
Already in his introduction the author refers to a challenging heritage, when he sees his socio-political and cultural analysis of Jewish and Hellenistic influences on the Herodian society in line with examinations of Bickerman, Hengel or Momigliano that referred to the earlier Hasmonaean period.

Anyhow, the future discussion will reveal the importance and scholarly rank of this monograph. But in terms of the goal of this study, the author did not want to write another historical biography of Herod the Great, as Schalit or, recently, Vogel and Kasher had written. R. examines the Herodian society by the means of analyzing three major aspects of the Jewish life in Herodian times: the life and religion, the army and the administration and economy. Consequently, this book tries “to anchor Herodian Judaea as firmly as possible within the surrounding Mediterranean world and therefore within the realities of Hellenistic Roman civilization in order to better understand its multi-faceted dimensions as part of the surrounding contemporary world, and not simply as an entity belonging to a biblical–New Testament reality” (3).

Ch. 1 deals with the royal ideology of King Herod, who was a king in the old Israelite and not in the Macedonian tradition. Here, the author refers especially to Josephus and several coins. And also in the public, Herod, as the re-builder of the (Second) Temple could be esteemed as a “second Solomon.” Nevertheless, R. is reasonably sceptical against Schalit’s thesis that Herod also had messianic aspirations. Further points in this chapter are: Herod’s Hasmonean and Hellenistic heritage and, for sure, Herod as a client ruler of Rome.

Ch. 2 discusses the traditions and responsibilities, the organization and outlook of the Herodian court in Judaea. The ancient Israelite idea of the Davidic and Salomonic court, the Macedonian, lately Seleucid and Ptolemaic, strand and also the way in which the older Achaemenid court influenced the Hellenistic organization. With view to the shape of the courts of Hellenistic kings and aristocrats in general, Herod was no exception to the rule. Nevertheless, some peculiarities can be detected, when it comes to a closer examination of the Herodian palaces, e.g., the missing servant quarters, kitchens and storerooms in the palaces at Jericho or Caesarea Maritima. Furthermore, the Herodian winter palaces lack a peristyle. Besides this, R. distinguishes between three types of palaces: “city palaces,” “winter palaces” and “fortified palaces.” The discussion of features mainly refers to the studies of Netzer. It leads to the conclusion that, despite many comparisons, the household of Herod and the household of the Roman emperor Augustus reveal many differences.

Ch. 3 deals with the army of king Herod, including especially the archaeological finds of fortifications—again following mainly Netzer’s examinations. Firstly, the study highlights the ethnic composition and strength of the Herodian army.
In general, Herod's army can be described as a Hellenistic army with many Roman features. A Roman influence on Ptolemaic and Seleucid military structures are already to be detected in the 2nd cent. B.C.E. under Ptolemy IV and Antiochus III. All in all, the army was structured and organized by Hellenistic and Roman features and was a very “modern” army in its time: its aim was to fight the Nabateans and Parthians. Furthermore, the Herodian army served as an instrument of cohesion, bringing together Jews and Gentiles.

Ch. 4 deals with the Herodian administration and economy. Firstly, the author discusses the separation of Herod’s territory into different meridarchiai, existing of different toparchiai and kome. “In conclusion, Herod’s administration continued the Hellenistic-Hasmonean local administrative tradition, but differed significantly from the Hellenistic administrative tradition of Coile Syria, which continued to be implemented in the administration of the eastern Roman provinces, and as in the latter, the cities had a far greater importance” (203). Within the Herodian administration, Jerusalem was the only city assigned to hold an autonomous role. Concerning the taxation, R. distinguishes two periods: from 37 B.C.E. until 31 B.C.E., when Herod was under sway of Mark Antony, and from 31 B.C.E. onwards, when Augustus was emperor at Rome. Both periods differ insofar, as in the latter years Herod obviously exempted the Jews from the tribute and reduced their payment of poll tax (epikephaleion). Insofar, the tax system was very different from taxation at Rome, Republican or Imperial, and was much closer to the foregoing system in the Seleucid and Hasmonean tradition. In conclusion, the Herodian Judaea can be seen as a typical Mediterranean country that includes typical economic structures.

Ch. 5 examines the ruling class in Herodian Judaea. R. states that Herod was not the first Second Temple Judaean king, but the first emperor in Judaea who realized the “monarchic principle.” In his examination of different groups within the Herodian administrative organizations, R. is rather sceptical towards the reliability of data stemming from the works of Josephus. E.g., against the description by Josephus (Ant. and J.W.), R. concludes: “Moreover, Pharisees found a place at Herod’s court and benefited from the elimination of the Sadducees as a political class” (259). Here, a sceptical view of the political history of Josephus in general comes to view. The tendency of this study is to prefer archaeological and epigraphic against literary data. The chapter continues with a description of institutions of administration in Herodian times: boule ekklesia and synedrion. With view to the synedrion/Sanhedrin, R. proposes a new approach. The institution stems from Herodian times and existed as a religious court until the end of the Second Temple. While the Pharisees had a prominent role in the synedrion/Sanhedrin in the Herodian epoch, the situation changed after Herod’s death: As the Sadducees became the ruling class, favoured by the Roman rulers, the synedrion/Sanhedrin was filled with aristocratic priests. R. finds parallels with the early Imperial Areopagus of Athens.