

## Pawns of Power: The Political Manipulation of Girls in the Herodian Dynasty

The academic study of the lives of children in general, and the lives of ancient children in particular, is a recent trend of scholarship. Much of the work which has been done has focused on general characteristics of ancient childhood—child exposure, nursing, religious roles, education, and so on, most frequently grouped in collected volumes (most recently: Beaumont, Dillon, and Harrington, 2020; Crawford, Hadley, and Shepherd, 2018; Grubbs and Parkin, 2013). There remains, however, a need to examine the lives of those (admittedly few) children who appear in the ancient historical record. The royal families of the ancient world are one of the few instances where we do see children mentioned by ancient historiographers and other writers. In the Hellenistic royal families in particular, children appear in dynastic politics, yet no real work has been done to study them. This may, in part, be due to the lack of quality of historiographical sources we have for other periods and regions, such as the contemporary Roman Republic and Empire.

The exception to this is the Jewish royal houses in Jerusalem. These, however, can be a valuable source for our understanding of children in the wider Hellenistic and Roman worlds. The Hasmonean and later Herodian dynasties in Judea took shape in the context of the wider Hellenistic Near East. Unlike the other kingdoms of this period, the royal courts of Judea are covered continuously by a surviving historiographical source. Josephus, of course, is not an unproblematic source (though the same can be said of any ancient historiographer to a certain extent), but no such continuous narrative source exists for the Antigonid, Seleucid, or Ptolemaic kingdoms, especially in the later Hellenistic period, when we do not even have Polybius' tangential account of Roman expansion. Moreover, there are additional literary sources,

including the New Testament gospels, which attest to dynastic history of the Herodian family. As such, a study of children and childhood in the more consistently covered Jewish royal houses can provide a point of comparison for a study the position of children in royal courts in the Hellenistic Age more generally.

The study of ancient Jewish children has had even less work done than their counterparts in the Greek and Roman world. The several studies which have been written focus largely, though not exclusively, on children as they appear in the various biblical texts, both the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament, the latter overlapping between Jewish and Early Christian studies, (for example: Betsworth, 2019; Steinberg, 2015; and Bunge, 2008) These studies have also been primarily textual studies. No real work has been done on the lives of particular children.

This paper will examine two illustrative examples from the history of the Herodian royal house, which are illustrative of the uses to which children, and in particular girl children, were put by the adults around them who schemed for power. The first is the Hasmonean princess Mariamme, whom Herod the Great took as his wife to establish a secure claim to the throne in Jerusalem and undermine the claim of his rival claimant Antigonus. The second is the unnamed daughter of Herodias who, according to the gospels of Mark and Matthew, was used by her mother to secure the execution of John the Baptist. In each case, adults used the girls of the royal house as a tool to gain political advantages over their rivals. Though we must be cautious about relying too heavily on these narratives, particularly that regarding the daughter of Herodias (Roller, 2018; Kraemer, 2006), they indicate the uses to which girls were used in royal contexts in the Hellenistic Near East, and can be a starting point to our understanding of the roles of children in the politics of the other Hellenistic dynasties.

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