

Adam Kolman Marshak. *The Many Faces of Herod the Great*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015. 400 pp.  
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Adam Kolman Marshak (head history teacher and supervisor at the Gann Academy in Waltham, MA) provides an informative account of the life and times of Herod the Great (74/73–4 BCE). Rereading, reinterpreting, and reconstructing primary Jewish, Hellenistic, and Roman ancient literature and related sources (e.g., archaeology, coins) are key to Marshak's primary contribution to Herodian scholarship. By distinguishing Herod the actual person from Herod the public figure, he offers a historical breakthrough as he mediates between hostile literary traditions and depictions of a client king obedient to the Roman emperor Augustus (Octavian). Marshak builds on his years of research and writings (dissertation, articles) in reconstructing the legacy of Herod, encompassing a plethora of views. He necessarily comments on relevant materials in the Hebrew Scriptures, Dead Sea Scrolls, the New Testament, rabbinic writings, modern writers, and gleanings from nonhistorical sources that have contributed to Herod's image as fratricidal and despotic, feeding centuries of anti-Judaism associated with Herod.

The introduction provides a short overview of the book's intent to strike the "right relationship" in analyzing the many facets of Herod in a nonbiased, scholarly manner. Thus the chapters present the cultural and intellectual milieu of the Greco-Roman world and the rise and fall of the Hasmonean dynasty; survey the multifaceted and complicated life and dynasty of Herod; and invite a new approach to an oft-referenced, but misunderstood era of Judean history. Marshak's broad and balanced vision represents a major step forward to understanding the challenges, triumphs, and failures of a man who has left an unquestionable mark on Second Temple Judaism and beyond.

The checkered life of Herod the Great is often traced to his personal insecurities, his insensitivity toward others, and what many perceive as his paranoia. Marshak notes the importance of his non-Jewish Idumaeon origins and Herod's marital choices. The region of Idumaea (biblical Edom), south of Judea, spanned the eastern border of the Aravah Valley, land extending from the Dead Sea to Eilat. Edomite history is marked by ongoing conflict and battle with Judeans, Syrians, and Assyrians, ending in forced total conversion (circumcision) of Esau's children into Judaism, conducted by the Hasmonean priest-king John Hyrcanus between 140–130 BCE. Tannaitic decisions aside, Herod's Jewishness was not completely respected, since he was a descendant of Jews by force, not choice nor birth. Marriage to Mariamme of the Hasmonean dynasty did not increase his social acceptance. As a despot, he often struck out against real and imagined foes near and far; murdering family (wife, three sons, others), former sovereign John Hyrcanus II, and countless others. Was he an "evil genius of the Judean nation" (Heinrich Grätz, *History of the Jews*, 2:72), who was "prepared to commit any crime in order to gratify his unbounded ambition" (Isaac Broydè, "Herod I (surnamed the Great)," in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 6:356)?

## *Book Reviews*

Marshak postulates a prescription for royal success in the ancient world: a long and reasonably stable peaceful reign culminating in natural death, and passing on one's realm to designated heirs. The key to such success is an amiable patron-client relationship based on a well-tested formula. Patron/superiors sought trusted district/area/territory/land supervisors to collect the taxes, settle disputes, and supply military support and undeniable loyalty and submission to the patron. In return, the superior provides his client shelter and protection, advances his status and increases his land grant, advocates on his behalf against adversaries near and far, and exhibits reciprocal loyalty to his underling.

Herod's commanding presence, intrigue, diplomacy, and ruthless ways were enmeshed in the power of Rome, Caesar, and Senate, as well as in the larger Hellenistic and Jewish worlds. Marshak shows how Herod pleased Rome and was subsequently rewarded from his first exploit as prefect of Galilee at the age of twenty-five to later instances where he extradited rival opposition. Herod's rise to political power can be glimpsed early in his diplomatic career. As the Roman administrator of Galilee, Herod defied the Sanhedrin priority of just trial when he executed a band of brigands who looted heathen caravans and towns. Conniving intervention from Sextus Caesar, governor of Syria, pressured a weak Hyrcanus II to defy the Sanhedrin decision, and he arranged Herod's flight in the night. Herod found refuge and support from Sextus Caesar, who appointed Herod prefect of Coele-Syria. Henceforth, Herod cemented his reputation as a stellar politician simultaneously serving the needs of the Romans in the eastern Mediterranean and carving out his rule in Judea. A definitive sign of Herod's adroitness and brilliance was his quick switch in loyalty from Mark Anthony to Octavian following the defeat of the former by the latter in the battle at Actium in 31 BCE, and his ability to limit Cleopatra's designs on Judean territory. Finally, Herod's pro-Roman fidelity led to his appointment as king of Judea. Here he accepted the ethos of Hellenism inherited from his Hasmonean predecessors; and he advanced in his perceived role as a benefactor of Jews when he advocated for their issues and projects in Judea and throughout the eastern Mediterranean. In short, Herod mastered the patron-client relationship, and this served him well.

The volume is well researched and documented. Readership is not specified, but I presume it will appeal to academics and others with a strong interest in the hows and whys of a local Judean leader who bridges ethnicities (Idumean and Jewish), dynasties (Hasmonean and Herodian), and ideologies (Roman, Hellenistic, Jewish) to emerge as a genuine albeit controversial shaper of Judean history two millennia ago. Included are primary and secondary sources, a lengthy bibliography, an index of modern authors, an index of ancient literature, but unfortunately no subject index. The foreword (by John J. Collins) and Marshak's important book attempt to salvage the savage acts of Herod by "appreciating his very real achievements" (xv). But this reviewer wondered whether it is proper to bracket all moral and ethical standards when doing historiography. One needs to avoid the tendency to whitewash all the atrocious acts of the Hasmoneans and Herodians by celebrating their contributions to the rededication of Second Temple and Herod's other

major architectural expansion of the Second Temple compound. But these criticisms should not obscure the fact that Marshak has written an engaging and impressive scholarly work.

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Stuart S. Miller. *At the Intersection of Texts and Material Finds: Stepped Pools, Stone Vessels, and Ritual Purity among the Jews of Roman Galilee*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015. 342 pp.  
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The past twenty-five years have witnessed an explosion in scholarly interest in the topic of ancient Jewish purity practices. While much of this interest has focused on the textual—especially the critical halakhic texts from Qumran Cave 4, which began to be made accessible from the mid-1980s and onward—an increasing number of studies have also begun to pay close attention to archaeological remains that are widely interpreted as relating to ritual purity observance, namely: stepped pools and chalkstone vessels. Spawned by the seminal investigations of Ronny Reich on immersion pools (*mikva'ot*) and Yitzhak Magen on chalkstone vessels, these studies have invariably attempted to interpret the archaeological finds through the prism of halakhic texts, often rabbinic, while sometimes also trying to understand the texts in light of the material remains. Stuart Miller has published a number of articles on these topics over the course of the past decade, but his truly comprehensive treatment of the subject is now available in this thought-provoking volume, which serves not only as a response to the current discourse but also as an important contribution to the ongoing discussion in its own right.

Following a personal preface, the volume opens with an introduction that provides a “lay of the land” for the ensuing eleven chapters, with a brief summary of the history of archaeological research on stepped pools, and an introductory presentation of the data relating to the persistence of these pools, as well as of chalkstone vessels, following both the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE and the failure of the Bar Kokhba revolt in 135 CE. While recognizing that the number of stepped pools and chalkstone vessels drops sometime after 135 CE, Miller argues that it is not so much the relative intensity or ubiquity of these phenomena that is important, as much as their character and very persistence.

The first two chapters discuss the diverse meanings of the terms *mikveh* and *bet tevilah* in the sources, and the relevance of using these designations, as well as the modern term “ritual bath,” when relating to the archaeological remains of stepped pools. Here Miller argues that, on the one hand, the term *mikveh* in the tannaitic sources invariably means simply a natural or artificial “gathering of water,” which may or may not have originally been used exclusively for ritual bathing and, on the other hand, that the stepped pools found in excavations