

§ II ALEXANDRA 76-67 B.C.

Sources

Josephus *Ant.* xiii 16 (405-32); *B.J.* i 5 (107-19).  
 Rabbinic traditions: bSoṭah 22b  
                           bTaanith 23a  
                           bShabbath 16b  
                           Sifra *Be-Hukkoṭhay* 1 (ed. I. H. Weiss, p. 110b)  
                           Leviticus Rabbah 35:10.  
 Cf. Derenbourg, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-12.  
 Coins: see n. 1 below.

Bibliography

Derenbourg, J., *Essai sur l'histoire et la géographie de la Palestine* (1867), pp. 102-12.  
 Graëtz, H., *Geschichte der Juden* III (1905-6), pp. 135-49.  
 Abel, F.-M., *Histoire de la Palestine* I (1952), pp. 239-44.  
 Schalit, A., *König Herodes, der Mann und sein Werk* (1969), pp. 679-80.

According to Alexander's will, the throne went to his widow, Alexandra, who in turn nominated her eldest son, Hyrcanus, High Priest.<sup>1</sup> Alexandra, whose transliterated Hebrew name appears in Greek texts as Salcme or Salina (76-67 B.C.), was in all respects the antithesis of her husband.<sup>2</sup> Whereas he hated, and was hated by, the Pharisees, Alexandra was well disposed towards them and entrusted

1. *Ant.* xiii 16, 1-2 (405-8); *B.J.* i 5, 1 (107-9). It is now generally accepted that there are no coins certainly attributable to Alexandra. F. de Saulcy, *Recherches sur la numismatique judaïque* (1854), pl. IV, 13, listed two with the alleged reading ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣ. ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΑ. But both the decipherment and the attribution are highly uncertain, see U. Kahrstedt, *Klio* 10 (1910), pp. 284-5, and *BMC Palestine*, p. xciv. It is, however, sometimes suggested that the coins of John Hyrcanus II with the Greek letter Α on the obverse refer to Alexandra, and were minted during her lifetime (see Y. Meshorer, *Jewish Coins*, p. 121, n. 14; cf. also R. de Vaux, *L'archéologie et les manuscrits de la Mer Morte*, p. 15).

2. On the chronology, see above p. 200. The Hebrew name of Alexandra has been handed down in various forms. In rabbinic sources she is referred to as שלמצה, שלמצר, שלמזר, שלמזר, שלצירון (see Jastrow, *Dictionary*, p. 1587). All these forms as well as שלמזר (Meg. Taan. § 24, gloss) no doubt derive from an original שלמצירון attested epigraphically as a Jewish woman's name. See C. Clermont-Ganneau, *Archaeological Researches in Palestine* I (1899), pp. 386-92 = J.-B. Frey, *CIJ* II, 1317; cf. 1223, 1253, 1265, 1297, 1353, 1363. A daughter of Herod is called Σαλαμψιδ, *Jos. Ant.* xviii 5, 4 (130) and Babata's step-daughter bore the same name: see Y. Yadin, *Bar-Kokhba* (1971), pp. 246-8. If J. T. Mlik's statement (*Ten Years of Discovery*, p. 73) concerning a reference to Alexandra as שלמצירון in an unpublished calendar from 4Q is confirmed, the issue will be definitely settled. Eusebius, *Chron., ad. ann. Abr.* 1941, mentions 'Alexandra quae et Salina' (=the Armenian translation and Jerome in Euseb. *Chron.*, ed. Schoere II, pp. 134-5). Cf. also

them with the reins of government. Whereas he was a despot after the oriental pattern, she was a God-fearing ruler after their own hearts. By their standards, her administration of power was blameless.

Alexander is said to have advised his wife on his deathbed to make peace with the Pharisees.<sup>3</sup> Whether this is true or not, the fact is that from the start of her reign Alexandra placed herself firmly on their side; she listened to their claims and wishes, and in particular restored legality to all the Pharisaic ordinances abrogated since the time of John Hyrcanus. The Pharisees were, during her reign the *de facto* rulers of the land. 'She had the name of royalty, but the Pharisees had the power. They recalled fugitives and released the imprisoned, and were in a word in no respect different from absolute rulers.'<sup>4</sup> They could only have wielded such authority if they were a determining factor in the supreme administrative body, the Gerusia. This must therefore have undergone an important transformation. Whereas it had hitherto consisted of the nobility and the priesthood, it must now have admitted Pharisaic teachers also.<sup>5</sup> A series of Pharisee triumphs reported by rabbinic tradition (Megillath Taanith) may also belong to this period of Pharisaic reaction. But the references are very brief and enigmatic, and the relatively late Hebrew glosses appended to the Aramaic text, expounding it as an account of a Pharisee victory over the Sadducees, provide no reliable historical evidence.<sup>6</sup> Neither

*Chron. pasch.*, ed. Dindorf, I, p. 351; Syncellus, ed. Dindorf, I, p. 559; Jerome, *In Daniele* 9:24 (CCL lxxvA, p. 874), 'Alexandra quae et Salina vocabatur'. In consequence, *Σαλίνα* in Euseb. *Chron.*, ed. Schoene I, p. 130 should be read as *Σαλίνα*. Eusebius undoubtedly derived this name from *Jos. Ant.* xiii 12, 1 (320), where the wife of Aristobulus I, who is almost certainly to be identified with the spouse of Alexander Jannaeus, is called *Σαλίνα* in two manuscripts, whereas the rest give, with Epitome and Vet.Lat., *Σαλώμη ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ, λεγομένη δὲ ὑπὸ Ἑλλήνων Ἀλεξάνδρα*.

3. *Ant.* xiii 15, 5 (401-4). According to the Talmud, bSoḥ. 22b, he said to her: 'Fear neither the Pharisees, nor those who are not Pharisees (Sadducees), but beware the hypocrites who behave like Zimri but seek Pinhas's reward' Cf. Derenbourg, *op. cit.*, p. 101; Finkelstein, *The Pharisees* I (1962), pp. xxiii, 837, n. 52.

4. *Ant.* xiii 16, 2 (408-9) πάντα τοῖς Φαρισαίοις ἐπιτρέπει ποιεῖν, οἷς καὶ τὸ πλῆθος ἐκέλευσε πειθαρχεῖν, καὶ εἴ τι δὲ καὶ τῶν νομίμων Ὑρκανὸς ὁ πενθερός αὐτῆς κατέλυσε ὡν εἰσῆργεον οἱ Φαρισαῖοι κατὰ τὴν πατρῴαν παράδοσιν, τοῦτο πάλιν ἀποκατέστησεν. τὸ μὲν οὖν ὄνομα τῆς βασιλείας εἶχεν αὐτῆ, τὴν δὲ δύναμιν οἱ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ γὰρ φυγάδας οὗτοι κατήγον καὶ δεσμώτας ἔλυον, καὶ καθάπαξ οὐδὲν δεσποτῶν διέφερον. Cf. also *B.J.* I 5, 2 (110-12).

5. The importance of Alexandra's reign for the transformation of the Sanhedrin was aptly emphasised by Wellhausen in *Isr. und jüd. Gesch.* (1958), pp. 267-71. Cf. H. Mantel, *Studies in the History of the Sanhedrin* (1961), pp. 56-7, 99-100; R. Meyer, *Tradition u. Neuschöpfung im antiken Judentum* (1965), pp. 47-50.

6. On Megillath Taanith, see above p. 114 f. The references in question are analysed by Lichtenstein, *HUCA* 8-9 (1931-2), pp. 290-8. See also Graetz, *Gesch.* III (1905-6), pp. 567-72 (note 1). Derenbourg, *op. cit.*, pp. 102 f.; Wellhausen, *Pharisäer und Sadducäer*, pp. 56-63.

does the statement in the Mishnah, to the effect that Simeon ben Shetaḥ was once responsible for hanging eighty women in Ascalon, offer any solid basis for an historical conclusion. This famous Pharisee does not seem to have possessed judicial authority in that city.<sup>7</sup> Historical information can thus be obtained solely from Josephus. And the clarity of his account is commendable. The Pharisees, in consciousness of their power, went so far as to order the execution of the former counsellors of King Alexander (who had advised him to massacre eight hundred rebels). Such despotic behaviour did not please the Jerusalem nobility, and they sent a deputation, which included Alexandra's own son, Aristobulus, to the queen to ask her to put an end to the Pharisees' activities; whether she liked it or not, she was obliged to comply.<sup>8</sup>

In her foreign policy, Alexandra showed prudence and energy.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, no political events of any importance occurred during her reign. The most significant was a military expedition undertaken by her son Aristobulus against Damascus, which, however, was without result.<sup>10</sup> The Syrian empire was at that time in the hands of the Armenian king, Tigranes, but although he assumed a threatening attitude towards the end of her reign, the dreaded invasion of Judaea did not take place, partly because Alexandra purchased peace with substantial gifts, and partly for the more cogent reason that the Romans under Lucullus invaded Tigranes's empire, thereby compelling him to abandon his plans in regard to Judaea.<sup>11</sup>

On the whole, Alexandra's reign was felt by the people to be a time of prosperity. Peace with other nations was matched by peace at home. The Pharisees were satisfied, and the people, too, were favourably disposed to the God-fearing queen. In Pharisaic tradition, the days of Alexandra are of course praised as a golden age in which—as though to reward the queen's piety—even the soil was astonishingly fruitful. 'In the days of Simeon ben Shetaḥ [and queen Salome], rain fell in the night of every Wednesday and Sabbath, so that the grains of wheat were like kidneys, the grains of barley like olives, and the lentils like

7. *mSanh.* 6:5; cf. *ySanh.* 23c; *yHag.* 77d; *Sifre Dt.* § 221. Derenbourg, *op. cit.*, p. 69, conjectured that the Simon in question was Simon Maccabee; cf. however, p. 106. Against historicity speaks the fact that Ascalon did not belong to Jewish territory; see above, p. 228. On the other hand, as rabbinic sources show, the story proved to be a considerable embarrassment to rabbis of later generations, who are therefore unlikely to have invented it, and could justify it only as a measure of expediency rather than one corresponding to Jewish law. Cf. Mantel, *op. cit.*, p. 9, n. 51.

8. *Ant.* xiii 16, 2-3 (410-17); *B.J.* I 5, 3 (113-14).

9. *Ant.* xiii 16, 2 (409), 3-4 (418-19); cf. *B.J.* I 5, 2 (112), 3 (115-16).

10. *Ant.* xiii 16, 3 (418); *B.J.* I 5, 3 (115-16).

11. *Ant.* xiii 16, 4 (419-21); *B.J.* I 5, 3 (116).

golden denarii; the scribes gathered such grains and preserved samples of them in order to show future generations the effect of sin.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, the Pharisees did not hold power so exclusively that the queen could, without danger, rely on them alone. The strength of the Sadducees was not yet broken. And the discontent among these circles was all the more dangerous since Alexandra's own son, Aristobulus, was at their head. The queen was herself to discover the instability of her position towards the end of her life. When she fell gravely ill at the age of seventy-three, and it was expected that her elder son, Hyrcanus, would succeed to the throne, Judas Aristobulus judged that the time had come to raise the banner of insurrection. As the number of his followers rapidly increased, the elders of the people<sup>13</sup> and Hyrcanus became seriously alarmed, and remonstrated with the queen that it was necessary to take steps against him. The queen granted the authority for this, but died before the outbreak of war, in 67 B.C.<sup>14</sup>

12. bTaan 23a. The text only mentions Simeon ben Shetaḥ, but when quoted in Tosaphoth to Shabb. 16b, both Simeon and the queen are named. See Derenbourg, *op. cit.*, p. 102; cf. also Sifra B<sup>h</sup>ukḳ. 1; Lev. R. 35:10. Be this as it may, it is clear that the period of Alexandra is meant.

13. *Ant.* xiii 16, 5 (428) τῶν δὲ Ἰουδαίων οἱ πρεσβύτεροι.

14. *Ant.* xiii 16, 5-6 (422-32); *B.J.* i 5, 4 (117-19). For the date see above pp. 200-1.