalty to Antonius was unpopular in Judaea, because Antonius' great ambition was to conquer Parthia, a kingdom that most Judaeans liked. During Antonius' three expeditions against the Parthians (36, 34 and 33 BC) Herodes stayed faithful to his patron, serving as a stabilizing influence in the Levant as Antonius fought his indecisive campaigns in Armenia and Media. By 33 BC, however, relations between Antonius and Octavian had soured badly, and it appeared that another Roman civil war was in the offing. Herodes had little choice but to give his support to Antonius. He was fortunate that in 31 BC, when the civil war began and Antonius and Cleopatra took their massive armies and fleets to Greece, he was told by Antonius to remain in Judaea, serving once again as a rearguard custodian of the southern Levant.

So Herodes was not present at the Battle of Actium (September of 31 BC), where Antonius' and Cleopatra's forces melted away and Octavian was left as victor and as ruler of the Roman world. On learning of the debacle, Herodes was quick to inform Octavian that he had supported Antonius only because of his formal obligations as a client, and that henceforth he would be as loyal to Octavian as he had been to Antonius. After a conference on the island of

Rhodes in 30 BC Octavian confirmed Herodes' position as king of Judaea, and as client of Rome.

For the rest of his reign Herodes was assiduous in demonstrating his devotion to Octavian or "Caesar Augustus," as Octavian chose to be called after a formalization of his imperial powers in 27 BC. Sacrifices in honor of Augustus were performed twice a day at the Jerusalem altar. To honor the emperor's victory at Actium, Herodes established the Actian Games, a recurring athletic event celebrated in Jerusalem with great display. When Herodes rebuilt the old city of Samaria, making it architecturally impressive and giving it something of a Greek character, he named it *Sebaste*, the Greek translation of "Augustus." And when Herodes created for Judaea a first-class harbor at a place called Strato's Tower, he changed the name of the harbor-city to Caesarea Maritima. Like many cities all across the Roman empire, both Samaria/Sebaste and Caesarea Maritima were graced by the presence of temples to Rome and Augustus. Herodes arranged to send his sons Antipater, Aristoboulos and Alexander to Rome for their "education": long stays, during which the emperor had plenty of opportunity to evaluate and indoctrinate the heirs apparent.

Augustus reciprocated Herodes' loyalty by greatly increasing his kingdom, doubling it in size. While confirming him as king of Judaea in 30 BC, Augustus gave Herodes back two of the Decapolis cities in the north along with all of coastal Palestine except the city of Ascalon. Ten years later Herodes was given control of more territory in the north and northeast. Augustus expected Herodes to cooperate closely with the successive provincial governors of Syria, and the vassal king did so. He was allowed to keep a modest military force, the most reliable units being his personal guard, made up of Thracian, Keltic (Galatian) and Germanic professionals. Native Judaeans troops were also raised when circumstances required, but as a Roman client state Judaea had little reason to fear aggression from any of its neighbors.

A friend of Rome, Herodes was also a philhellene, a friend of Greek *paideia*. His close ties to Nikolaos of Damascus are illustrative. Although also fluent in Aramaic, Nikolaos was accomplished in all branches of Greek culture, from poetry and music to philosophy. He was already an eminent writer when Herodes became his royal patron, and the ties between the two men went far beyond financial support. Herodes made Nikolaos one of his advisors, and Nikolaos was regularly in the company of Herodes when the king met with Augustus or traveled with Marcus Agrippa, who for many years was Augustus' right-hand man and heir-apparent. Late in Herodes' reign Nikolaos began - at the king's suggestion - his most ambitious project, a history of the world from the beginnings down to the reign of Augustus.

As a great monarch Herodes was generous to many Greek cities in the Levant and in Anatolia. On Cyprus he controlled the island's copper mines,<sup>12</sup> and showed his appreciation with gifts to several Cypriote cities. With the cities of the Greek mainland Herodes' finest hour came in 12 BC. The Olympic games for Zeus and Hera, celebrated quadrennially ever since 776 BC, had fallen on hard times and needed a wealthy patron. Herodes came to the rescue with a handsome gift, and the grateful Hellenes made him President of the Games for life.

Herodes' most spectacular achievements were on display in Judaea itself. He built a summer palace in the hills ten miles south of Jerusalem (the place was called Herodion), and a

winter palace at Jericho, down near the Jordan rift. At Masada, on the southwest shore of the Dead Sea, he erected a fortress. Samaria/Sebaste was substantially rebuilt. The harbor at Caesarea Maritima was one of the great engineering projects of the late Hellenistic period, an artificial harbor that vied with the fine natural harbors of Phoenicia to the north. Large stone blocks, each weighing several ton, were lowered to the sea floor, and course-by-course the walls rose, to serve as breakwaters.

The principal monument to Herodes' reign was the temple in Jerusalem. Since its dedication in 516 BC the temple had from time to time been repaired, but no major construction had been done for centuries, even by the Hasmonaean kings. Under Herodes' supervision, enlargement and beautification of the temple and its courtyards continued for fourteen years, and when it was finished all Judaea was immensely proud of the achievement. The work was still in progress when Marcus Agrippa paid an extended visit to Herodes in 15 BC, and a tour of the outer courtyard (gentiles were not permitted in the inner court) was the high point of his stay. Elsewhere in Jerusalem Herodes built a splendid palace for himself, and for the populace a theater and an amphitheater. All of this made Jerusalem one of the most impressive cities in the Mediterranean world, second only to Antioch among the cities of the Levant.

Because he did not take the office of High Priest for himself, Herodes did not control the temple directly. His control was nevertheless assured because immediately to the north of the temple he constructed a massive, impregnable, and altogether magnificent fortress.<sup>13</sup> Because this fortress was built in the mid 30s BC he called it the *Antonia*, in honor of Marcus Antonius (its name outlived the triumvir by a hundred years). The Antonia was designed for military security, rather like a castle, although for much of Herodes' reign it also served as his palace. It was in the Antonia that the vestments of the High Priest were kept, to be handed over to the High Priest just before the festival for which they were appropriate.

Herodes' grandiose building projects, especially of the Jerusalem temple, were in part made possible by the temple tax that poured in from the Diaspora. A levy of a half shekel or *didrachmon* - two drachmas - on every adult male in the Judaeian Diaspora between twenty and fifty years of age brought in well over three hundred talents of silver a year. Herodes also collected a royal tax from all his subjects, but this was not very onerous, especially when we recall that his regime gave Judaea 33 years of peace and prosperity. In addition, his own properties supplied him with revenue, and the loans he made to neighboring princes and cities earned good interest.

### **Herodes' private life**

Although his public life was splendid, Herodes' private life was dreadful. Before their extensive contact with the Greco-Roman world the Judaeans - like most other people in the Near East - had traditionally allowed polygamy, and expected their kings to take multiple wives and concubines. Herodes took advantage of the tradition and had at least ten wives and as many concubines. His first wife was Doris, a commoner from Jerusalem, whom he married when he was in his early twenties. Doris bore him a son, whom he named - in honor of his own father - Antipater. But in 42 BC, by which time he was 31 years old and governing Galilee, Herodes was betrothed to Mariamme, the 12- or 13-year-old granddaughter of Hyrcanus II. Five years later

he married her, the ceremony capping his triumphal re-entry into Jerusalem as king. Herodes was infatuated with Mariamme, and in the eight years of their marriage she bore him three sons (the oldest of whom died in Rome while still a child) and two daughters.

Mariamme was well aware of her own importance. She was doubly Hasmonaean: her grandfathers were Hyrcanus II and Aristoboulos, the brothers who had vied for the throne in 67 BC. She therefore provided for Herodes the royal credentials that he so conspicuously lacked, and she expected to be treated not like his other wives, but like a queen. The children she bore him were respected by the royal courtiers as princes and princesses, and were clearly preferred to Antipater, who as Herodes' oldest son was expected to succeed him, but whose mother was a commoner. Josephus reports, on the testimony of Nikolaos, that Mariamme frequently berated Herodes about his mother and sister.

Herodes' connection with the Hasmonaean family was difficult and dangerous from the beginning. Because his own family had been Judaeian for only a generation he decided early on that it would not be fitting for him to serve as High Priest. His first choice for that prestigious position was Hananel, a Sadducee, but that choice infuriated Alexandra, Mariamme's mother, who insisted that the High Priest be a Hasmonaean. To mollify her Herodes cashiered Hananel and gave the position to Alexandra's teen-age son and Mariamme's younger brother, Aristoboulos. Almost immediately, however, he became suspicious and envious of Aristoboulos, especially because when the boy presided as High Priest at the great Passover feast in spring of 36 BC the crowds gave him a rapturous welcome, clearly preferring him to Herodes himself. That summer, Aristoboulos was suddenly whisked off to Herodes' estate at Jericho, where he immediately "fell" into a bathing pool and drowned.

Herodes' relations with the Hasmonaeans were further damaged by his execution of Hyrcanus II, Mariamme's elderly grandfather, in 30 BC. This time Herodes' motive was fear that Octavian, recent victor at Actium, might remove Herodes from the throne and replace him with the old man. After her grandfather's execution, Mariamme considered herself in danger. Reports came to Herodes that she had been unfaithful, and in fact that years earlier she had sent her portrait to Marcus Antonius, to show that she was more beautiful than Cleopatra and would be happy to become the wife of the Roman Triumvir. In 29 BC Herodes ordered Mariamme's execution.

There were no immediate repercussions, because Mariamme's two surviving sons - Alexander and Aristoboulos - were still small boys at the time of their mother's death, and like their older brother had been sent off to Rome for their education. But when in their mid 'teens they returned from Rome to Jerusalem, and court intrigues began to swirl around them, they began alternately to hate and fear their father, who had killed their mother, uncle, and great-grandfather. Some at the court expressed to the adolescents the hope that one day they would rule, and so return the throne to the Hasmonaean family, where it belonged. The various other sons of Herodes began, in turn, to look upon the two Hasmonaeans as a threat to themselves and to their various mothers, most of whom Herodes had married for their beauty. Antipater especially, who had early been supposed to be Herodes' successor, saw the two Hasmonaeans as rivals. Weary of the mess he had sired, Herodes packed his three oldest sons off to Rome with him in 10 BC, and asked Augustus and his senatorial advisors to hear the family's problems and

reconcile the sons to each other. Because the boys said all the right things before such an august and powerful panel of therapists, the emperor and attending senators believed that they had resolved the family's woes and therefore allowed Herodes to make whatever decision he chose about the succession problem. Upon his return the king announced to a great assembly in Jerusalem that when he died he would be succeeded by all three sons: Antipater, son of Doris, would be the first among equals, but Alexander and Aristoboulos, sons of Mariamme, would share the kingdom as his loyal and helpful partners.

The paranoia soon returned, however, and after a search of private documents and the posting of nocturnal spies, to check on who in the court was doing what, Herodes' believed the charges made by Antipater that the Hasmonaean princes were once again plotting to kill Herodes and several of his wives, and - of course - Antipater himself. Because the Roman emperor had already recognized Alexander and Aristoboulos as heirs apparent, the two could not be executed without Roman approval. Judaeans public opinion was strongly on the side of the young princes, and even Herodes' troops seemed to favor the princes' acquittal. Herodes took the princes to Berytus (Beirut), to be heard by the governor of Syria and other Romans of consular rank, and the panel recommended the death penalty. On Herodes' orders Alexander and Aristoboulos were then taken to Sebaste and strangled. Their bodies were removed at night and buried in the ancestral Hasmonaean tombs (6 BC).<sup>14</sup>

The majority in Judaea was incensed at the execution of the Hasmonaean princes, and before long other reports came to Herodes that the charges against the two had been fabricated, as part of Antipater's elaborate scheme to be the lone successor to his father. Eventually Herodes found these reports credible too. Once again a Roman tribunal was assembled, under the presidency of P. Quinctilius Varus, governor of Syria, and the charges against Antipater were weighed. Herodes was permitted to do as he thought best, and he ordered that Antipater be imprisoned and that Archelaos be elevated to the rank of crown-prince (Archelaos was Herodes's son by Malthake, his Samaritan wife).

By this time (early in the year 4 BC) Herodes' own health had severely deteriorated. Perhaps his illness was the result of kidney failure, exacerbated by his fall from a horse in a hunting accident. Taken to his winter palace at Jericho, he was in constant distress and had to be closely monitored because he looked for opportunities to kill himself. When a rumor spread that the old man had done just that, Antipater in his prison cell let out a joyful noise. Herodes, however, was not yet dead, and when word reached him of Antipater's hoorah the king ordered the guards to kill Antipater.

That was the great king's last order. Five days after the execution of his oldest son Herodes himself died. His sister Salome informed first the royal guards and then the native troops. Archelaos supervised the funeral, according to the instructions that Herodes had left. Herodes' body, decked in royal robes, was placed on a bier of solid gold. It was carried in solemn procession for twenty five miles from Jericho to Herodion, where it was buried in the tomb that Herodes had prepared.<sup>15</sup>

## **Herodes' relationship with his subjects**

How Herodes got on with his subjects and with the several religious sects in Judaea is not entirely clear. He began his reign with bloodshed, executing over half of the seventy-one members of the Sanhedrin. The victims, most of whom were Sadducees, had backed Antigonus against him, and their execution was an act of vengeance. But while he was ruthless against individual Sadducees who had opposed him he seems to have had no quarrel with the Sadducean sect as a whole: eventually - and perhaps inadvertently - his handling of the High Priesthood won the sect's support. He did not, as we have seen, think it proper to take the High Priesthood for himself because he was from a family that had recently proselytized to Judaism, and so he offered the position to the Sadducee Hananel. He was pressured into revoking that appointment in favor of the teen-age Hasmonaean, Aristoboulos, but after Aristoboulos' "accidental" drowning Herodes gave the office back to Hananel. He limited Hananel's term, however, and thereafter made it a policy to appoint High Priests for relatively short terms, rewarding each successive appointee with handsome gifts upon retirement. The appointees came almost entirely from two Sadducee families, and by the end of Herodes' reign the Sadducees were quite satisfied with him.

Although eventually they turned against him, the Pharisees began as supporters of Herodes. In the civil war of 39-37 BC they had preferred him, not because of his great merit but because the Sadducees had thrown in their lot with Antigonus. Two of Herodes' early Pharisaic backers, Shammai and Hillel, became famous teachers (*tannaim*) during his long reign, establishing schools in which they instructed young Pharisees on the oral and written *torah*. For thirty years the two Tannaitic schools flourished and the Pharisaic sect had no serious complaints against Herodes. In 17 BC Herodes excused the Pharisees as well as the Essenes from taking an oath of loyalty to him, honoring the sects' ban on using the name of Adonai in an oath.

Toward the end of his reign, unfortunately, Herodes incurred the hostility of the Pharisees, and so damned himself for posterity in Rabbinic tradition. In 7 or 6 BC, nervous again about the loyalties of his subjects, Herodes and his advisors were inspired to require all the men of Judaea to swear an oath of loyalty both to Herodes and to the Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus. Claiming that an oath would violate their religious purity, the Pharisees refused and Herodes punished them - 6000 of them, according to Josephus - with a fine. The fine was paid by Herodes' own sister-in-law, but Herodes went on to discover that certain Pharisaic leaders were plotting against him and he ordered that they be executed, along with his sister-in-law. This ruthless response provoked more antagonism and more violence. During the winter of 5-4 BC, and just a few weeks before Herodes' death, two radical Pharisees, Judas and Matthias, incited to martyrdom about forty young men who came to hear their discourses on the *torah*. The two teachers declared that Herodes' worsening illness was punishment from Adonai for Herodes' transgressions of the *torah*. Years earlier Herodes had installed, over the main entrance to the grand temple courtyard that he had constructed, a bronze image of an eagle. The eagle was the symbol of Rome, and the image was meant to express Herodes' and Judaea's loyalty to Augustus and Rome. But, the two teachers now insisted, the bronze eagle violated Adonai's injunction against the worship of a "graven image." To cut it down would be an almost suicidal venture, but the reward for those who did it would be an eternity in Paradise. At high noon, when the temple precinct was most crowded, the young men let themselves down with ropes from the top of the courtyard wall, and with hatchets cut down the eagle. They were promptly arrested by Herodes' troops, and together with their two teachers were summarily executed.<sup>16</sup>

This dramatic episode, followed a few weeks later by the deaths of Antipater and then of Herodes himself, convinced not only the sect of the Pharisees but most people in Judaea that for his great sins the king was punished by Adonai.

The people of Judaea had profited from the peace and prosperity of Herodes' reign, but they had also paid the taxes he required. The refurbishing of the temple and its courts was popular, but Herodes' other construction projects were less appreciated. All along, his subjects were angered by his elimination of the Hasmonaeans, the anger culminating with the execution of Mariamme's sons in 6 BC. By the end of his reign - after he had broken with the Pharisees and executed the *torah* radicals in the "eagle incident" - hatred of Herodes was widespread in Judaea.

Judaeans in the Diaspora, both in Aramaic Mesopotamia and in the Greek-speaking provinces of the Roman empire, seem to have had considerable admiration for Herodes, although perhaps not affection. In 15 BC, when he accompanied Marcus Agrippa to the Black Sea and then returned with him through the province formally known as *Asia* (west central Anatolia), Agrippa used the opportunity to address the animosity between Hellenes and Judaeans at Ephesos and several other cities. Agrippa asked Herodes to address both groups and the king succeeded in smoothing over their differences. He also brought about a reconciliation of Judaeans and Hellenes at Cyrene, in North Africa.

Certainly some - and possibly many - in Judaea would have regarded Herodes as a mere place-holder: a thoroughly human king who would soon be followed - just as Daniel had prophesied - by a Messiah, who with the power given him by Adonai would in righteousness rule the entire world forever. But it is likely that the apocalyptic expectations that had flourished during the ethnarchy of Hyrcanus II, and that would reappear almost immediately after Herodes' death, were to some extent muted in the 34 years of Herodes' reign. Judaea had a king for those years, and in fact a king of remarkable stature and achievement. His egotism, his paranoia, and his many crimes were denounced, but at least to some extent his virtues compensated for his vices. To be ruled by a man who was honored by Greeks and Romans, who was known throughout the Roman and Parthian empires, and who was a trusted friend of Caesar Augustus himself, was something in which even Herodes' most devout subjects could take pride.

### **The succession in 4 BC, and Varus' War<sup>17</sup>**

After the seven days of mourning for Herodes were over, various groups of subjects approached the palace to air their grievances. Largest was an evening crowd that hated both the Herodian royal family and its Roman patrons, and that loudly mourned those Pharisees whom Herodes had executed a few months earlier, in the aftermath of the "eagle" incident. The crowd that gathered at the palace demanded not only the punishment of the royal advisors responsible for the deaths of the martyrs, but also that the High Priest be replaced by someone whose devotion to the *torah* was as keen as their own. As the de facto ruler, although not yet formally the king, Archelaos temporized until March, when violence broke out at the Passover festival. While hundreds of thousands of pilgrims streamed into the city for the festival, the "mourners" for the martyrs set themselves up at the temple courtyard and recruited many of the pilgrims to their cause. When Archelaos dispatched a company of guards to break up the "mourners" they

and their anti-Herodian and anti-Roman sympathizers, now numbered in thousands, set upon the guards, killing many and wounding the commander. Fearing that the riot could swell into a rebellion, Archelaos sent in his infantry and cavalry, resulting in a massacre of Passover celebrants. Josephus reports that 3000 people were killed in the riot.<sup>18</sup>

Soon after the Passover massacre Archelaos departed for Rome. Although during his terminal illness Herodes had named him as his successor, Archelaos understood that he dared not assume the crown and the title of king without the approval of Caesar Augustus. He went to Rome to be crowned, but others from Judaea traveled to Rome in order to prevent that from happening. Fifty delegates from Judaea were present at the hearings before Augustus and assorted senators, and outside the chambers there gathered a throng of eight thousand Judaeans who lived in the city of Rome and who were keenly interested in what the emperor would decide about the kingdom.<sup>19</sup> At the hearing some of Archelaos' detractors told Augustus that by the time Herodes made Archelaos his heir-apparent the old king was no longer *compos mentis*, and that Herodes' other sons were far better equipped for the position than was Archelaos. Other partisans reported that although Archelaos ostensibly mourned for Herodes during the prescribed seven days, during the nights he caroused with his courtiers. And of course Archelaos' rivals and opponents stressed the enormity of the Passover massacre as evidence that he had neither the skill nor the public support to function as king of Judaea. Some Judaeans even requested that the Herodian monarchy be abolished entirely, and that Judaea be added to the Roman province of Syria.

The debate and deliberations dragged on through spring and early summer of 4 BC, and during Archelaos' long absence in Rome the situation in Judaea descended into chaos and then into the conflict known as "Varus' War." In April a band of anti-Herodian insurrectionists gathered around a tall, good-looking slave named Simon and proclaimed him king.<sup>20</sup> Simon's followers burned the royal palace at Jericho and threatened the other royal properties. The person more or less in charge of Roman interests in Judaea was P. Quinctilius Varus, governor of Syria and married to Augustus' grandniece. On learning of the insurrection, Varus marched south to Judaea with three legions and promptly quelled it. He returned to Syria with two legions, but left the third in Jerusalem, under the command of a procurator named Sabinus, whose assignment was to safeguard the royal and temple properties in Judaea until Archelaos' return from Rome. At the Feast of Pentecost, seven weeks after Passover, the presence of a Roman legion in the Antonia fortress, just to the north of the temple, incited a second riot. Again Jerusalem was thronged with festival pilgrims, and the sight of gentile troops guarding the temple infuriated the crowds. Insurgents set up three camps to besiege Sabinus' legion in the Antonia and cut off its supplies. Sabinus himself had holed up in Herodes' new palace, at the western edge of the Upper City, and from there he sent messengers to Syria, urging Varus to return with the other two legions and rescue him.

The royal troops, nominally the bulwark of the Herodian monarchy, initially opposed the insurgents, but as the latter grew in number and boldness many of the royal units either joined the rebels or disintegrated. In the anarchy various unusual men came forward to claim the throne. The tall slave Simon has already been mentioned. Another aspirant to the throne was a muscular shepherd named Athronges or Athrongaios, who appointed "generals" over an armed following large enough to control a good part of Judaea. At Sepphoris, the largest city in

Galilee, Judas son of Ezechias (Hezekiah) and his followers took control and proclaimed an end to Herodian rule.

None of the rebel forces, however, was a match for Varus' two legions and the auxiliaries with which they were augmented. Sepphoris was taken and burned, and the rest of Galilee was quickly pacified. When Varus entered Jerusalem the inhabitants of the city declared that they themselves had not participated in the revolt, which was the doing of pilgrims - from Galilee, Idumaea, Peraea and elsewhere - who had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost. With Jerusalem secure, Varus went south to Idumaea, where a rebel force of ten thousand surrendered rather than risk a battle with a Roman army. Most of the insurgents, whether in Idumaea or Judaea, were simply disarmed and reprovved, but on two thousand who were deemed "most responsible"<sup>21</sup> for the uprising Varus pronounced the cruelest sentence available to a Roman governor: they were crucified and so served - for the day or two on which they hung on their crosses and died their tortured deaths - as an object lesson to the entire populace. Thus was Judaea pacified. But the year 4 BC may have been the bloodiest year that Jerusalem had seen in a thousand years.

Augustus' solution to the succession problem was an anticlimax to Varus' War. While the war was in progress Augustus announced his decision. From Jerusalem, Archelaos was to rule over Judaea proper, Samaria, and Idumaea. His half-brother Antipas would rule Galilee and Peraea (Sepphoris, rebuilt, would be Antipas' capital). Another half-brother, Philip, was placed in control of Gaulanitis - the Golan Heights - across the Jordan, ruling from Bethsaida, also known as Julias. None of these three sons of Herodes, however, was to style himself as "king." Archelaos was to use the title of "ethnarch," and Herodes Antipas and Philip were each to be a tetrarch, or "ruler of a quarter." Each of the three princelings was regularly to consult with Varus and whoever succeeded Varus as the Roman governor in Syria.

Judaea had been a large and proud kingdom from 104 to 63 BC, and again from 40 to 4 BC, and now that kingdom was abolished by the Romans. After Augustus' issued his order Judaea was greatly reduced in size and was now merely a small principality, ruled by an ethnarch who held his position at the pleasure of the Roman emperor. For Judaea the fall from Herodes' peaceful and splendid reign to the bloodshed of Varus' War and to the humiliating arrangements made by Augustus in summer of 4 BC was shattering. And the consequences of this *katastrophe* were enormous.

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1. On these see Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 2.102-04.

2. For the Greek inscription see *CIJ* 1400 = *OGIS* 598.

3. The *Psalms of Solomon* should not be confused with the *Odes of Solomon*, which were composed by a Christian Judaeon in the late first or the second century. The *Psalms* had been long known from Greek mss, but in 1909 Rendel Harris published a Syriac ms of the text. For both corpora see Harris' *The Psalms and Odes of Solomon* (1909).

4. Translation by G. Buchanan Gray, in R. H. Charles, ed., *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*

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*of the Old Testament in English* (1913).

5. How adroit Antipater was in steering Hyrcanus and Judaea in the right direction is illustrated by his help to Julius Caesar, only a few months after Caesar had defeated Pompeius, who had been Hyrcanus' and Antipater's patron since 64 BC. Caesar spent the winter of 48-47 BC in Alexandria. At the time of Caesar's arrival in Egypt, the Ptolemaic royal house was split between the incumbent ruler, Ptolemy XIII, and his sister and challenger, Cleopatra VII. Caesar's choice was Cleopatra, who had quickly become his lover, and that decision set off hostilities by Ptolemy's army and most of his civilian subjects. Caesar and Cleopatra found themselves virtually cut off in the palace sector of Alexandria, but were rescued by a relief force from the Levant. In the van of that force were Antipater and 3000 Judaeans troops. Antipater had also thought to bring Hyrcanus with him into Egypt, a brilliant tactic. On learning that the High Priest of Adonai was on the side of Caesar and Cleopatra, the Judaeans of Alexandria and other Egyptian cities, together with the Judaeans units of the Ptolemaic army, abandoned Ptolemy and the resistance fizzled. Caesar never forgot the debt that he owed to Antipater, Hyrcanus and the Judaeans.

6. A detailed account of Hyrcanus' and Antipater's shifting course during these tumultuous years is provided by Smallwood 1981, pp. 30-43.

7. Josephus, *Judaeans War* 1.241. Mariamme was born in the mid 50s BC and had hardly reached puberty in 42 BC, and the marriage did not occur until 37 BC. She was doubly royal, being the granddaughter of both Hyrcanus and Aristoboulos. Mariamme was the child of a cousin-marriage between Alexandra, Hyrcanus' daughter, and Alexander, Aristoboulos' son.

8. In the mid 30s BC the Parthians sent Hyrcanus back to Jerusalem, as a gesture toward King Herodes, whose father-in-law Hyrcanus was. But in 30 BC, on the eve of his conference with Octavian, Herodes had the old man murdered, lest it occur to Octavian to oust Herodes and reinstate Hyrcanus as ruler of Judaea.

9. Cleopatra did offer an alternative, but one that neither Rome nor Judaea cared for. She hoped that Judaea, Palestine and Phoenicia would be given to her, restoring what the Ptolemies had lost 160 years earlier. Antonius, under pressure from the other two Triumvirs and from public opinion in Italy, chose to have Judaea remain a Roman client-state.

10. *Judaeans War* 1.429-30.

11. For a balanced and readable account of Herodes' life and reign see Michael Grant, *Herod the Great* (1971).

12. *Judaeans Antiquities* 16.127-29. Augustus asked Herodes to manage Cyprus' copper mines, in return for which Herodes was given half of the mines' revenues.

13. On which see Smallwood 1981, pp. 73-4.

14. *Judaeans Antiquities* 16.356-95.

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15. *Judaean Antiquities* 17.182-199

16. *Judaean War* 1.648-55.

17. On this momentous year see the very detailed account in *Judaean War* 2.1-100.

18. *Judaean War* 2.4-13. Compare *Judaean Antiquities* 17. 213-219

19. *Judaean War* 2.80.

20. *Judaean War* 2. 57; Tacitus *Histories* 5.9.

21. *Judaean War* 2.75.