
Featured Research

Undergraduate Student Research

Fall 11-2013

Herod the Great's Message through Year 3 Coin

Elizabeth Chau

Pepperdine University, Elizabeth.Chau@Pepperdine.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/sturesearch>



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [History of Religion Commons](#), and the [Other History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

-empty-

This Research Poster is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Student Research at Pepperdine Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Featured Research by an authorized administrator of Pepperdine Digital Commons. For more information, please contact bailey.berry@pepperdine.edu.

HEROD THE GREAT'S MESSAGE THROUGH YEAR 3 COIN

ELIZABETH CHAU

Abstract

King Herod the Great was a half Jewish client king who struggled with appeasing Roman rulers and yet avoiding conflict with the Jews. In the investigation of a coin from year 3 of King Herod's reign I have found that Herod was aware of Jewish customs and respected their customs through the lack of Pagan symbols. Additionally, the Greek lettering and the symbolism on the coin illustrates Herod's Hellenistic reign. In my observations of the coin King Herod's Hellenistic reign was characterized by his great value of power and yet respect of Jewish culture while at the same time pleasing the Roman rulers.

History of Herod the Great

Herod I was made a client king of Judea by the Romans though he himself was half Jewish. When Herod first came into power the economic situation was poor, however, Herod's heavy taxation policy greatly improved the economy. Herod's accomplishments include the construction of an amphitheater, the coastal harbor city of Caesarea Maritima, the fortress Herodium, the capture of Masada, and most importantly the restoration of the Jewish temple. Herod was extremely paranoid that the religious rulers would take his power and reacted by exterminating the threat. Herod the Great was the same king the Gospel of Matthew says had all the newborn boys in Bethlehem killed because he was afraid of the rumors that a king would be born during that specific time period (Matthew 2:16). Much of this history gives context to the symbols on the coin and explains Herod's motives for placing the images on the coin.

Obverse



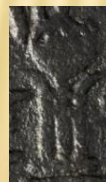
Dimensions
Mass = 5.93 g
Length = 26 mm

Discussion: Obverse

This bronze coin was minted in Samaria under Herod the Great. Client rulers could not mint coins with silver or gold. The obverse of the coin has the words "BASILEOUS ERODOU", or "belonging to King Herod", in Greek. There are no letters in Hebrew, which is significant because this demonstrates the overall Hellenistic reign of Herod. Also on the coin is the year 3, which provides an indicator of the time the coin was minted, year 3 of Herod's reign, or 37 BCE. The writing begins near the middle of the coin at "B" and continues in a circular direction ending at "Y". Additionally, in the center of the obverse is a tripod and a ceremonial bowl called a "lebes". This was used as a decoration in the Jewish temples. The presence of this Jewish object shows Herod's attempts to respect the Jews and avoid conflict as well as the lack of a face on the coin, as a face on a coin would symbolize idolatry to the Jewish people.



<http://metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/23183>



Tripod and lebes

Reverse



Discussion: Reverse

On the reverse of the coin at the very center is a Dioscuri cap, with a star on top, resting on a table. The Dioscuri were twins who were the Greek gods of horsemanship and were believed to aid in the escape of a storm. The Dioscuri were often pictured with such a cap and the appearance of a Greek symbol such as the Dioscuri cap provides further evidence of King Herod's Hellenistic rule. This is a point conflict with some scholars as some believe that the center object is a military helmet, however, I believe the Dioscuri cap theory is more probable due to the appearance of very similar Dioscuri caps on other coins of the same time as well as the appearance of a star on top. The cap is flanked by a palm branch at each side, which represents victory. During this time of Herod's reign he had just been re-crowned king by the Romans and illustrates his value of power. Because he was only a client king he often had to prove himself to the Romans and was paranoid that his power would wane. Such symbols appear on the coin because Herod wants to show that he is a victorious king to both his subjects and to the Romans.

Military Helmet



http://www.bible-history.com/herod_the_great/HER003.htm

Dioscuri Cap



<http://www.theod.com/Quaranta/Dioscuri.html>

Contrasting Opinions

Many scholars have differing interpretations of what is on the coin. To some the central image on the reverse is a military helmet resting on a table with the cheek pieces hanging down. However, the problems with this theory would be questions as to why the cheek pieces would be hanging in the middle of the helmet. Other scholars believe that the central image could be a Dioscuri cap resting on a table because various other coins had very similar looking Dioscuri caps with a star on the top as well. This does not, however, explain the two objects below the table. Scholars have yet to agree on one or the other explanation as both have compelling evidence for their prospective theories.

Conclusion

While researching the Herod year 3 coin much was learned about Herod's reign itself. Through the Greek symbolism and lettering it was evident that Herod's subjects operated under great Hellenization. Furthermore, the presence of Jewish items as well as Roman objects demonstrates Herod's need to appease both the Romans and the Jews in order to keep and advance his place as a powerful figure. Herod the Great was faced with many challenges, however, he managed to prosper and led a successful reign as king.

Works Cited

See Works Cited handout