The Architecture of Herod, the Great Builder

Ehud Netzer

With the Assistance of Rachel Laureys-Chachy
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Preface to the Paperback Edition

This book was first published by Mohr Siebeck in 2006, close to two years after its actual completion. By the end of 2005, the excavations at Herodium had been resumed after a standstill of five years. The resumed excavations concentrated solely on the search for Herod’s Tomb and were undertaken in the only section of the “Tomb Estate” (in Lower Herodium, see below) that was yet unexplored. Since no signs of a burial cave or room came to light, however, the focus of our work shifted in the middle of 2006 to the northeastern slope of the mount. Finally, in the first half of 2007, it became clear to us that we had located the remains of the mausoleum in which Herod’s body had been laid to rest (for a reference to his magnificent funeral as described by Josephus, see p. 198). The work at this section of the hill is ongoing.

In addition to exposing the remains of the mausoleum Herod had erected for himself, the excavations on the northeastern slope featured new data that shed a different light on the development of the site. These include:

1) the presence of a wall in the form of a glacis that circled at least part of the hill and that was in use prior to the construction of the artificial mount;
2) the existence of different manners of ascends (in the various stages of the site) to the Mountain Palace-Fortress;
3) a group of previously unknown Herodian buildings on the hill’s slope, below the glacis wall.

In light of these new data, it became clear that the construction of the artificial, conical mount, as well as that of the monumental stairway (also described by Josephus, p. 187), was the last Herodian building activity on the hill, probably implemented by Herod prior to his death. It seems that the glacis wall and the aforementioned structures (not including the mausoleum) were simultaneously destroyed during the creation of the artificial hill.

The location of the mausoleum appears to have been specifically chosen by Herod. This is attested to by the presence of one of the initial water cisterns directly below the monument. In order to avoid the cistern’s collapse under the pressure of the heavy mausoleum, two wide walls had been built into it. The decision to build the mausoleum here was apparently due to:

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a) the desired visual connection of this spot with the surroundings of Jerusalem;
b) the proximity to a foot path or a stairway that led up to the hill, prior to the construction of the monumental stairway;
c) the location below the area that was initially bounded by the glacis wall, probably to avoid any contamination of the palatial fortress (as a result of religious purity laws).

The mausoleum itself (built of hard white limestone, of a type known as “Meleche”) was revealed in a state of near-total destruction, no doubt a deliberate one. Only part of its podium was preserved (see fig. I). The huge fill covering it included many building stones as well as hundreds of pieces of a red sarcophagus – probably Herod’s – that had suffered the same fate as the building. Moreover, two additional sarcophagi, of a white limestone, were found. Most of their large fragments were unearthed in a single group at the bottom of the eastern corner of the monument. They probably belonged to family members of Herod or of Archelaus, his son.

A study and analysis of the architectural elements revealed in the monument’s debris enabled the reconstruction of a building composed of four superimposed layers.
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parts (see fig. II). They comprise, from bottom to top: a podium; a first story, square in plan; a second story, circular in plan (a *tholos* of sorts); and a roof. The first three parts mentioned contained an inner room – a square one probably covered by a vault in the first two and a circular one topped by a dome in the third. The location of doorways still remains an open question.

Only part of the podium, 10 × 10 m in size, decorated with profiles typical for this element, has survived. (Only the western corner stands to its full height. See fig. III.) The first, square floor probably featured pilasters on its outer walls, at least at its corners. They bore a Doric frieze (with rosettes between its triglyphs), which was topped by a decorated cornice. The circular structure, standing on top of a round podium, was surrounded by a portico. Its monolithic columns – eighteen in number – had Attic bases and Ionic capitals. They bore a two-fascia architrave, a blocked-out soffit frieze (whose long elements formed the ceiling of the portico) and a highly decorated cornice. The rear, circular wall of the portico featured pilasters opposite the columns, which also bore a two-fascia architrave.

The monument was crowned by a concave conical roof, comparable to the one of the well-known funerary monument of Absalom (first century C.E.) located in the Kidron Valley, east of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The conical roof was topped by a decorated urn placed on top of a large, Corinthian capital. Another four urns were located probably at the bottom of this roof or, alternatively, on top of the first, square floor’s corners, flanking the circular structure. Even though the design of the mausoleum did not feature any particular architectural innovation, its scale and elegant appearance, no doubt, left a great impression on everyone who saw it.

![Figure II: Architectural elements of Herod’s mausoleum during excavation.](Photo by Rachel Laureys-Chachy.)

![Figure III: View of the western, highest preserved corner of the podium of Herod’s mausoleum.](Photo by Rachel Laureys-Chachy.)

Figure IV: Preliminary reconstruction of Herod’s mausoleum (reconstructed by Rachel Laureys-Chachy)
Around the monument, a series of garden terraces were laid out. They formed part of the monument’s landscaping, to which a pool, revealed to the northwest of the monument, might also have belonged.

The destruction of the mausoleum is dated to the occupation of Herodium by the rebels during the First Jewish Revolt against the Romans (66–73/74 C.E.).

With regard to the other structures that existed on the northeastern slope of the hill, it seems that simultaneously with the construction of the Mountain Palace-Fortress on top of the hill were built the glacis wall, the first ascent to the top (perhaps a winding footpath) and a series of water cisterns.

The large buildings (still under excavation), located below the glacis and the entrances to the lower cisterns, might have functioned as an entrance or service building of sorts. One of them, which features highly decorated frescoes and stucco, might have served the man in charge of the whole site (comparable to Building no. 8 in Masada, see pp. 35–39). In any event, these buildings were apparently constructed in stages, similar to the tentative various ascending ways to the top. Most, if not all, of these structures (with the exception of the monument) were intentionally destroyed apparently at the time the monumental stairway and the artificial mount were erected.

The exposure of Herod’s mausoleum on the northeastern slope of the mount, and the various phases of building activity on this slope, call for a new, wider view on the structures previously termed the “Tomb Estate.” We still believe that the focus of the tentative burial location was twice targeted at Lower Herodium, in the area between the Pool Complex and the Large Palace. The first, modest facility (an entrance building, perhaps a wide portico, with an attached ritual bath, see p. 198) was built apparently at the establishment of the site around 24 B.C.E. Several years later (ca. 16–18 B.C.E.), this facility was dismantled and a large compound – the “Tomb Estate” – was erected together with the tentative enlargement of the Pool Complex. It comprised a long funeral course (350 × 30 m) with a large triclinium (the “Monumental Building”) at its western edge, a large ritual bath and a highly decorated three-room structure that probably was to serve as the entrance to the future tomb (see pp. 195–99). It is now assumed that several years before his death (ca. 10–8 B.C.E.), the old king again changed his mind and ordered the construction of the large mausoleum halfway up the hill’s slope, to be visible from Jerusalem. It seems that the crucial decision to create the artificial hill and the monumental stairway came only closer to his death (ca. 6–5 B.C.E.). The latter might have been planned in order to be used, together with the funeral course and the adjacent installations (the “Tomb Estate”), during the royal funeral. The dates presented here are tentative; in the same manner, the artificial mount might have been created slightly later, in the days of Archelaus, Herod’s successor in Judea.

The exposure of Herod’s Mausoleum gave Herodium – a unique site from any point of view – further depth. It adds proof to Josephus’ description of the events that took place in 40 B.C.E. (which drastically changed the course of Herod’s life).
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and to Herod’s ensuing decision to be buried at Herodium, despite the site’s distance from the capital and its desert conditions. His monument was indeed erected not in the capital’s periphery but in a majestic site that was specially built to house the king’s burial place and was named after him.

With the exception of the extensive new finds at Herodium, no other remains of constructions by Herod the Great have been revealed during the few years since the original publication of this book, and no additional final reports have seen light. Worthy of mention, though, is a recent PhD dissertation by Orit Peleg-Barkat on the Temple Mount’s stoa basileia, hopefully to be published soon – a study that illuminates the architectural decorative elements from the Hellenistic Period until the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. that have been discovered in Eretz-Israel.

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Part I

Herod’s Building Projects
Chapter 1

Herod, the Man and King

Herod was born about 73 B.C.E., during the reign of the Hasmonaean queen Alexandra (Salome), almost a century after the commencement of the Jewish struggle for religious and national freedom from the Hellenistic rulers who had held sway in Judaea since its conquest by Alexander the Great. Leading the struggle were the Maccabaeans, a priestly family who ultimately founded the royal, Hasmonaean dynasty.

Against the background of the waxing power of Rome, the Maccabaeans rose against the Seleucid kingdom, one of the three Hellenistic kingdoms emerging after Alexander’s death. They soon established political ties with the Romans, which found expression in several treaties of friendship. At that time, the Romans were gradually approaching the borders of the Hasmonaean kingdom, and in 69 B.C.E. Syria, the center of the Seleucid kingdom, came under Roman domination. Their invasion of Palestine was now, in fact, inevitable, but it was hastened by the bitter rivalry and violent conflict between the two heirs to the Hasmonaean kingdom, the brothers John Hyrcanus II and Judas Aristobulus II. They were the sons of Alexander Jannaeus and his wife Alexandra who ascended to the throne after her husband’s death in 76 B.C.E. and reigned till 67 B.C.E. Upon her accession, she appointed her elder son, Hyrcanus, as high priest. This act only intensified the rivalry between the two brothers, which most probably dated from their father’s lifetime. Aristobulus refused to abide by his mother’s decision while she was still alive, and made numerous attempts to depose his brother. On the queen’s death, Aristobulus forced his brother to cede his office and established himself, like his father before him, as both king and high priest. The following years, characterized by internal strife and the deployment of the Roman army along the borders of the kingdom, witnessed the first activities of Antipater, Herod’s father, the scion of a wealthy and prominent Idumaean family. Idumaea (Edom), then the southern part of Judaea, had been annexed to the Hasmonaean kingdom in 125 B.C.E., after its occupation by the Hasmonaean ruler John Hyr-
canus I. The annexation was accompanied by the conversion to Judaism of most of the Idumaeans, who were gradually assimilated into the Jewish population and became loyal citizens of the Judaean state. This process found expression in the appointment of Antipas (Herod’s grandfather) by Alexander Jannaeus as governor of the district (toparchy) of Idumaea. During the reign of queen Alexandra, Antipas was apparently succeeded in his function by his son Antipater, a close friend of Hyrcanus II, and gradually becoming the latter’s counselor. Some two years after Hyrcanus’ deposal from the high priesthood and kingship, Antipater tried to restore his Hasmonaean friend to the throne with the military aid of the Nabataeans, with whom his family maintained close ties. The attempt failed, but Antipater demonstrated his political talents when he successfully persuaded the Nabataeans to capitulate to the Romans without fighting, and in addition convinced the Roman commanders Scaurus and Pompey to enter into a military pact with Hyrcanus rather than with his brother Aristobulus. When the brothers’ dispute was submitted for arbitration to Pompey, the Roman general who had just reached Damascus. He soon realized that it would be to his advantage to side with Hyrcanus, who had the support of Antipater the Idumaean and was moreover willing to accept Roman authority unconditionally. He therefore backed Hyrcanus and demanded Aristobulus’ unconditional surrender. When these demands were rejected, Pompey resorted to military force and invaded Judaea. Implementing the policy of divide et impera, he seized Judaea in 63 B.C.E., and Aristobulus was exiled to Rome. The latter did not resign himself to the occupation of his kingdom and, after escaping from Rome, he made repeated attempts to resist the military might of the Romans; his sons, too, did likewise. However, Antipater and Hyrcanus employed diverse means (including bribery) to curry favor with the various Roman commanders and governors serving in the region.

Against the background of these troubled years, Antipater paved the way for his sons, and in particular for Herod. Herod’s birthplace is unknown. It could have been in Jerusalem, or more likely in one of the cities of Idumaea – Hebron, Adora (Adoraim) or Marisa (Mareshah). Little is also known about his mother Cyprus, other than the information provided by Josephus that she came from a distinguished Arabian (apparently Nabataean) family. Neither is the time of Herod’s birth known with certainty, since Josephus’ data pertaining to Herod’s

12 As Antipater apparently succeeded his father in the position of governor at Marisa, the latter town could be regarded as Herod’s ‘home town.’
Chapter 1: Herod, the Man and King

The only known fact about Herod’s youth is that, at the time of the conflict of Hyrcanus and Antipater with Aristobulus, during which the Roman world was shaken by numerous power struggles, Cyprus and her five children (Phasael the eldest, Herod, Joseph, Pheroras, and a daughter, Salome) were evacuated to the court of the Nabataean king Malichus I for their safety (about 53 B.C.E.). Antipater’s position was considerably enhanced in 48 B.C.E., when he was able to render invaluable assistance to Julius Caesar. Caesar, having defeated his rival Pompey in battle, became embroiled in the “Alexandrian War” and found himself in a dangerous situation. Antipater, displaying considerable courage, led a unit of ca. 3,000 soldiers to Caesar’s aid in a battle that took place near the city of Memphis, in Egypt. The victorious Caesar confirmed Hyrcanus’ appointment to the high priesthood and gave him governing powers (as ethnarch), whereas Antipater was awarded the administrative post of procurator of Judaea. Furthermore, he permitted the repair of the walls of Jerusalem, which had been destroyed by Pompey.

Antipater, exercising his new authority, and possibly also seeking to reinforce his personal position, now appointed his eldest son, Phasael, governor of Jerusalem and the surrounding region, and his second one, Herod, governor of the Galilee. Josephus claims that Herod was then only 15 years old; however, not only does this figure not accord with Josephus’ own information about Herod’s age at his death, but it is also inconceivable that a mere youth could have assumed such great responsibility and survived the events that soon followed. It is more reasonable to assume that Herod was about 25 years old when he took up his post in the Galilee.

Herod’s first act was to liquidate a gang of Jewish “bandits,” led by one Hezekiah, which was harassing villages in southern Syria. While this action met with approval in Syria, it aroused the anger of those of his victims’ relatives who were living in Jerusalem. Summoned to Jerusalem for trial by the Sanhedrin, he made a defiant appearance, dressed in all his finery and escorted by his bodyguards. The members of the Sanhedrin were at first intimidated by his stance, but then summoned their courage and were about to condemn him to death.

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14 According to Kokkinos (1998, 109), Herod was born in 72 B.C.E.
19 The epithet “bandits” derives from the Hellenistic-Roman terminology for enemies of Rome and does not necessarily convey any information as to the real nature of Hezekiah’s band.
Acting on Hyrcanus’ advice, Herod fled to Syria, where the Roman governor, Sextus Caesar, appointed him military governor (*strategos*) of Coele-Syria (as the southern part of this province was called) and Samaria. Some time later Herod set out for Jerusalem at the head of a small army, intending to punish the Sanhedrin, but his father Antipater dissuaded him from such an action. The young man had weathered his first political storms.

During his lifetime, Herod married several wives, ten in all: Doris, Mariamme the Hasmonaean, Mariamme daughter of Simon Boethus (a high priest), Malthace the Samaritan, Cleopatra, Pallas, Phaedra, Elpis (daughter of his sister Salome) and two others who were relatives of his but whose names are unknown. Herod’s first wife, Doris, came from a noble Jerusalemite family; however, the date of their marriage is unknown. She bore his first son, Antipater. Some years later (in 42 B.C.E.), as his position grew stronger, he took the farsighted step of betrothing himself to Mariamme, granddaughter of the rival Hasmonaean brothers – Hyrcanus II, through his daughter Alexandra, and Aristobulus II through his son Alexander. The marriage was consummated only several years later (in 37 B.C.E.), but the betrothal at that time bolstered Herod’s ties with Hyrcanus, who had just lost his main support – Herod’s father Antipater. Since the power of Antipater and his sons had been growing steadily, providing good cause for concern in various sectors of the Judaean populace, numerous attempts had been made to check the Idumaeans’ progress. The first leader of the opposing factions was a person named Malichus, who, at a dinner with Hyrcanus, finally succeeded in assassinating Antipater by poisoning him. Although Herod’s men subsequently killed Malichus, the opposition was not quashed but flared up anew, headed now by Helix and Malichus’ brother. The latter even managed to seize a number of fortresses, including Masada. Herod was sick at the time (42 B.C.E.), but he soon recovered and immediately recaptured all the fortresses that had been taken by the rebels.

During the same year Herod’s position was put to a further test with the arrival in the region of Mark Antony, a member of the Second Triumvirate now dominant in Rome. As Syria, Judaea and Egypt had fallen to the lot of Antony, Herod’s fate was largely dependent on him. A Jewish delegation, bearing complaints about Herod and his brother Phasael, now presented itself before the Roman ruler. Another delegation, consisting of Hyrcanus and his men, expressed their 21 Josephus, *AJ* 14.177–178; *BJ* 1, 213.
23 “… [Herod’s wives] had been chosen for their beauty and not for their family…[they] were numerous, since polygamy was permitted by Jewish custom and the king gladly availed himself of the privilege” (Josephus, *BJ* 1.477; *AJ* 17.3).
24 As to the marriage dates, see Kokkinos 1998, 208–211.
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support for the two brothers, while Phasael and Herod themselves buttressed
their case with gifts of money to Antony. Antony ruled in favor of the two Idu-
maeans and appointed them tetrarchs. At the same time, he imprisoned some of
the Jewish delegates who had brought charges against them and dismissed the
others out of hand.28

Two years of relative tranquility were followed by a new source of unrest
in the region. The Parthians, whose center was in present-day Iraq, Iran and
Turkmenistan, took advantage of the tensions between the members of the Tri-
umvirate and invaded Syria (40 B.C.E.). The Hasmonaean Mattathias Antigonus,
son of Aristobulus II,29 joined forces with the Parthians and exploited this new
situation. Together they overran Judaea.30 Hyrcanus, Phasael and Herod were
now faced with a crucial dilemma: collaborate with the Parthians, enemies of
the Romans, or seek some other course of action? Phasael and Hyrcanus were
tempted to surrender, whereas Herod refused, as he believed in the power of
Rome. Under cover of night, he left Jerusalem, together with his family and
bodyguards, and fled southward.31 Their destination seems to have been Petra,
the Nabataean capital, via the Judaean Desert and the Negev.

Antigonus and his followers soon learned of Herod’s escape. They set out in
pursuit and caught up with Herod and his party ca. 15 km south of the capital
(close to the place where Herod would later found Herodium, among other
reasons, to commemorate this battle32). In the battle that was fought, Herod was
victorious and thus able to continue his flight southward. His family, accom-
panied by his brother Joseph and bodyguards, headed for Masada; he himself,
apparently with a small group of companions, set out for Petra. The rest of his
followers were advised to seek asylum in Idumaea.33

At this fateful point in Herod’s career, the Nabataeans forbade his entry into
their kingdom. Consequently, he changed his plans and headed for Rome, via
Egypt. The ship on which he sailed finally reached Brindisi (Brundisium) after
many trials and tribulations, and from there he traveled overland to Rome.34
While still on his way to Egypt, Herod had been informed of the bitter fate of
both his brother Phasael and Hyrcanus II. The former was imprisoned and ulti-
mately committed suicide; the latter’s ears were mutilated so that he could no
longer serve as high priest.35

29 Aristobulus had been assassinated in Rome on the order of Pompey, ca. nine years ear-
er.
Soon after his arrival in Rome Herod met again with Mark Antony, who considered him to be the most suitable man to wrest Judaea from the hands of Antigonus and the Parthians. On Antony’s advice, the Senate appointed Herod king of Judaea (40 B.C.E.). According to Josephus, this appointment came as a surprise to Herod himself, although many scholars assume that, since the mutilation of Hyrcanus and the death of his eldest brother Phasael, he had prepared himself for it. \(^3^6\)

Herod now hastened to Judaea, landing on his way at Ptolemais (Acre). Here he assembled an army of mercenaries and continued southward in order to relieve his family at Masada, under siege by Antigonus’ army (39 B.C.E.). On his way Herod conquered the city of Joppa (Jaffa), the inhabitants of which had shown hostility toward him. He was then able to rescue his family from the relatively long siege they had experienced in remote Masada. \(^3^7\)

His next natural mission was the recovery of Jerusalem, but Antigonus did not yield easily to his new opponent. Roman support for Herod was only intermittent, as the Roman commanders in the area not infrequently accepted bribes from Antigonus to withhold such assistance. Herod achieved his goal only after two years of strife (during which his brother Joseph was killed in the fighting around Jericho), following his special appeal to Mark Antony for help. \(^3^8\) As a result, Sossius, the governor of Syria, left for Jerusalem, which was conquered following a siege of two months (37 B.C.E.). \(^3^9\) Antigonus was captured and executed.

During the following six years, the young king was involved in several internal and external struggles. \(\text{Inter alia,}\) he had to win the loyalty of the masses of his Jewish subjects as well as the allegiance of the local nobility. At the same time, he had to compete with certain elements of the Hasmonaean family. Worthy of mention here is not only his marriage to Mariamme in 37 B.C.E. in Samaria, but also the role he played in releasing Hyrcanus II from the hands of the Parthians. \(^4^1\) On the other hand, against the will of the Hasmonaeans, Herod appointed a non-Hasmonaean, Ananel (from Babylonia), as high priest. \(^4^2\) In response to an appeal from some of the Hasmonaeans with whom she maintained friendly relations, Cleopatra VII, queen of Egypt, turned to Antony (her lover), who forced Herod to dismiss Ananel and appoint Aristobulus, the young brother


\(^3^8\) It was also in this period, before the capture of Jerusalem, that Herod left for Samaria in order to marry Mariamme (*Josephus, AJ* 14.467).


\(^4^1\) Josephus, *AJ* 15.11–22.

\(^4^2\) Josephus, *AJ* 15.22.

However, Aristobulus’ great popularity with the masses, as evidenced by his enthusiastic reception in the Temple during Succoth (the feast of Tabernacles), drew the attention of Herod,
who probably decided that there was an urgent need to get rid of him. The opportunity presented itself at Jericho shortly after the feast. Herod was being entertained by Alexandra (the daughter of Hyrcanus II and mother of Mariamme and Aristobulus), and as the day was hot, many of the guests, including Aristobulus, found relief by swimming in one of the pools. The day ended with the drowning of Aristobulus, probably executed by Herod’s companions in fulfillment of their master’s order.44

The reaction to the drowning of Aristobulus was soon forthcoming. Herod was summoned to appear before Mark Antony, following Alexandra’s complaint to Cleopatra. In the meanwhile, Herod’s absence from the capital caused unrest in his court. On his return, he executed his brother-in-law Joseph (Salome’s husband), accusing him of having had intimate relations with Mariamme whom he was supposed to have guarded in the king’s absence.45

As a result of Cleopatra’s pressure on Antony, the latter severed certain cities and areas from Herod’s domain, including Jaffa and the Plain of Jericho, and presented them to her (ca. 34 B.C.E.).46 Cleopatra sought to gain possession of all of Judaea (as well as Arabia), but Antony greatly valued Herod’s administrative, political and military prowess. However, with regard to the fertile Plain of Jericho, Herod found a way, at a great cost, to lease back its precious date palm and balsam plantations from the Egyptian queen.

The year 31 B.C.E. was a critical one. War broke out with the Nabataeans, and Herod at first suffered a harsh defeat. Shortly thereafter, Judaea experienced a severe earthquake, which claimed many lives. Nevertheless, he and his army were finally able to gain a decisive victory over the Nabataeans, in a battle fought near Philadelphia (present-day Amman).47

The crucial confrontation between Octavian and Marc Antony at Actium, in the same year, put Herod in a very dangerous and delicate situation. On the one hand, he sent his family to take refuge in his strongest fortresses, Alexandrium and Masada, and placed the kingdom in the hands of Pheroras, his young brother. On the other hand, he executed Hyrcanus II, the last representative of the Hasmonaean family, accusing him of conspiring with the Nabataeans, and at the same time prevented a band of gladiators from rushing to the aid of the defeated Antony (once the battle was over). Herod was certainly well prepared for the meeting with the new ruler, which took place in Rhodes. It ended with the victor’s full recognition of Herod as king of Judaea. This was undoubtedly Herod’s greatest political success throughout his career.48

44 Josephus, AJ 15.53–57. This event undoubtedly took place in the Hasmonaean palace complex with its numerous swimming pools (see Netzer 2001b 7; 301–311).
46 Josephus, AJ 15.95.
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Herod could now safely render assistance to Octavian and his forces on their way to Egypt, not only supplying food for the army, but also providing a lavish reception for Octavian at Ptolemais (Acre). Shortly thereafter Antony and Cleopatra committed suicide. On Octavian’s way back from Egypt, Herod escorted him all the way to Antioch. Octavian took the opportunity to restore to Herod all the territories that had been ceded to Cleopatra and even awarded him additional ones: Samaria, Gaza, Strato’s Tower (later Caesarea) and some of the Hellenistic cities east of the Jordan.49

The death of Mariamme in 29/28 B.C.E. was a severe blow to Herod. Herod loved her passionately as a woman, but at the same time was very suspicious toward her. In having her killed, he might have been misled by the biased advice of various members of his family. Following her death, Herod fell ill, as if seized by a deep depression, but finally he overcame his grief.50

Nevertheless, thanks to the tranquility that now pervaded the entire region as well as Herod’s court, the king was able to exert considerable efforts in extensive building operations as well as in the development of agriculture and commerce in order to augment the income to his coffers. Some of this income was direct, such as that from the many estates, and some was indirect, originating from the collection of taxes and customs duties. These revenues enabled him to maintain his court and army, after various payments and gifts to Roman notables, make contributions to various cities and states outside his realm, and in particular to finance his ambitious and impressive building projects. In times of need Herod was not averse to policies of public welfare. In 25 B.C.E., when various parts of his kingdom suffered from drought and famine, his close ties with the Roman governor of Egypt enabled him to purchase large quantities of grain which were distributed to the needy population. Herod was also successful in maintaining peaceful relations and a proper balance between his Jewish subjects and the pagan inhabitants of the Gentile cities under his rule. While the localities inhabited by Jews were organized in districts (toparchies), the pagan cities were generally administrated along the lines of the Greek poleis.

It was not by chance that Samaria was selected as the site for one of Herod’s first construction projects following Augustus’ reaffirmation of his kingship. Not only was Samaria of major geographical importance,51 but it was also the center of an area inhabited by pagans, a fact that was exploited to maintain the delicate balance between the Jewish populations in Judaea and the Galilee and the pagan ones elsewhere. Herod renamed the city Sebaste, the Greek title of Augustus.

At the same time Herod launched his building operations in Jerusalem and presumably also elsewhere. The first two important structures erected in Jerusalem were a theater and a hippodrome. In later years, around 25 B.C.E., Herod

51 Being an important crossroad surrounded by fertile land.
invested special efforts in expanding his various palaces. A second palace was built in Jericho (in addition to the first one which was probably built when Cleopatra still controlled the Jericho Plain), and in Jerusalem the central main palace was erected, replacing the Antonia (which had been rebuilt earlier in his reign) and the older Hasmonaean palaces. It seems that only then did Herod embark on the construction of his most remarkable building project, the Mountain Palace-Fortress at Herodium.

Over the years, Herod forged ever closer personal ties with Augustus, the Roman ruling classes in general, and the representatives of imperial rule in the neighboring countries, Egypt and Syria. Inter alia, he sent two of his sons (by Mariamme the Hasmonaean) to be educated in Rome.\(^{52}\) In some cases he offered military assistance to the Roman regime (e.g., in 25 B.C.E., he sent some 500 soldiers to participate in the military campaign of Aelius Gallus, governor of Egypt, in Arabia), no doubt a step toward strengthening his ties with Rome.

Augustus’ increasing confidence in Herod led to the gradual expansion of the latter’s domain. Round about 23 B.C.E., Trachonitis, Batanaea, and Gaulanitis were added to his realm, following the troubles with bandits these territories had previously experienced. (The former ruler, Zenodorus the Ituraean, supported these bandits.) Some two years later, while Augustus was visiting Syria, he confiscated another district – Panias (Bania) and its surroundings – from Zenodorus and awarded it to Herod (20 B.C.E.). With these additions Herod’s domain attained its greatest extent. He now ruled over most of the Land of Israel, excluding the coastal city of Ascalon in the south and the Phoenician coastal cities of Dora and Ptolemais in the north.

At this time of relative tranquility throughout the Roman world, when the fruits of his administrative and economic policies were becoming evident, Herod launched his two largest and most ambitious building projects, the harbor of Caesarea (ca. 22 B.C.E.) and the Temple in Jerusalem (ca. 20 B.C.E.).

Herod could not initiate the rebuilding of the Temple without first convincing his Jewish subjects that his intentions were sincere and that the old building would be demolished only if the erection of the new one was assured. Construction of the new Temple took about a year and a half; no doubt a period of great tension and excitement for Herod. One might assume that during these 18 months, the king rarely left his capital. Once the building was completed, Herod sought relaxation in yet another journey to Italy, to meet with Augustus and bring back his own two sons with him. On their return home, the eldest, Aristobulus, married his cousin Berenice, Salome’s daughter, and Alexander married Glaphyra, the daughter of Archelaus, king of Cappadocia in Asia Minor (the latter marriage being evidence of Herod’s network of international contacts).

\(^{52}\) They lived at the home of Pollio, Herod’s friend.

Chapter 1: Herod, the Man and King

In the following years Herod strengthened his friendship with Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, Augustus’ second-in-command and right-hand man as well as his son-in-law, a relationship that undoubtedly played an important role in Herod’s life. Apparently they first met during Herod’s initial visit to Rome (40 B.C.E.). Twenty-eight years later, while Agrippa was staying in Mitylene on the island of Lesbos (off the western coast of Asia Minor), Herod spent some time with him. Six years later (16 B.C.E.), following his return from Rome with his two sons, he took the initiative and invited Agrippa to visit Judaea. This state visit must have left a strong impression on both parties. Herod prepared a “grand” tour in the course of which the two visited, *inter alia*, Sebaste (Samaria), Caesarea, Alexandrium, Hyrcania and Herodium. The climax was probably Agrippa’s visit to Jerusalem, during which he offered sacrifices to the God of Israel before the Temple, in the presence of a huge crowd.53

With the arrival of winter, Agrippa left the country, but was followed by Herod who joined him at the beginning of spring. Thus began a long and eventful tour of Asia Minor and the nearby islands. The lengthy journey provided Herod with the opportunity to demonstrate his generosity and his initiative in the sphere of building projects. Another source of enhanced prestige for Herod on his return to Judaea was the assistance he rendered to the Jewish communities in the Ionian cities in their conflicts with their Greek neighbors.54 Here he took advantage of the good services of his friend, Nicolaus of Damascus, one of the most prominent members of his court.

Despite Herod’s political and economic achievements, including his impressive building projects, his standing with his family did not improve. Following the return of his two sons from Rome, many of his relatives (and ultimately he himself) feared that they would try to avenge their mother’s death. As a result, Herod granted special favors to Antipater, his firstborn by his first wife Doris, who had been excluded from the court since the king’s marriage to Mariamme.55 In an effort to strengthen Antipater’s position, Herod sailed with him to Asia Minor (13 B.C.E.), intending to present him to Marcus Agrippa with a request to take him to Rome, to be introduced to Augustus.56 This ploy did not relieve the tensions at the royal court. As a result, Herod decided to take Aristobulus and Alexander to Rome, to be charged in the presence of the emperor. The result was unexpected. Augustus met the full deputation at Aquileia in Italy and succeeded in bringing about reconciliation between Herod and his two sons. The relations between Antipater and his half brothers also seemed to have improved.

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55 Later, ca. 14 B.C.E., Doris was recalled to the court but was sent away again some seven years later; see Kokkinos 1998, 208–211.
Before leaving Italy, Herod presented the emperor and his people with generous gifts. Augustus, on his part, charged Herod with supervision of his copper mines on the island of Cyprus, rewarding him with half of the income. Augustus also authorized Herod to nominate one of his sons as his heir. On his return to Jerusalem, Herod proclaimed his firstborn son Antipater as his first heir, and the two sons of Mariamme as heirs after him.

At this late stage of Herod’s career he was finally able to reap the fruits of his building activity. Two of his largest projects in this field, Caesarea and its harbor and the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, were about to be completed. While the inauguration of Caesarea provided him with the opportunity to stage a glorious and most lavish celebration, the dedication of the Temple was apparently a more modest affair. At Caesarea, there were theatrical performances and banquets; guests were invited from abroad, and gifts arrived from foreign countries. The crowning events of these festivities were games and competitions dedicated to the emperor (quinquennial games; see Chapter 5). Augustus and his wife Livia honored the occasion by sending elaborate utensils, to be used in the ceremonies.

The last years of Herod’s reign saw a distinctive deterioration of his powers of leadership and his performance as a monarch, and nowhere was this more evident than in the complex web of relationships at the royal court. His arrangement members of Herod’s family considered them as a possible source of danger. The latter group included Salome, Herod’s sister, although her daughter was married to Aristobulus. The situation was further aggravated by the tension that arose between Herod and his younger brother Pheroras, who refused to marry one of Herod’s daughters and remained faithful to the servant-girl he loved.57

The final showdown was now inevitable. Aristobulus and Alexander, scions of the Hasmonaean dynasty, were immensely popular among the masses and had even secured the loyalty of the army. Rumors and accusations leveled against the two princes were rife. A temporary reconciliation was achieved at the court, on the occasion of a visit by Archelaus, king of Cappadocia and Alexander’s father-in-law, who acted as a peacemaker, but visits of other foreign notables (including Eurycles of Sparta) only served to fan the flames.

The worsening of relations between Herod and the Nabataeans, his neighbors on the southeast, introduced a further complication. The immediate cause was a rebellion that broke out in Trachonitis, the inhabitants of which maintained close ties with Syllaesus. The uprising was suppressed, but the tension was not lessened, and in 9 B.C.E. Herod took punitive action against the Nabataean army.58

Augustus, upon being informed of these developments, was angered by this unauthorized action within the realm of Roman rule. He notified Herod that, though the Judaean monarch had hitherto been considered a “friend of the Roman people,” he would from now on be regarded as a mere subject. Herod sent his faithful courtier, Nicolaus of Damascus, to Rome to mediate between him and the Nabataeans (8 B.C.E.), and it seems that a partial reconciliation with the emperor was achieved. Nevertheless, Herod’s relations with Augustus were distinctly cooler than before.

The antagonism between Herod and certain members of his family, on the one hand, and the brothers Aristobulus and Alexander, on the other, now reached a breaking point. The brothers, accused of having contacted certain officers who had fallen into disfavor, were arrested. On Augustus’ advice, Herod sent him up-to-date information concerning his two sons. A special court was set up at Berytus, which ultimately sentenced the two brothers to death, a punishment that was soon implemented at Sebaste (7 B.C.E.). They were buried in the fortress of Alexandrium.59

The central figure in the renewed struggle for the succession was again Antipater, who took various steps to strengthen his position. His chief ally was now his uncle Pheroras.60 He also tried to gain the sympathy of the people by contracting a marriage with a Hasmonaean princess, the daughter of Mattathias Antigonus. Once again it was Salome who played a major role in the intrigues, this time contriving to break up the alliance between Antipater and Pheroras.

Antipater now set out for Rome, in order to gain further support there. While he was away, Pheroras died and Herod managed to glean information that cast suspicion not only on his dead brother but also on Antipater, in connection with plans to murder him. Antipater, being informed of the situation while still in Rome, was at first hesitant to return home. Ultimately he did so but was arrested on his arrival in Judaea. In the presence of Varus, governor of Syria, Antipater was found guilty and put to death (5 B.C.E.).61

By this time Herod was incurably sick and approaching death.62 His last days were spent in his favorite winter palace at Jericho. It is evident that tension in the capital as well as throughout the kingdom then attained its peak. When rumors reached Jerusalem that the king had died, the golden eagle installed by Herod on one of the Temple’s gates was removed, an act that aroused his anger.63 The king ordered a number of notables to be brought to Jericho and assembled in the theater. Bedridden and summoning up his last reserves of strength, he angrily berated this audience.

60 Josephus, AJ 17.1–11, 32–45.
61 Josephus, AJ 17.79–146.
Following his physicians’ advice, Herod tried to relieve his pains by bathing in the spa of Callirrhoe, on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea.\(^{64}\) This treatment was of no avail and he became melancholic. According to Josephus, he even attempted to take his own life, but was prevented from doing so by his cousin, Achiab.\(^ {65}\)

Realizing that his days were numbered, Herod devised a plan to plunge the entire nation into mourning and thus forestall the rejoicing that would undoubtedly greet his death. He commanded his men to arrest a large number of eminent men from all parts of Judaea and detain them in the hippodrome of Jericho. These hostages were to be executed as soon as he died. His instructions were only partly fulfilled; the notables were indeed brought to Jericho, but his heirs freed them upon hearing of his demise.\(^ {66}\) Jericho was also the place where all the army assembled, once the news of the king’s death became widely known. Here his will was read and the soldiers swore allegiance to the new regime. The funeral, which resembled a military ceremony, then proceeded all the way to Herodium, the site that had been prepared, no doubt from the outset, as the king’s eternal resting place.\(^ {67}\)

According to the terms of Herod’s last will and testament, written shortly before his death, Archelaus, his son from Malthace (his sixth wife), was chosen to be the ruler of Judaea and Samaria; another son, Herod Antipas (at one time considered the sole heir), was appointed tetrarch of the Galilee and Peraea; and Philip, son of Cleopatra (his seventh wife), was appointed tetrarch of Gaulanitis (including Paneias), Trachonitis and Batanaea. Some towns, as well as a large sum of money, were now presented to Salome, the king’s sister. Gifts were also provided, according to the testament, to the emperor and his wife Livia.

Herod’s death led to temporary unrest in his kingdom, including some unsuccessful attempts at uprisings (such as at Sepphoris and Jericho). Nevertheless, his three sons gradually consolidated their rule. They continued in the traditions that Herod had established, but their efforts were never to attain the level of magnificence or sheer magnitude of those during Herod’s reign, the acme of material achievement during the Second Temple period, and most of the territory soon fell into the hands of Rome.

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\(^{67}\) Josephus, *AJ* 17.194–199.