

### BOOK REVIEW

*Agrippa II: The Last of the Herods.* By DAVID M. JACOBSON. Routledge Ancient Biographies. London, UK and New York, NY: Routledge, 2019. Pp. xxviii + 232. Hardback, \$140.00. ISBN 978-1-138-33181-5.

The complex world of the Herodian dynasty, whose members ruled various regions of the southern Levant for over a century, has been well documented, both in the detailed account of Josephus and in numerous modern studies. Yet oddly the last of the Herods to rule in this area, Agrippa II, the great-grandson of Herod the Great, had not been the subject of his own biography before this outstanding study by David M. Jacobson

Agrippa II--officially Marcus Julius Agrippa--ruled from the late 40s AD until his death nearly half a century later. These were turbulent times in the southern Levant, with the impact of the Roman-Jewish war of AD 66-70 as well as the vagaries of Roman policy. There was also a series of questionable Roman procurators, and the endemic religious fervor.

Moreover, it is a persistent problem regarding understanding of the Herodian world that one must rely almost totally on the various account by Agrippa's contemporary Josephus, which can be excruciating in their detail yet do not always agree with one another. Since Josephus himself was a player in some of the events of Agrippa's reign, his treatises have both an agenda and all the perils of autobiography. Yet strangely, after Josephus discussed the first 40 years of the king's life in detail--through the era of the war--there is no further mention of him, although he survived a quarter of a century more, until AD 94/95.

It is the topic of Josephus and his reliability that opens Jacobson's work (6-15). There are only a few other notices of Agrippa II in the other standard Greek and Latin sources relating to the era, so the matter of Josephus is no trivial issue. Of particular note is a nuanced discussion of the reliability of speeches in his narrative; it is far too common among classical scholars to reject the veracity of speeches in ancient texts, but Jacobson well realizes that the problem is complex, and that outright dismissal is not the best means of interpretation. This issue of speeches is covered in greater detail in the discussion of Agrippa's address to the population of Jerusalem in the summer of AD 66, the high point of his career (60-6).

Jacobson has provided a straight-forward narrative of the king's career from his birth in Rome in (probably) AD 27-28 to his death, assumed to be around AD 94/95. Events in the life of his father, King Agrippa I, are also included. There is a discussion of important relationship of the family to the Roman elite, and the difficulties afflicting allied kings and queens as they attempted to balance their own kingdom's needs with those of Rome. Jacobson excellently threads the reader through the onomastic complexities of the Herodian dynasty, which can be baffling to all (a partial stemma is included).

Included in the biographical narrative of Agrippa II is a solid account of the Roman-Jewish war. Even though this topic has been previously studied in detail, the author's clear and concise rendition (86-120) is one of the most valuable now available for these years, even though the king himself begins to fade from Josephus' material.

After the war, one must rely on numismatic and epigraphical evidence for the last years of the king's life, with a few scattered notices in sources such as Dio (121-36). The documentation for his career ends with a coin struck in AD 94/95 (fig. 8.2), and the cessation of other numismatic and epigraphic evidence in the early AD 90s.

In Jacobson's narrative, King Agrippa II appears as the least effective of the Herodian kings, unable to gain control of the events swirling around him, and showing little ability to take a dominant role in the Roman-Jewish war. After the war he became little more than a wealthy landowner, living at his capital of Caesarea Philippi and having little effect on political events, perhaps the reason that Josephus saw no need to mention him further.

But far more interesting than the king is his sister Berenike II of Judaea. As is so often the case with women in antiquity--one has only to think of Cleopatra VII--the ancient notices of her tend to be either derogatory or merely connect her with the men in her life. Berenike remains most famous today for her relationship with the future emperor Titus, yet she emerges as the dominant Herodian of the era, taking control of situations where her brother could not. One of the benefits of Jacobson's book is a virtual biography of the queen.

The book broadly includes important ancillary material. Most notable is a long discussion and catalogue of the inscriptions relating to the king--nearly 40 in all--written by David F. Graf (145-72). This brings all Agrippa II inscriptions into one place. Another essential supplement is a discussion (with photographs) of over a dozen of the king's coins (173-97), which demonstrate the romanization that took place during his reign, as Roman motifs and Latin inscriptions begin to appear over the years. The work also has a selection of photographs of relevant places and a useful chronology of the king's life. It is thoroughly indexed, including the necessary list of passages cited, although one might wish for sub-headings in the index and better quality photographs. But this will long be the definitive study of Agrippa II, and is an essential addendum to the examination of the ever-fascinating Herodian world.

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