

§ 9 ARISTOBULUS I 104-103 B.C.

Sources

Josephus *Ant.* xiii 11 (301-19); *B.J.* i 3 (70-84).

On the disputed question of his coins see n. 7 below and Appendix IV.

Bibliography

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Abel, F.-M., *Histoire de la Palestine* I (1952), pp. 224-5.

Schalit, A., *König Herodes* (1969), pp. 708-9, 743-4.

John Hyrcanus left five sons.¹ He nevertheless stipulated in his will that the secular authority should devolve upon his wife,² whereas his eldest son Aristobulus should receive only the office of High Priest. The young man was not satisfied with this. He committed his mother to prison, and to death there by starvation, and assumed power himself.³ With the exception of Antigonus, he also incarcerated all his brothers. Only in Antigonus had he enough trust to allow him a share in the government. But it was this privileged position that proved fatal to Antigonus. It aroused the jealousy of many, and their intrigues in the end succeeded in causing Aristobulus to murder the brother whom he loved. Told that Antigonus himself aspired after supreme power, Aristobulus became suspicious, and gave the order to his bodyguard that if Antigonus should come to him armed he should be struck down. At the same time, he asked his brother to come to him unarmed. The enemies of Antigonus bribed the messenger, however, and made him say instead that Aristobulus had heard that he had acquired new weapons and armour, and invited him to visit him fully armed so that he could see them. Antigonus did so, and entering the citadel unsuspectingly, was killed by the guard. Aristobulus is said to have suffered bitter regret after the deed was done, so much so that it hastened his death.⁴

This whole domestic tragedy—if it may be taken as historical—reveals Aristobulus's character in a very poor light. His only interest was the exercise of power. All regard for piety was sacrificed to this. In other ways, too, Aristobulus departed further than his father from the ancient traditions of the Maccabees. Monarchical pride drove him

1. *Jos. Ant.* xiii 10, 7 (299).

2. *Ant.* xiii 11, 1 (302); *B.J.* i 3, 1 (71).

3. *Ant.* xiii 11, 1 (302); *B.J.* i 3, 1 (71). On the chronology, see above pp. 200-1.

4. *Ant.* xiii 11, 1-3 (303-17); *B.J.* i 3, 2-6 (72-84).

(according to Josephus) to assume the royal title borne by his descendants from this period onward until the time of Pompey.⁵ Greek culture, the spread of which was once opposed by the Maccabees, was directly favoured by him; that he also bore the title *Φιλέλλην* appears probable from the words of Josephus.⁶ As his father, Hyrcanus, had given purely Greek names to his sons (Aristobulus, Antigonus, Alexander), it may be assumed that it was he who paved the way for the views eventually adopted by Aristobulus.

It is not certain whether Aristobulus minted coins, but if he did, he made no use on them, either of his royal title, or his Greek name. The coins in question have the legend:

יהודה הכהן הגדול וחבר היהודים

Judas the High Priest and the Congregation of the Jews.⁷

Notwithstanding his phil-Hellenism, Aristobulus remained fundamentally Jewish, as is shown by the most important event of his short reign; namely, the conquest and Judaizing of the northern districts of Palestine. He undertook a campaign against the Ituraeans, conquered a large part of their land, united it with Judaea, and forced its inhabitants to be circumcised and to live according to the Jewish Law.⁸ The Ituraeans resided in the Lebanon.⁹ Since Josephus does not say that Aristobulus subdued 'the Ituraeans', but only that he conquered and Judaized part of their country; since, furthermore, Galilee had not hitherto belonged to the territory of the Jewish High Priest (see above p. 141; the conquests of John Hyrcanus I in the north had only extended as far as Samaria and Scythopolis; and since also, the population of Galilee was until this time more Gentile than Jewish (see above p. 142),

5. *Ant.* xiii 11, 1 (301); *B.J.* i 3, 1 (70). Strabo, xvi 2, 40 (762), relates this of Alexander Jannaeus, possibly because he overlooked the short reign of Aristobulus. But E. Meyer, *Ursprung und Anfänge* II, pp. 275-6, argues that Strabo is correct. Priestly kings ruled, for instance, in Sidon. Cf. vol. II, § 23, 4.

6. *Ant.* xiii 11, 3 (318): *χρηματίας μὲν φιλέλλην*. From the context, this probably means, 'he called himself *Φιλέλλην*', rather than, 'he acted as someone friendly towards the Greeks'; see Meyer, *op. cit.*, II, p. 277. For various Parthian kings with the title *Φιλέλλην*, see *BMC Parthia*, pp. 275-80; J. Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia* I (1965), p. 8. Cf. also the Nabataean king, Aretas (see Appendix II, pp. 578-9).

7. On Aristobulus's Hebrew name, cf. *Jos. Ant.* xx 10, 3 (240) *Ἰουδα τῷ καὶ Ἀριστοβούλῳ κληθέντι*. On the coins see, for their attribution to Aristobulus I, most recently B. Kanael, 'Altjüdische Münzen', *Jahrb. f. Numism. u. Geldgesch.* 17 (1967), p. 167; and for their attribution to Aristobulus II (see below, p. 233), Y. Meshorer, *Jewish Coins*, pp. 41-55. Cf. Appendix IV, p. 605.

8. *Jos. Ant.* xiii 11, 3 (318) *πολεμήσας Ἰτουραίους καὶ πολλὴν αὐτῶν τῆς χώρας τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ προσκτήσάμενος*. Strabo, following Timagenes and quoted by Josephus *ibid.* (319), has *χώραν τε γὰρ αὐτοῖς προσεκτήσατο καὶ τὸ μέρος τοῦ τῶν Ἰτουραίων ἔθνους ὑπεκίωσατο*. This passage is Jacoby FGtH 88 F 5 (Timagenes) = 91 F 11 (Strabo).

9. See Appendix I, p. 562.

it is justifiable to presume that the region conquered by Aristobulus was mainly Galilee, and that it was through him that Galilee was first Judaized.¹⁰ In any case, he extended Judaism further to the north, as Hyrcanus had done toward the south.

Aristobulus died of a painful disease after a reign of only one year.¹¹ Since Gentile historians judge him favourably,¹² it is possible that the charge of cruelty towards his relatives laid against this Hellenophile Sadducee was an invention of his political opponents, the Pharisees.

10. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the territories north and east of Galilee were still predominantly Gentile in the Herodian period. They cannot therefore have already been Judaized by Aristobulus. Consequently, the area annexed by Aristobulus must have been Galilee. That Josephus does not call it Galilee, may be explained by his use of a non-Jewish source. Another objection may be raised against the thesis that Galilee first came under Hasmonaean rule under Aristobulus, viz. that John Hyrcanus caused his son, Alexander Jannaeus, to be brought up there, *Ant.* xiii 12, 1 (322). But the implication of this may be precisely that Hyrcanus, not wishing his son to succeed to the throne, had him educated outside the country. It is also possible that Hyrcanus was already in possession of the southern parts of Galilee. The above remarks would then only refer to the northern parts. The statement concerning Alexander's upbringing in Galilee is, moreover, open to considerable suspicion because of the context in which it appears.

11. *Ant.* xiii 11, 3 (318); *B.J.* i 3, 6 (84).

12. Strabo, following Timagenes, quoted by Jos. *Ant.* xiii 11, 3 (319) ἐπεικῆς τε ἐγένετο οὗτος ὁ ἀνὴρ καὶ πολλὰ τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις χρήσιμος. See n. 8 above.