5

The Pilgrimage Economy of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period

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There have been many general studies of the economy of Jerusalem in the late Second Temple period.[1] It is clear that, despite social tensions engendered by the inequitable distribution of wealth, this was an exceptionally prosperous society.[2] The basis of such prosperity can hardly have been the exploitation of the agrarian hinterland in the Judaean hills which, despite the panegyrical remarks of Josephus (*War* 3, 49–50), was too poor and too far from the coast for the encouragement of cash crops for interregional trade. Jerusalem did not lie on any important trade route. Nor was prosperity a product of the political role of the city in the Herodian period and under Roman procuratorial rule, for the government of Judaea was often based elsewhere than Jerusalem and, in marked context to Ptolemaic Alexandria, Jerusalem never developed a society and economy based around a royal court. The wealth of Jerusalem derived in one form or another from its sanctity. It is a truism that without its religious role Jerusalem would never have become a major city; specifically, although by the end of the Second Temple period the city may have attracted wealthy visitors to study or to settle in an exciting international atmosphere, the main cause of prosperity was the presence of the Temple. The aim of this paper will be to explore the role in the economy of mass pilgrimage and, in particular, the significance of pilgrimage from abroad.

In theory, the economic impact of pilgrimage should have been immense. According to the Torah (Ex. 23:17; Deut. 16:16), every adult Jewish male was required to visit the Temple three times each year, and although the total size of the Jewish population in this period is unknown, it was undoubtedly very large indeed.[3] Comparison with the history of Mecca in more recent times encourages speculation that much of Jerusalem's society might have been bound up in the service industries required by pilgrims, so that the periodic

pilgrim festivals might have become the "harvest" of the city,[4] although since Jerusalem did at least have *some* indigenous economic base, the city would not have been as totally dependent on visitors as Mecca became.[5]

Some aspects of the pilgrimage process and its importance in later Second Temple Judaism can be derived from explicit evidence in the ancient sources, particularly the writings of Josephus and early rabbinic texts.[6] Visitors might use tents (*Ant.* 17, 213–17) but often they needed to be given accommodation by institutions[7] or individuals (Mark 11:11), for which they might pay in cash or in kind (as envisaged in T Ma'aser Sheni 1:12). They needed food, drink, luxuries, and souvenirs, and it is reasonable to assume that the craftsmen of the city, who greeted the pilgrims on arrival according to M Bikkurim 3:3, took advantage of the market for their goods. Pilgrims tended to stay not just for the minimum period required, but for the whole festival period, often bringing with them their wives and children, even though the latter were under no obligation to visit the Temple at all.[8] Proper performance of pilgrimage without considerable expenditure was more or less impossible, however cheaply the pilgrim tried to live, since, according to early rabbinic texts, there was a requirement for the money earned in exchange for the second tithe (Deut. 14:26) to be spent by the pilgrim while within the boundaries of the city.[9]

It is unlikely that every adult male Jew visited Jerusalem at the same time, but ancient comments on the impact of pilgrimage in the first century C.E. make it clear that the festivals were very crowded. The interest of the sources lies naturally not in economics but in the political volatility which resulted from the presence of huge numbers of people (*War* 2, 224 and elsewhere). Passover was apparently a particularly popular pilgrimage time (*Ant.* 17, 214), but the Pentecost and Tabernacles festivals were also well attended. Numbers in ancient texts are always hard to evaluate, but Josephus clearly intended to impress his readers when he gave the figure of 2,700,000 male pilgrims who came to Jerusalem for the Passover in 66 C.E (*War* 6, 425); the size of the city's normal population is unknown, but even the highest estimate is under a quarter of a million.[10]

As Philo remarked with pride, these pilgrims came from all over the Jewish world: they were "thousands of men from thousands of cities" (*Special Laws* 1, 69). Such mass international pilgrimage is not attested for any other cult in the Roman empire, for the simple reason that only Jews insisted (at least in theory) both that only one Temple was a valid place for sacrifices and that all adult male devotees of the cult were duty bound to make regular obeisance there. Other shrines, like the sanctuary of Asclepius at Pergamum or Artemis at Perge, also hosted regular large gatherings,[11] but these festivals were essen-

tially local affairs for the surrounding region. A devotee of Asclepius in Italy would usually visit a shrine to the god closer to home than Pergamum, and would see no value in the long trek to Asia Minor; pagan pilgrims who embarked on long journeys were the exception, not the rule.[12]

It seems clear that mass international pilgrimage was a feature of Judaism which distinguished it from other religions, thus explaining the nervousness of the Roman authorities at the potentiality for political unrest among such huge crowds. It is worth comparing the caution of Trajan when asked by Pliny the Younger about setting up a fire brigade in Nicomedia in Bithynia (*Letters* 10, 33–34). It is also likely (if unprovable) that such pilgrimage was to prove an important element in the prosperity of the city in the last century of its existence. Below I shall investigate a question which, I think, has not been previously asked by scholars: when did such mass international pilgrimage start?

It has been noted before that no reference to international pilgrimage can be found in any source referring to the period before Herod.[13] I would like to suggest that this silence may not be accidental. It seems to me significant that nothing about such pilgrimage can be found in the glowing description of Jerusalem found in *Ps. Aristeas to Philocrates* 83–120, a text composed probably in the mid-second century B.C.E., or in the writings of any of the Greek and Latin gentile authors who wrote about Jews before the mid-first century B.C.E.[14]—despite the fact that mass movements across international borders would have been very noticeable in the late Hellenistic period, with Jews coming from Alexandria (in Ptolemaic territory until 31 B.C.E.) or Babylonia (in Parthian territory). Both Jewish and non-Jewish writers referred quite frequently to the transfer of money from the Diaspora to the Temple. This was the theme of Cicero (*On Behalf of Flaccus* 28), Josephus described it as an ancient custom (*Ant.*14, 185–267; 16, 160–78), and according to Bar. 1: 10–14 Babylonian Jews sent money (rather than themselves) to Jerusalem for offerings and prayers to be made on their behalf in the holy city on the feast days. None of these sources, however, refers to Diaspora pilgrimage. It seems likely that the pilgrimage feasts before Herod's time involved essentially only local Jews from the land of Israel; the vastly expanded Temple court which Herod was to build would eventually be filled to overflowing, but no source suggests a problem with lack of space in the Temple before then.

If mass pilgrimage began in Herod's reign, how did it come about? By chance, perhaps. It is notoriously hard to gauge the intentions of individuals from their actions. But it seems to me more likely that the prime motivator was Herod himself. Herod was a remarkable businessman, speculator, and entrepreneur,[15] and had initiated numerous complex financial schemes.[16] It is

hard to believe that he was unaware of the economic consequences of the upsurge in the number of visitors to Jerusalem during his rule, especially when his own expenditure did so much to support it (see below). It was unlikely that Diaspora pilgrimage would have become popular unless it was encouraged. Diaspora Jews were not tied into the Temple service by the close links of the *ma'amad* system, which apparently applied only to inhabitants of the land of Israel.[17] It is possible that the loyalty to Jerusalem of the huge Jewish population of Egypt (and especially Alexandria) was threatened by the competing attractions of the shrine at Leontopolis, although concern about such competition cannot be proved. Josephus even hints that pilgrims were only expected to go up to Jerusalem "from the ends of the land which the Hebrews shall conquer" (*Ant.* 4, 203). It was a product not of a change of halakha from the biblical requirement, but of custom, that Diaspora Jews had come to assume that they were not required to visit the Temple three times a year. If their custom was to alter, they would have to wish to go.

Herod had good economic reasons to encourage pilgrimage from the Diaspora. The kingdom of Judaea, granted to him and captured for him by the Roman state,[18] lacked more than a few capital assets. There was a limit to the wealth to be derived from natural resources such as the balsam groves of 'En Gedi, and Judaea was not well suited to bring in a large income from agricultural exports. The only real asset of the kingdom to be exploited was the status of Jerusalem as a religious center, and that is what Herod set out to do.

The time was propitious for the venture. The *pax Romana* permitted freedom of movement throughout much of the world inhabited by Jews, particularly after the suppression of Mediterranean piracy by Pompey in 67 B.C.E.[19] After 31 B.C.E., the huge Alexandrian Jewish community was, like Judaea, integrated into the Roman empire; the Jews of Syria and Asia Minor had been incorporated within the empire earlier. The Babylonian community remained under Parthian rule at this time, but trading contacts between the empires multiplied, as is evident from the sudden prosperity of the caravan city of Palmyra,[20] which facilitated communications of other kinds. In any event, the brief episode of Parthian control over Judaea in 40–37 B.C.E.[21] initiated far closer relations between Palestinian and Babylonian Jews than had been known for many centuries.[22] Even if Herod's Hasmonaean predecessors thought of encouraging mass pilgrimage (which is unknown, although many of them invested in the repair of the Temple itself), political instability would have made it difficult.[23] By contrast, Herod chose the right time.

The economic advantages brought by such pilgrims were multifarious. Pilgrims helped to protect delivery of the offerings sent to the Temple, even by those who did not themselves go up to worship (cf. *Ant.* 17, 312–13, on the

caravans which came from Babylon); according to T Sheqalim 2:3, which may or may not be based on anything more than speculation, the offerings from remote lands were a rich source of Temple income. Jews from the Mediterranean Diaspora seem to have picked up from their gentile compatriots the practice of euergetism, apparently uncommon among Judaean Jews outside the Herodian family. Thus, the gates of the Temple were plated with gold by Alexander the Alabarch, who came from Alexandria (*War* 5, 201–206), and there are other examples of such conspicuous expenditure by individuals in search of prestige.[24] Visitors were bound to spend money on the purchase of souvenirs,[25] and although it is impossible to tell precisely when the non-biblical requirement to spend all second tithe money in Jerusalem became current,[26] it is probable that it was in operation in Herod's time.

How could Herod set about attracting Diaspora pilgrims to the holy city? The dictatorial methods he used in the administration of Judaea[27] would hardly work in this case, since he lacked any formal powers outside his kingdom, but he was an expert at diplomacy, as shown by his ability to prosper through the Roman civil wars. The examples of the capitalist schemes of the Ptolemies in Egypt and the radical reorganization of Rome by Augustus after Actium undoubtedly influenced his general policies, but in this case only indirectly.

Some methods of encouragement were simply practical. Herod protected the pilgrimage route from Babylonia by installing a military colony in Batanaea (*Ant.* 17, 29–31), although there is no evidence that he encouraged a network of protected pilgrimage routes for the Mediterranean Jews; on the contrary, arrival at his new port city of Caesarea would have presented a disconcerting first view of the holy land for pious Jews, since the temple of Rome and Augustus dominated the harbor.[28] The Temple provided, either through its own staff or by leasing space to entrepreneurs, good facilities for the exchange of foreign currencies (M Sheqalim 2:1, 4), but Herod's only obvious contribution to this service was the building of the great basilica in which it was probably housed.

More significant, perhaps, were Herod's efforts to alter Diaspora attitudes to the Temple to make Diaspora Jews feel that pilgrimage would be worthwhile. Among more blatant moves was the appointment of high priests from the principal Diaspora communities, such as the Babylonian Hananel, and Jesus b. Phiabi and Boethus, both from Egypt. This preference for non-Judaean priests as incumbents of the highest office has often been discussed as part of the suppression of the local Jewish elite,[29] but it is reasonable also to emphasize its effect in raising the profile of Diaspora Jews in Jerusalem. Herod in any case maintained contact with many Diaspora communities, portraying himself as their protector throughout the Roman empire, much as

Hyrcanus had done before him; in this case, his patronage may have bought the king prestige in the eyes of his Roman masters by showing him to be a ruler with a constituency wider than just Judaea, and the promotion of pilgrimage may only have been a secondary motive.[30]

It is plausible to postulate a similar dual motive for the single action by Herod most likely to have stimulated pilgrimage—the rebuilding of the Temple. Rebuilding began in 20/19 B.C.E. and was basically completed by ca.12 B.C.E., although work on the building continued fairly constantly until 64 C.E., since the edifice needed frequent repair.[31] Herod himself explained his massive expenditure as a product of his piety and wealth, according to Josephus, whose report probably derived from Nicolaus of Damascus (*Ant.* 15, 380–90), and the new edifice was doubtless intended to reflect the glory of his rule, much as Augustus tried to enhance his own image by the rebuilding of the city of Rome. The initial completion of the Temple project was celebrated on the anniversary of Herod's accession to power (ibid., 15, 421–31). Like Augustus in contemporary Rome, Herod enhanced public space by enlarging the hillside through the use of an artificial platform built on arches. It is less likely that Herod's main hope was to win popularity with his Jewish subjects, who were apparently nervous about the whole project and the possibility that it might prove sacrilegious (ibid., 15, 385); like Augustus, Herod's main hope may have been to ensure his reputation for posterity.

At the same time, it is a reasonable assumption that Herod believed that his rebuilding made economic sense and that it was more than simply a heavy financial drain. It is hard to doubt Josephus' insistence (ibid., 15, 380; 17, 162) that Herod paid for the initial construction out of his own pocket, but the continuing work on the site, not completed until more than three-quarters of a century later, was financed from Temple money and the grandiose project may have served a useful purpose in releasing into the economy sacred funds otherwise kept idle in the Temple treasury.[32] In practice, the building project stimulated the entire economic life of the kingdom.[33] Despite the behavior of Agrippa II in seeking alternative jobs for the workmen after the Temple was finally completed in 64 C.E. (ibid., 20, 219–22), it is implausible to see the provision of employment as a prime aim of Herod. Equally implausible is the picture of Herod's finances given by Josephus (*Ant.* 16,150–55), where he described Herod's munificence as the product of a passion for honor which blinded him to the economic consequences of his generosity. According to Josephus, it was only after prolonged famine that Herod's expenditure on urban reconstruction led him into difficulties in feeding his subjects from his own resources (ibid., 15, 302–16). The whole thrust of this paper is to encourage the view that Herod's expenditure was really a capital investment

expected to pay off in time in the promotion of tourism. Pilgrimage to the great new sanctuary, one of the wonders of the Roman world, built on a massive scale with meticulous care, became an enjoyable and awe-inspiring experience, such that Diaspora Jews would be willing to undergo the inevitable discomforts of the journey and, on arrival, would spend their money in the holy city.

It takes time for investment in infrastructure to pay off, and it is unlikely that Herod's own finances benefited greatly from the influx of tourists he encouraged. His own income derived from direct and indirect taxation in Judaea (benefiting in the latter case from the increase in interregional trade) and by the profit from tax concessions in various parts of the empire leased to him by the Roman state. It also remained true, even in the very last days of the Temple, that the great majority of pilgrims still seems to have come from the land of Israel. There is no evidence that a Diaspora Jew like Philo went up more than once to Jerusalem (*On Provid.* 2, 64), and it is a surprising fact that non-local coin issues have rarely turned up in the archaeology of the city.[34] Nonetheless, by the mid-first century C.E., many Jews from many different places could be found in the vicinity of the Temple (Acts 2: 9–11; 6:9), and Jerusalem was, in the eyes of Pliny the Elder, one of the great cities of his time (*Nat. Hist.* 5, 14).

Notes

1. For example, J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (London, 1969).
2. M. Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judaea: the Origins of the Jewish Revolt against Rome A.D. 66–70* (Cambridge, 1987), 51–75.
3. For estimates of the size of the Jewish population, see L. H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World* (Princeton, 1993), 293, 555–56.
4. M. N. Pearson, *Pious Passengers: the Hajj in Earlier Times* (London, 1994), 172–87.
5. F. E. Peters, *Jerusalem and Mecca: the Typology of the Holy City in the Near East* (New York and London, 1986).
6. See especially S. Safrai, *Pilgrimage in the Time of the Second Temple*[2] (Jerusalem, 1985) (Hebrew). See also J. Feldman, "La circulation de la Tora: les pèlerinages au second Temple," *La Société juive à travers l'histoire*, IV, ed. S. Trigano (Paris, 1992–93), 161–78.
7. J.-B. Frey, *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum*, II (Rome, 1952), no. 1404.
8. Safrai (above, note 6), chapter 6.
9. E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief* (London, 1992), 128–29.
10. See the figures quoted by Feldman (above, note 3).
11. R. MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven, 1981), 25–26.
12. Ibid., 29.
13. Safrai (above, note 6), 55.

14. See the authors cited in volume I of M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (Jerusalem, 1974).

15. M. Grant, *Herod the Great* (London, 1971), 173.

16. See especially E. Gabba, "The Finances of King Herod," *Greece and Rome in Eretz Israel: Collected Essays*, eds. A. Kasher et al. (Jerusalem, 1990), 160–68.

17. On the *ma'amad*, see M Ta'anit 4:2–3.

18. On Herod's accession to power, see Josephus, *Ant.* 14, 381–93.

19. See P. Greenhalgh, *Pompey: the Roman Alexander* (London, 1980), 91–100.

20. On Palmyra, see J. Starcky and M. Gawlikowski, *Palmyra*[2] (Paris, 1985), 36–42; E. Will, *Les Palmyréniens: la venise des sables* (Paris, 1992), 33–46.

21. E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, eds. G. Vermes et al., 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1973–87), I, 278–83.

22. On Herod and the Jews of Babylonia, see J. Neusner, *A History of the Jews of Babylonia*, I: *The Parthian Period*, rev. ed. (Leiden, 1969), 34–39.

23. I owe this observation to Ed Sanders.

24. On the inscription near the Temple by a Jew from Rhodes, see B. Isaac, "A Donation for Herod's Temple in Jerusalem," *IEJ* 33 (1983), 86–92.

25. See M. Del Verme, *Giudaismo e Nuovo Testamento: il caso delle Decime* (Naples, 1989), 194–97.

26. J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (London, 1969), 9.

27. A. Schalit, *König Herodes: der Mann und sein Werk* (Berlin, 1969).

28. On the buildings of Caesarea, see K. G. Holum and R. L. Hohlfelder (eds.), *King Herod's Dream: Caesarea on the Sea* (London and New York, 1988), 72–105.

29. See especially M. Stern, "Social and Political Realignments in Herodian Judaea," *The Jerusalem Cathedra*, III, ed. L. I. Levine (Jerusalem, 1982), 40–62.

30. Josephus, *Ant.* 16, 27–65; cf. Schürer (above, note 21), I, 319.

31. Ibid., I, 292, note 12, on the chronology.

32. Gabba (above, note 16), 166–68.

33. Ibid., 166.

34. Z. Safrai, "Jerusalem as an Economic Center during the Roman-Byzantine Period," *Recent Innovations in the Study of Jerusalem*, eds. Z. Safrai and A. Faust (Ramat Gan, 1996), 29 (Hebrew).