

## Ancient Israel - Shanks

Hershel Shanks, ed., *Ancient Israel* (Washington DC: Biblical Archeology Society, 1999),

Shaye J.D. Cohen, *Roman Domination*. Hershel Shanks, ed., *Ancient Israel*: (Washington DC: Biblical Archeology Society, 1999),

### **Roman Domination:**

The Romans entered Judean Politics ironically by invitation of one Jewish faction that was in power struggle with another. In 76 B.C.E. Alexander Jannaeus, the last great king of the Hasmonean line, died. He was succeeded by his widow Salome Alexandria, who herself died in 67 B.C.E. The royal couple's two sons, Hyrcanus and Aristobulus, then fought each other for succession to the throne. Both Hyrcanus (usually called Hyrcanus II) and Aristobulus (usually called Aristobulus II) appeared before the Roman legate in Syria, each asking to be recognized as the ruler of Judea. Other Jews appeared as well, asking the Romans to reject the claims of both; by this time many Jews were thoroughly disillusioned with Hasmonean rule. The Romans at first supported Aristobulus II, but when they realized he was a potential troublemaker, a suspicion amply confirmed by subsequent events, they transferred their support to Hyrcanus II. Aristobulus considered fighting the Romans, but, realizing her overwhelming might of Rome and the hopelessness of his situation, he surrendered in 63 B.C.E. to the Roman general Pompey. The supports of Hyrcanus opened the city of Jerusalem to the Romans. But that was not the end of the battle for Jerusalem. Although the city was in Roman hands, many of Aristobulus supporters garrisoned themselves in the Temple and refused to surrender. After a three-month siege and some fearsome fighting, however, the Temple fell to Pompey's legions (63 B.C.E.).<sup>1</sup> Thereafter, Romans assigned client King of Judea to rule the land on behalf of Rome.

Of the groups that emerged in the first century C.E., the Christians are the most famous. Jesus, their leader, was a holy man and a teacher, who attracted admirers and disciples. Although Christianity emerged from a Jewish context, as one among many first-century C.E. Jewish apocalyptic groups, by the end of the century it had separated from its mother religion.....<sup>2</sup> In 66 C.E. the Jews of Palestine revolted against the Roman rules.<sup>3</sup> In 70 C.E., the Romans, under Titus, besieged the city and the Temple was destroyed.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hershel Shanks, ed., *Ancient Israel* (Washington DC: Biblical Archeology Society, 1999), 265.

<sup>2</sup> Hershel Shanks, ed., *Ancient Israel* (Washington DC: Biblical Archeology Society, 1999), 284.

<sup>3</sup> Hershel Shanks, ed., *Ancient Israel* (Washington DC: Biblical Archeology Society, 1999), 285.

<sup>4</sup> Hershel Shanks, ed., *Ancient Israel* (Washington DC: Biblical Archeology Society, 1999), 291.

With Roman support, Herod reconquered Jerusalem in 37 BCE. Herod remained the undisputed leader of the Jews for over 30 years (37 – 4 B.C.E.).

Herod was an enigmatic figure.

A tyrant, a madman, a murderer, a builder of great cities and fortresses, a wily politician, a successful king, a Jew, a half-Jew, a gentile – Herod was all these and more.

He is perhaps best known to posterity as the murderer of several of his wives, children and other relations. The murders were prompted by Herod's suspicions of anyone who had an equal or better claim to the throne than he. In the first year of his reign, Herod executed the surviving members of the Hasmonean society aristocracy. Since he was married to Mariamme, the daughter of the Hasmonean King, Herod thus murdered his own wife's relatives – her brother, her aunt and her father. Finally he murdered Mariamme too. At the end of his reign, he executed the two sons Mariamme had borne him. Herod also executed various other wives, sons and close relations. The Christian tradition of Herod's "massacre of the innocents" (Matt.2) is based on his unpleasant habit of killing anyone associated with the old aristocracy, including many teachers and religious leaders.

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Like all other vassal kings subservient to the Romans, Herod was authorized to govern his subjects as he pleased as long as he maintained peace and stability, did not engage in any unauthorized activities outside his kingdom and actively supported Roman administrative and military activities in the area.

Herod knew his place and followed these rules. At home he was tyrant, but in his dealings with the Romans he was ever dutiful subject. Before engaging in any major enterprise (killing his sons, for example) he consulted the Roman governor of Syria or even the emperor himself.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Shaye J.D. Cohen, *Roman Domination*. Hershel Shanks, ed., *Ancient Israel*: (Washington DC: Biblical Archeology Society, 1999), 267. 269.

<sup>6</sup> Shaye J.D. Cohen, *Roman Domination*. Hershel Shanks, ed., *Ancient Israel*: (Washington DC: Biblical Archeology Society, 1999), 270-271.

Herod maintained his rule through terror and brutality. His secret police were everywhere and reported to the king any murmurings of discontent. He prohibited his subjects from assembling in public. These security measures were required because of the general dislike for Herod among the Jews. *Jewish antiquities* broadly recounts two major complaints the Jews had against Herod, aside from his violence and brutality. First was his violation of traditional Jewish laws. He built a theater and an amphitheater in Jerusalem (entertainment unfamiliar to Judaism). He built pagan cities and temples, and seemed to favor the pagan and Samaritan elements in the population over the Jews. Furthermore, many of his judicial and administrative enactments were not in accordance with Jewish law.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps Herod's policy was dictated by the fact that he himself was the offspring of the Idumeans, who had been converted to Judaism only three generations earlier. Herod's court historian, Nicolaus of Damascus, claimed that Herod was a scion of Judea's noblest families, which had returned from Babylonia in the time of the Persians; but Herod's detractors called him a half-Jew," or even a gentile, because of his Idumean extraction. His marginal status in the native Jewish community perhaps explains his eagerness to solicit the support of Samaritans and the gentiles of the country.<sup>8</sup>

During the first half of the first century C.E., the Romans used vassal kings to govern those areas of the eastern empire that, like Judea, were neither urbanized nor greatly "Hellenized" but were home to vigorous national cultures. Administration through a vassal king, a native aristocrat who could understand the peculiar ways of the population, thought preferable to direct Roman rule. Thus, throughout eastern Asia Minor, northern Syria, and Palestine,

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<sup>7</sup> Shaye J.D. Cohen, *Roman Domination*. Hershel Shanks, ed., *Ancient Israel*: (Washington DC: Biblical Archeology Society, 1999), 271.

<sup>8</sup> Shaye J.D. Cohen, *Roman Domination*. Hershel Shanks, ed., *Ancient Israel*: (Washington DC: Biblical Archeology Society, 1999), 272.

native dynasts governed their territories in accordance with the wishes of the Romans. In accordance with this policy, after Herod's death, his kingdom was divided among three of his sons. **Antipas** received Galilee and Perea; **Phillip**, the Golan heights and points east. **Archelaus** became ruler of the largest and most important part of Herod's kingdom – Judea. In 6 C.E., however, the Romans deposed Archelaus for misrule and Judea along with Idumea, Samaria and much of the Mediterranean coast, was annexed to the province of Syria. Henceforth Judea was administered by functionaries in the Roman civil service known as *perfect* or (after 44 C.E.) *procurators*. The rest of the country remained in the hands of Abtipas and Philip for another 30 years, but then became the domain of the Herod's grandson Agrippa 1.<sup>9</sup>

At the beginning of the first century, the land of Israel was governed by vassal rulers – men like Herod and his sons; by the middle of the century, it was governed by Roman procurators (with the exception of Agrippa II).

Judea, on the other hand, was governed by Roman perfects (장관) from 6 C.E. Pontius Pilate (26 to 36 C.E.) was one of the Roman perfects. According to the Gospels, Pilate massacred a group of Galileans (Luke 13:1) and brutally suppressed a rebellion (Mark 15:7), quite aside from crucifying Jesus. According to Philo, Pilate introduced into Herod's former palace in Jerusalem some golden shields inscribed with the name of the emperor Tiberius. The Jews objected because they felt that any object associated with emperor worship was idolatrous and an offense to the Jewish religion. Previous Roman governors had respected Jewish sensitivities in this matter, but Pilate did not.<sup>10</sup>

The social tensions and eschatological expectations that impelled Judea to war with Rome were not uniquely Jewish. In fact the war of 66-70 C.E. follows a pattern evident in other native rebellions

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<sup>9</sup> Shaye J.D. Cohen, *Roman Domination*. Hershel Shanks, ed., *Ancient Israel*: (Washington DC: Biblical Archeology Society, 1999), 273-274.

<sup>10</sup> Shaye J.D. Cohen, *Roman Domination*. Hershel Shanks, ed., *Ancient Israel*: (Washington DC: Biblical Archeology Society, 1999), 274.

against the Roman Empire. Tensions between rich and poor, between city and country, were endemic to ancient society and often contributed to native rebellions. Like the uprising in Judea, other native rebellions were often led by aristocrats, although peasants, day laborers and landless poor formed the bulk of the revolutionary army. As .. like Jews, other rebels in antiquity also dreamed of subjugating the universal Roman Empire The revolt of the Gauls in 69 C.E. was prompted in part by a Druid prediction that Rome would be destroyed and that the rule of the empire would devolve on the tribes of Transalpine Gaul. <sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Shaye J.D. Cohen, *Roman Domination*. Hershel Shanks, ed., *Ancient Israel*: (Washington DC: Biblical Archeology Society, 1999), 288.