

RBL 04/2007



Jensen, Morten Hørning

Herod Antipas in Galilee: The Literary and Archaeological Sources on the Reign of Herod Antipas and Its Socio-economic Impact on Galilee

Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2/215

Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006. Pp. xvi + 316. Paper. €59.00. ISBN 3161489675.

Mark A. Chancey
Southern Methodist University
Dallas, Texas

One of the chief insights of the Third Quest for the historical Jesus is that to understand Jesus, one must understand Galilee. Increasingly, scholars have also recognized that to understand Galilee, one must understand the impact of the reign of its Herod Antipas. Despite this insight, however, Herod Antipas has been the object of surprisingly few in-depth examinations. Morten Hørning Jensen's monograph is the first book-length treatment of him to appear in over three decades (the last was Harold W. Hoehner's 1972 *Herod Antipas* [SNTSMS 17; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972]) and will become a milestone in studies of both Antipas and Galilee.

Jensen's extensive review of not only the pertinent ancient literary sources but also excavation reports sets it apart from earlier discussions of Herod Antipas. He focuses on the socioeconomic condition of early first-century C.E. Galilee, particularly urban-rural relations. He convincingly demonstrates that recent scholarly claims that the reign of Antipas resulted in the impoverishment of the Galilean countryside have little basis in the currently available evidence. His work stands as a particularly significant challenge to studies espousing views of Galilee that are based more on the presuppositions of particular social-scientific models than on careful review of the actual data.

The book is a slightly revised version of Jensen's 2005 Aarhus University dissertation, written under the direction of Per Bilde. It consists of eight chapters, a twenty-five-page bibliography, twenty-nine figures of various types (maps of regions and individual sites; photographs and drawings of coins, structural remains, and other archaeological finds; charts of data), and indices of references to ancient sources, modern authors, and subjects.

Jensen devotes chapters 1 and 2 to the history of scholarship regarding both Antipas and the historical Jesus and to method, describing how his own approach differs from earlier studies. He rightly notes that "Herod Antipas has increasingly become a 'factor of explanation and verification' of the various presentations of his Galilee" (9). Jensen affirms the emerging consensus that "the Galilee of Antipas was *not* as Hellenized as anywhere else in the Roman world" (45). Nonetheless, he argues, "Antipas has emerged as *the* decisive factor of explanation of the socio-economic realities of early-first-century Galilee" (46). Jensen points out that "the different use of [socio-scientific] models seems to predetermine the different views on the urban-rural relationship" (34), contrasting studies that depict harmonious urban-rural relations with those that view those relations as conflicted. In regard to the latter, he points to studies (i.e., those of John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan Reed; Richard A. Horsley; and William E. Arnal) that argue that the ruler's policies—particularly his construction of the cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias, his level of taxation, his minting of coinage, and his purported commercialization of Galilee—created an economic crisis that prompted the activity of Jesus and his movement. He describes his own approach as a "source-oriented method" that examines ancient references to Antipas within their own literary contexts and that interprets archaeological data from Galilee within a larger regional perspective.

Jensen provides a thorough review of the literary evidence regarding Herod Antipas in chapters 3 and 4, discussing not only Josephus and the New Testament but also Nicolaus of Damascus, Strabo, Philo, Tacitus, Justin Martyr, and Dio Cassius. He makes greater use of Josephus scholarship than most other studies of Galilee and carefully differentiates between the emphases of that historian's various works. He argues that Josephus's negative attitude toward Antipas should be understood as part of his larger portrayal of the Herodian dynasty as rulers who were insensitive to Jewish law and tradition: "Josephus wants to present Antipas as another example of a bad Herodian ruler who was not able to safeguard the ancient and stable Jewish way of life" (99). However, despite his negative tone toward Antipas, Josephus provides few specific examples of his tyranny (the execution of Jon the Baptist being an obvious exception). Thus, "*Antipas was by no means remarkable either in deeds or misdeeds*" (100, emphasis original). The ancient sources largely agree in depicting Antipas as having mostly positive relations with both Jerusalem and Rome. Despite the relative stability of his reign, which had no internal uprisings,

Antipas never received the title “king” or “ethnarch” from the emperor, a slight that Jensen interprets as evidence of the ruler’s mediocrity.

Chapter 5, the longest in the book, reviews the archaeological record, drawing on both published and unpublished information. Jensen carefully sifts through the data for Sepphoris and Tiberias, differentiating the modest early-first-century remains from those of earlier and later periods. For each, the greatest growth occurred in the Middle and Late Roman periods, not the first century C.E. For comparison, he examines several nearby rural sites (Yodefat/Jotapata, Cana, Capernaum, and Gamla, a site in the Golan Heights with historical and cultural connections with Galilee) and neighboring cities (Caesarea Maritima and the Decapolis cities of Hippos, Gadara, and Scythopolis). Far from showing any signs of decline in the decades prior to the First Revolt, the rural communities appear to have been flourishing, with public buildings, upper-class residences, and varied industrial and agricultural activity. The discussion of neighboring cities shows that Sepphoris and Tiberias were modest in comparison, smaller in size, with fewer monumental public buildings. “Antipas, rather than imposing real novelties, brought Galilee up to date with some of the infrastructure already known in the area” (185). Jensen’s analysis seriously undermines claims that Antipas’s construction programs were massive in scale and led to the economic devastation of Galilean villages by draining away their resources.

Chapter 6 is devoted to an investigation of the coins of Antipas, focusing on their messages (i.e., images and inscriptions) and circulation in comparison with the coins of the Hasmoneans, the procurators, and other Herodian rulers. In line with other studies, he emphasizes the lack of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic imagery on Antipas’s coinage as evidence for the ruler’s respect for the Jewish prohibition of figural imagery. Jensen’s investigation of monetary circulation relies heavily on research by Danny that demonstrates that Antipas minted only a small number of coins. Major changes in the amount of currency in Galilee occurred in the Hasmonean and Middle Roman periods, not the first century C.E.—a fact that weakens assertions that Antipas tried to monetize the economy to facilitate tax collection and debt accumulation.

The final two chapters synthesize Jensen’s findings. Antipas, in his estimation, was a “minor Roman client ruler, unremarkable in both successes and failures” (242), “a minor ruler with a moderate impact” (254). Neither the ancient literary sources nor the archaeological data provide clear support for the view that his reign was characterized by economic crisis. Indeed, “it seems indisputable that the rural area was able to sustain its livelihood and even expand it in this period” (247). At least as reflected in the archaeological record, the most significant changes in Galilean society occurred well before and after the reign of Antipas. Thus, hypotheses suggesting that Jesus’ activity is

best explained as a response to the economic conditions created by Herod Antipas are “too bold and unwarranted. Too much is explained with too little” (259).

My critiques of the book are all minor. More interaction with narrative-critical studies of the Gospels would further strengthen Jensen’s consideration of ancient literary references to Herod Antipas. Likewise, his argument for the historicity of Luke’s report that Herod Antipas questioned Jesus (23:6–12) would profit from more detail. The overview of the population of Tiberias (136) should be supplemented with Josephus’s reference to the massacre of the Greek residents there at the start of the Revolt (*Vita* 67). Lastly, the work exhibits a fair amount of repetition, particularly in its frequent summary sections.

Such criticisms are mere quibbles. This is an important study, one that no scholar writing on the cultural climate of first-century Galilee or the historical Jesus can afford to ignore. It is a fine exemplar of thoroughness and nuance and will quickly become the standard reference work on Herod Antipas’s impact on the region. Those who would disagree with Jensen’s findings are faced with the daunting task of resifting through the evidence to find support for their own position. The work’s significance is broader than Galilean studies, however. It highlights the types of problems that occur when application of theoretical models is not accompanied by extensive review of the actual evidence.