

EHUD NETZER

The Architecture  
of Herod,  
the Great Builder

*Texts and Studies in  
Ancient Judaism*

117

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**Mohr Siebeck**

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Ehud Netzer

# The Architecture of Herod, the Great Builder

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Dedicated to my wife  
Dvorah



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## Foreword

Herod the Great and his building projects are known worldwide. The combination of several factors have contributed to it: the Holy Land as the cradle of Judaism and Christianity; the end of the first century B.C.E., the period immediately preceding the birth of Jesus; building projects of impressive sites with rich record of historical events, such as Jerusalem, Caesarea, Herodium and Masada; and the detailed description provided by Josephus – are sufficient to transform the builder king and his edifices into an attractive subject.

The first, serious field studies had already highlighted many of Herod's building projects. First and foremost were the surveys conducted by Wilson, Warren and others around the Temple Mount in Jerusalem,<sup>1</sup> together with the surveys of nearby and distant sites such as Caesarea, Herodium and Masada. Actual archaeological research of the sites at which, *inter alia*, are located Herod's buildings commenced only in the first half of the 20th century with the work of Reisner and Fischer at Samaria, and some 20 years later of Crowfoot, Kenyon and Sukenik at the same site – two excavations of great importance not only for the study of Herod's architecture but also, and mainly, as landmarks in the development of the science of archaeology in general.

The rate of research at Herodian sites increased in the second half of the 20th century. Worthy of particular mention are the work of the two expeditions from the American School of Oriental Research in Jericho (1950–1951); the work of the Italian team in Caesarea (1959–1963); Yadin's excavations at Masada (1963–1965); the work of father Corbo at Herodium (1962–1967); the excavations of Kochavi at Aphek-Antipatris (1972–1985); and once again the excavations at Caesarea by a joint team of Americans and Israelis (starting in the early 1990s) – extensive digs in the city and its harbor.

Archaeological research at Herodian sites gained renewed impetus after 1967. In the following years excavations were conducted around the Temple Mount (1969–1978) and to the west of the Old City (the area where Herod's main palace and the three towers Phasaël, Hippicus and Mariamme once stood); at Cyprus (1974–1975); Lower Herodium (1972–1987, 1997–2000); at the site of the winter palaces in Jericho (1973–1987, 1997–2000); in Jericho's hippodrome (1975–1976); at Alexandrium (1981–1984); in the *opus reticulatum* buildings

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<sup>1</sup> Some of which, in particular those of Charles Warren, were accompanied by hazardous excavations.

at Baniyas (1976–1977) and Jerusalem (1977); and at Mamre close to Hebron (1984–1986).

The numerous archaeological sites that have been surveyed, excavated and studied, together with the great amount of information on and the detailed descriptions of Herod's building projects made available to us by Josephus (and certain other historical sources), in effect presented the possibility of carrying out an overall synthesis of King Herod's architecture.<sup>2</sup> In any event, any sincere discussion of Herodian architecture should consider the archaeological finds as well as the descriptions of Josephus. Not a few of the buildings, including some of major significance, have practically left no archaeological traces (e.g., the Temple, the Antonia and the main palace in Jerusalem), and our almost sole knowledge of them derives from the writings of Josephus. On the other hand, there are Herodian structures, such as the stadium at Sebaste, that are known to us only thanks to archaeology. Archaeology and the works of Josephus thus constitute the main foundation for the study of Herod's buildings.

I was privileged to participate, as the team's architect (together with I. Dunayevsky), throughout the extensive excavations of Masada, and later to be the author of Volume III of the scientific final reports of this excavation, dealing with the architecture and stratigraphy of Masada. I also returned to this important site (after Yadin's death in 1984), as an independent excavator, for a brief season of excavation in 1989, and again (together with G. Stiebel) in 1995–1997.

In the early 1970s, my doctoral thesis led me to become thoroughly acquainted with two other key Herodian sites – Herodium and the site of the winter palaces of the Hasmonaean and Herod in Jericho. At both sites, we have commenced our study with limited excavations which soon developed to be extensive projects that continued annually.

During those years, I was also able to conduct excavations at some other Herodian building sites – the palatial fortress at Cypros; the Promontory Palace in Caesarea; the hippodrome (a multipurpose building) at Jericho; an *opus reticulatum* building (temple?) at Baniyas; an *opus reticulatum* building (burial monument?) in Jerusalem – eight in all, together with Masada, Herodium and Jericho's winter palaces.<sup>3</sup>

My initial synthesis of Herodian architecture was presented for the first time at a symposium held by the Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi Institute in Jerusalem in 1981.<sup>4</sup> The main points raised in that discussion have not changed in essence, despite the large amount of information that has been assembled since then.

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<sup>2</sup> Some aspects were discussed already, in brief, in E. Netzer, "Herod's Building Projects: State Necessity or Personal Need?" *The Jerusalem Cathedra* 1 (1981), 48–61, 73–80 and idem, 2001a. See Richardson 1996; Roller 1998; Lichtenberger 1999; and Japp 2000.

<sup>3</sup> For information concerning these eight sites see the following chapters.

<sup>4</sup> This symposium was published both in Hebrew (in 1980) and English [Netzer 1981 (see note 2, above)].

It seems that my personal experience in the field of modern architecture has also influenced the analysis of these ancient building projects.<sup>5</sup> The conception developed by me over the years – that Herod not only showed interest in the field of construction but also had a profound understanding of planning and architecture, and therefore took an active and important part in the erection of many of his buildings – was undoubtedly drawn from the line of thought of a nowadays architect.

Most of the building projects that are well known to us are located at a fairly limited number of sites: Jerusalem, Caesarea, Sebaste, Jericho, Herodium and Masada. I have therefore chosen to present this book not in the form of a catalogue or a list of buildings following their different types, but according to their locations and therefore a full chapter is devoted to each of these six sites, aside from the Temple in Jerusalem, which is dealt with in a separate chapter. All the other building projects will be discussed in two separate chapters; one dedicated to the desert fortresses (except Masada), and the other one to Herod's other building projects in and outside his kingdom.

Subsequent to the exhaustive treatment of the various sites and buildings, a general discussion including the following aspects of Herod's substantial building program will be presented in the second part of the book:

- planning of the various types of buildings and complexes (such as palaces, fortresses, temples, facilities for entertainment and sport, etc.);
- planning of cities;
- the sources of financing;
- the sources of stylistic-architectural influences;
- Herod's personal involvement in his building projects;
- the building program.

The book will also include few short appendices: building methods and techniques; architectural elements (the various orders); stucco and fresco decorations; and mosaics.

This book does not claim to be a corpus of all that has been written up to the present day about Herod the Great's building projects. It will focus on what is actually known and on views directly concerned with the field of construction and architecture. The book's main aim is to embody, as far as possible, the buildings about which we have sufficient information, either archaeological or from the literature, so as to make possible a more fruitful architectural discussion and analysis of these projects. The book includes not only a reconstruction of the

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<sup>5</sup> The present author completed his architectural studies in 1958, in Haifa's Technion, and worked as an active architect until 1972. during this period during which he was stationed at Masada for three years (1963–1966) actin both as the expedition's architect and as the architect in charge of the preservation-reconstruction works, which were implemented at the site by the National Parks authority.

buildings revealed by me but also of some of the other Herodian structures, such as the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, Caesarea's theater and Temple of Augustus and Rome, and Sebaste's Temple of Augustus.

Many rulers in world history – such as Augustus, Trajan and Hadrian throughout the Roman Empire; Senon in Turkey; Charles IV in Denmark; Peter the Great in Russia (in particular Petergrad); and Kubiček in Brazil – have left behind them numerous building projects. However, not many of these rulers became so personally involved as Herod did in the implementation of their building programs. Moreover, Herod's grasp of the realm of construction seems to me to be beyond the times in which he lived. The combination of an vibrant ruler, having an analytical mind and at the same time a pragmatic approach, together with a far reaching imagination, led him to initiate building projects that reflect a line of thought similar to that of an architect acting in the 20th or 21st century C.E.!

Herod undoubtedly had an intricate and diverse personality, many aspects of which still remain vague. Nevertheless, with regard to his building projects, it seems that the way of the builder king is now largely known, and I hope that by shedding light on this concept, the book will make a modest contribution toward ongoing research.

\* \* \*

I wish to thank all those who have helped me, either directly or indirectly, to publish this work. Since much of the material on which the information is based originates from excavations which I directed at various Herodian sites (mentioned above), it is my pleasant duty to express my gratitude to the team members who worked with me devotedly for months and years under conditions that were far from easy, and to the governmental bodies, various funds and individuals who assisted me in carrying out these excavations, the exhausting research that followed them in the office, and the preparation of the final reports. Their names are not listed here and can be found in the publications of the various digs. However, I am aware that without their participation and generous assistance this study could not have covered such a broad field.

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Jerusalem, May 2004

Ehud Netzer

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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),<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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 Idumaeans family.<sup>6</sup> 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 Hyrcanus.

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<sup>1</sup> Alexandra's transliterated Hebrew name appears in Greek texts as Salome or Salina; see Schürer 1973, 229.

<sup>2</sup> Schürer 1973, 184, 194.

<sup>3</sup> Josephus, *BJ* 1.127, 154; *AJ* 14.29, 31.

<sup>4</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 13. 405–408; *BJ* 1.107–109.

<sup>5</sup> Josephus; *AJ* 14.5–6; *BJ* 1.121 (and note f).

<sup>6</sup> Josephus, *BJ* 1.123.

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 Judaeian state.<sup>7</sup> This process found expression in the appointment of Antipas (Herod's grandfather) by Alexander Jannaeus as governor of the district (toparchy) of Idumaea.<sup>8</sup> 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' deposition 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.<sup>9</sup> 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 Scourus 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 Idumaeian and was moreover willing to accept Roman authority unconditionally. He therefore backed Hyrcanus and demanded Aristobulus' unconditional surrender.<sup>10</sup> 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.,<sup>11</sup> 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).<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> Neither is the time of Herod's birth known with certainty, since Josephus' data pertaining to Herod's

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<sup>7</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.255–258; *BJ* 1.63.

<sup>8</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.10.

<sup>9</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.122.

<sup>10</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.47–48, 73.

<sup>11</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.61–71; *BJ* 1.145–151; Strabo, *Geography* 16.762–763.

<sup>12</sup> As Antipater apparently succeeded his father in the position of governor at Marisa, the latter town could be regarded as Herod's 'home town.'

<sup>13</sup> Josephus, *BJ* 1.181. Kokkinos 1998, 95, note 39.

age contradict one another. Modern scholarship is inclined to regard 73 B.C.E. as the year of his birth.<sup>14</sup>

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.).<sup>15</sup> Antipater's position was considerably enhanced in 48 B.C.E., when he was able to render invaluable assistance to Julius Caesar.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup>

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.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>14</sup> According to Kokkinos (1998, 109), Herod was born in 72 B.C.E.

<sup>15</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.122; *BJ* 1.181–182.

<sup>16</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.127–137.

<sup>17</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.143–144.

<sup>18</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.158–159; *BJ* 1.203.

<sup>19</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.171–177.

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.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup>

During his lifetime, Herod married several wives, ten in all:<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> 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 Judaeian 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.<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup>

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 Phasaël, now presented itself before the Roman ruler. Another delegation, consisting of Hyrcanus and his men, expressed their

<sup>21</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.177–178; *BJ* 1, 213.

<sup>22</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.180–182.

<sup>23</sup> "... [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).

<sup>24</sup> As to the marriage dates, see Kokkinos 1998, 208–211.

<sup>25</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.300; *BJ* 1.241.

<sup>26</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.281.

<sup>27</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.296.

support for the two brothers, while Phasaël and Herod themselves buttressed their case with gifts of money to Antony. Antony ruled in favor of the two Idumaeans 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.<sup>28</sup>

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 Triumvirate and invaded Syria (40 B.C.E.). The Hasmonaean Mattathias Antigonus, son of Aristobulus II,<sup>29</sup> joined forces with the Parthians and exploited this new situation. Together they overran Judaea.<sup>30</sup> Hyrcanus, Phasaël and Herod were now faced with a crucial dilemma: collaborate with the Parthians, enemies of the Romans, or seek some other course of action? Phasaël 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.<sup>31</sup> Their destination seems to have been Petra, the Nabataean capital, via the Judaeian 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 battle<sup>32</sup>). In the battle that was fought, Herod was victorious and thus able to continue his flight southward. His family, accompanied 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.<sup>33</sup>

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.<sup>34</sup> While still on his way to Egypt, Herod had been informed of the bitter fate of both his brother Phasaël and Hyrcanus II. The former was imprisoned and ultimately committed suicide; the latter's ears were mutilated so that he could no longer serve as high priest.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.301–329.

<sup>29</sup> Aristobulus had been assassinated in Rome on the order of Pompey, ca. nine years earlier.

<sup>30</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.332–333.

<sup>31</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.352–353; *BJ* 1.263.

<sup>32</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.359–360.

<sup>33</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.361–362.

<sup>34</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.379.

<sup>35</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.366–374.

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.<sup>36</sup>

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.<sup>37</sup>

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.<sup>38</sup> As a result, Sossius, the governor of Syria, left for Jerusalem, which was conquered following a siege of two months (37 B.C.E.).<sup>39</sup> Antigonus was captured and executed by the Romans. Herod's kingship was soon reaffirmed, both by Antony and by Octavian, at their meeting in Tarentum, in southern Italy (Fig. 1).<sup>40</sup>

During the following six years, the young king was involved in several internal and external struggles. *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.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, against the will of the Hasmonaean, Herod appointed a non-Hasmonaean, Ananel (from Babylonia), as high priest.<sup>42</sup> In response to an appeal from some of the Hasmonaean 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

<sup>36</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.382–387.

<sup>37</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.396–398.

<sup>38</sup> 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).

<sup>39</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.469–486.

<sup>40</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 14.487–491.

<sup>41</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 15.11–22.

<sup>42</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 15.22.



Figure 1: Herod's kingdom.

of his wife Mariamme, to the office of high priest.<sup>43</sup> 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,

<sup>43</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 15.39–41.



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.<sup>44</sup>

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.<sup>45</sup>

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.).<sup>46</sup> 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).<sup>47</sup>

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.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> 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).

<sup>45</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 15.81–88.

<sup>46</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 15.95.

<sup>47</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 15.121–160.

<sup>48</sup> Josephus, *AJ* 15.187–195.

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