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Part 2

The Adiabene Royalty among their Own People

Introduction

In part 2 we will discuss the sources presenting Queen Helena and other members of the Adiabene royalty as exemplary models of good royalty for the Jewish People. First, we will analyze the royal picture of Helena as a benefactor to the people of Jerusalem in Ant. 20:101 and next the Rabbinic image of members of the Adiabene royalty as examples of praiseworthy piety. Secondly, we will deal with sources presenting another royal attribute of the Adiabene royalty – the possession of monumental structures in Jerusalem including Helena’s mausoleum and three palaces of the Adiabene royalty in the City of David.

6. The Adiabene Royalty as Benefactors and Models of Piety

6.1. Introduction

In addition to the Adiabene narrative (Ant. 20:17-96), Helena is again mentioned by Josephus in Ant. 20:101 with regard to her benefactions in Jerusalem. Likewise, the theme of her benefactions appears in Rabbinic sources. What is more, Rabbinic sources in general present Helena and her son Munbaz as great benefactors to the Jewish people and pious observants of the Jewish *halakha*.

6.2. Helena’s Euergetism

Josephus mentions Queen Helena once more in his *Antiquitates Judaicae* outside the Adiabene narrative in Ant. 20:101. What is the narrative context of Josephus’ reference? Ant. 20:101 is a short reference made in passing in the context of Josephus’ report on the tenure of procurator Tiberius Alexander (Ant. 20:100-104). After a few words on the genealogy and personality of Tiberius Alexander (Ant. 20:100), Josephus goes on to characterize his tenure by three events. The first is a great famine that occurred in Judea (Ant. 20:101), the second is the trial of two Jewish revolt leaders, James and Simon (Ant. 20:102), and the third is the appointment of a new high priest (Ant. 20:103). Afterwards, Josephus continues with his story about the administration of Cumanus (Ant. 20:104).

The first two events that Josephus relates referring to the time of Tiberius Alexander’s power in Judea are more precisely characterized by additional short remarks. First, in mentioning “James and Simon, the sons of Judas the Galilean”, Josephus devotes one sentence to remind his readers of who Judas the Galilean was. Namely, “this was the Judas who, as I have explained above, had aroused the people to revolt against the Romans while Quirinius was taking the census in Judea” (Ant. 20:102)⁵⁵⁸. Similarly, the great famine is said to be the one, “during which Queen Helena bought grain from Egypt for large sums and distributed it to the needy” (Ant. 20:101)⁵⁵⁹. This statement is ended by Josephus’ classic cross-reference: “as I have already related”⁵⁶⁰.

Thus, Ant. 20:101 is another mention of Queen Helena’s involvement in Jerusalem during a great famine there. Further, Ant. 20:101 is parallel to the content of Ant. 20:49-53 in that both passages convey a picture of Helena as a great benefactor of the Jewish people in times of need.

⁵⁵⁸ Feldman 1965: 57.

⁵⁵⁹ Feldman 1965: 57.

⁵⁶⁰ Petersen 1958: 259-274; Williamson 1977: 50-55; D.R. Schwartz 1982: 241-268.

How can we best understand Queen Helena's deed in the light of its ancient background? In dealing with Josephus' picture of Izates, we have briefly suggested that helping a people struck by famine can be best understood as an act of euergetism. Ancient euergetism consisted in two inseparable elements – benefactions of various kinds for public benefit, and public repaying the benefactor with tokens of honor⁵⁶¹. Such benefactions were performed by wealthy individuals who were members of local elite, or, less frequently, eminent philanthropists from outside. In societies of the one-man rule, euergetism was a natural obligation of the ruler who was supposed to provide for his subjects. Especially Hellenistic kings are known to act as *εὐεργεταί* to their subjects⁵⁶², and Roman Emperors to exercise the 'bread and circuses' policy in Rome and Italy⁵⁶³. Euergetism could include many things: "public buildings and works, provisioning, politics and diplomacy, entertainment and festivals, religious life, medicine"⁵⁶⁴, but euergetism is best manifested in extraordinary circumstances such as a famine⁵⁶⁵. Hunger and starvation can be relieved through the distribution of money for the purchase of grain or the distribution of grain itself⁵⁶⁶. The ancient euergetism had then a clear social dimension⁵⁶⁷. Those who contribute to the well-being of the people consequently earn a prestigious place in their community, expressed through various public honors granted to them⁵⁶⁸. In the case of royal *εὐεργέτης*, their benefactions also served as a means to ensure their subjects' loyalty and to avoid social disturbances, and, no less important, to display their own magnificence⁵⁶⁹.

Acts of euergetism are illustrated in Josephus' Ant. many times. Especially the biblical Joseph (Ant. 2:93-94) and King David (7:294, 7:332), when they faced a famine in their country, were *naturally* seen as responsible for taking action towards their starving people. When the seven-year famine started in Egypt, the Egyptians are said to be immediately running to pharaoh's gates, who, in turn, calls upon Joseph. By relieving the famine, Joseph becomes *σωτήρ* of the Egyptians (Ant. 2:93-94)⁵⁷⁰. In a well-known episode, when David could choose between three punishments from God, he immediately rejects the famine as most detrimental to his people (Ant. 7:332)⁵⁷¹. Again, in one of the most flattering passages about Herod the Great in Josephus (Ant. 15:315-316)⁵⁷², Herod is said not only to immediately bring food supplies by ship from Egypt during a famine in his kingdom, but also to distribute seed for planting and to provide help with the subsequent harvest (Ant. 15:315-316). This all was done by Herod not only in his own territory, but also in Syria (Ant. 15:315-316). Josephus' portrayal of Herod in Ant. 15:315-316 perfectly fits the Hellenistic ideal of a good king who acts as *εὐεργέτης* of his people⁵⁷³ and *φιλόανθρωπος* (as well as *φιλέλλην*) to his neighbors⁵⁷⁴. It was probably this performance that made Herod earn the prestigious title *εὐεργέτης* placed on a stone weight⁵⁷⁵.

Therefore, Helena's benefactions can be most properly understood in the light of ancient euergetism. Helena, while being in Jerusalem, comes to the aid of the starving people there. As a result, she has earned a great name for generations and this fact is explicitly proclaimed by

⁵⁶¹ S. Schwartz 2009: 79.

⁵⁶² Walbank 1984: 82-83.

⁵⁶³ Pastor 1997: 120; Patterson 2003: 89-104.

⁵⁶⁴ Rajak 1996b: 21.

⁵⁶⁵ Garnsey 1988: 82-86; Pastor 1997: 59-60.

⁵⁶⁶ Garnsey 1988: 82-86.

⁵⁶⁷ Hands 1968: 26-62.

⁵⁶⁸ Garnsey 1988: 83; Hands 1968: 49-61.

⁵⁶⁹ Pastor 1997: 59-61; Patterson 2003: 89.

⁵⁷⁰ Feldman 1998a: 362; Feldman 1998b: 549.

⁵⁷¹ Feldman 1998a: 553-554; Feldman 1998b: 549.

⁵⁷² S. Schwartz 2009: 83.

⁵⁷³ Pastor 1997: 120; S. Schwartz 2009: 82-84.

⁵⁷⁴ For Herod's benefactions to foreign cities and peoples as an expression of his philhellenism, see Rocca 2008: 42-52.

⁵⁷⁵ Rocca 2008: 211. On Herod's title, see Meshorer 1970: 97.

Josephus in Ant. 20:53. Further, Helena's lasting prestige achieved through her euergetism is also implicitly evident by the fact that it could serve Josephus as one of the major events to characterize the tenure of procurator Tiberius Alexander. What is more, the very fact that Helena undertook an act of euergetism is very telling in itself. Acts of euergetism were expected from indigenous rulers or members of the local elite in the first place. While there is some strain of the outside help when it comes to Izates (who sends it from Adiabene to Judea), Helena undertakes it while being in Jerusalem and so addressing it from the inside. This fact places her in a very special and close relationship with the Jewish people of Jerusalem. In fact, her euergetism puts her into the role once played by Jewish leaders like king David or king Herod. Consequently, we can state that in Ant. 20:49-53 and 20:101 Helena appears as a good queen for the Jewish people.

Since Helena is presented both in Ant. 20:49-53 and 20:101 as a great εὐεργέτης of the people of Jerusalem, the question arises as to what Izates' share in this royal image is. It is notable that while Helena's euergetism is recalled both in Ant. 20:49-53 and 20:101, Izates' euergetism is mentioned only in the Adiabene narrative. Further, there is quite a difference between both sources. Ant. 20:101 is a short remark made in passing, and the focus of the whole literary unit is not on Helena and her deeds, but on the Roman procurator Tiberius Alexander. Thus, while Ant. 20:49-53, as well as the whole Adiabene narrative, is very intentionally crafted in that it conveys a well-thought-out message, Ant. 20:101 seems to be more like an off-hand remark⁵⁷⁶. Nevertheless, despite the character of Ant. 20:101, it still provides us with an interesting insight. Namely, in recalling the famine under Tiberius Alexander in Ant. 20:101, Josephus could not help but immediately recall Helena's role in that event. Since Ant. 20:101 is an incidental remark, its content apparently belonged to the author's established knowledge which one can draw from at any time⁵⁷⁷. Further, even in the Adiabene narrative (otherwise so centered on Izates) it is Helena who takes the first role in relieving the people of Jerusalem in need and Izates plays only second fiddle to his mother. This may suggest that the description of his role in Ant. 20:49-53 was brought in accord with the general tendency of Ant. 20:17-96 to depict him as a model king. In other words, Izates' role was elevated by Josephus in Ant. 20:49-53. Therefore, the idea of the Adiabene royal euergetism was in fact more connected for Josephus with Helena than with Izates. To Josephus, the memory of that famine in Jerusalem was closely connected with the memory of Queen Helena's deeds.

6.3. The Adiabene Royalty as Models of Piety according to the Rabbis

The royal family of Adiabene also appears in Rabbinic literature⁵⁷⁸. First of all, it is Queen Helena who appears in three Rabbinic traditions (*m. Nazir* 3.6, *t. Sukkah* 1.1 [BT 2b, PT 1:1 [51d]], and *m. Yoma* 3.10 [*t. Kippurim* 2:3]). Secondly, King Munbaz shows up twice in tannaitic accounts (*m. Yoma* 3.10 [*t. Kippurim* 2:3], and *t. Pe'ah* 4:18 [BT *Baba Batra* 11a, PT *Pe'ah* 1:1 (15b)])⁵⁷⁹.

⁵⁷⁶ For the notion of "incidental remarks" in Josephus, and the difference between them and programmatic statements, see Mason 1998: 66-67 and Jonquière 2007: 50-51.

⁵⁷⁷ Mason 1998: 66-67 and Jonquière 2007: 50-51.

⁵⁷⁸ The following editions and translations are used here: Albeck 1952-58; Danby 1933; Lieberman 1955-73; Neusner 1977-81; Neusner 1982-1994; Epstein 1935-1952.

⁵⁷⁹ Furthermore, there are yet more traditions focused on *Rabbi* Munbaz (*t. Šebu'ot* 8:5 [BT 68b-69a] and *the house of Munbaz* (*t. Megillah* 3[4]:30 [BT *Menahot* 32b [44a], PT *Megillah* 4:12 [75c]], and BT *Niddah* 17a). The connection between these traditions and those centered on *king* Munbaz has been assumed by many scholars; most recently Kalmin 2010 discusses these texts at great length. We do, however, find these connections problematic. First, it should be noted that the only link between traditions about *king* Munbaz and *Rabbi* Munbaz is the name, which itself is not unique (Justi 1963: 189; Jastrow 1975: 744; Aggoula 1985: 34-35 [no. 12]; Beyer 1998: 13 [no. 12]; Ilan 2002: 352). Thus, we can see no reason to acknowledge this connection. More likely is the connection between *king* Munbaz and *the house of Munbaz* because the Aramaic word ביתא *can* be used in Talmudic texts for a *royal dynasty* like the house of the Hasmoneans, בית השמוניאי in BT *Baba Batra* 3b and BT *Qiddušin* 70b (but it is a very rare meaning, ביתא is usually

Lastly, a very interesting story in the midrash, *Genesis Rabbah* 46.11 apparently belongs to Rabbinic traditions on the Adiabene royal house in general⁵⁸⁰.

The mishnaic tractate *Nazir* 3.6 presents a debate over what to do with a person who has fulfilled the Nazirite laws outside the Land of Israel and only then arrives in Israel. The difference in opinions between the house of Hillel and the house of Shammai on the matter is recorded. According to the former, such a person remains a Nazirite for 30 days, but according to the latter, the Naziriteship has to commence again. Then, the example of Queen Helena's Naziriteship is reported. Accordingly, Helena is said to have made a Nazirite vow to bring divine help to her son in battle. After he has won the battle, she fulfilled her promise – she began her Nazirite period for seven years. At the end of seven years, she went on pilgrimage to Israel. The house of Hillel then instructed her that Nazirite status cannot be observed outside Israel and ordered her to start her Naziriteship again. Towards the end of this seven-year period, she contracted impurity and had to resume her Nazirite observances once again. Thus, altogether she was a Nazirite for twenty-one years. Finally, a separate opinion of Rabbi Judah is recorded that Queen Helena was a Nazirite for only 14 years.

First of all, let us remark that the focus of Rabbinic discussion is on the practice of Nazirite vows. The question under Rabbinic discussion is whether or not the Naziriteship can be regarded as meaningful outside the Land of Israel. Helena appears only in the background of that discussion, she is not of independent interest to the Rabbis. Nevertheless, she is presented as a pious queen, who makes devout vows, seeks advice from the sages, and consequently follows them strictly⁵⁸¹. Her figure is in fact so important that the example of *her observance* is recalled as a decisive argument in the dispute between two eminent Rabbinic schools. Although the main course of discussion is clearly written from the perspective of the school of Hillel⁵⁸², which presents Helena as its disciple, the objection of Rabbi Judah that Helena was under vows for only 14 years means that she would follow the instruction of the school of Shammai⁵⁸³. Either way, both schools try to prove that they managed to win over Queen Helena to their understanding of Nazirite vows. Although *m. Nazir* 3.6 knows that Helena started her observance outside the Land of Israel, she is not explicitly described as a convert⁵⁸⁴. Indeed, it would be unusual for the Rabbis to brag about the acknowledgement of a *converted* and *female* person if we take account of other Rabbinic traditions that exhibit a great deal of restraint towards non-Jews and converts, to say the least (*m. Qiddušin* 4.1)⁵⁸⁵. Quite to the contrary, Helena is self-evidently taken to be Jewish.

In sum, the focus of *m. Nazir* 3.6 is on religious issues, namely on one aspect of observance of the Nazirite laws. Helena's observance in itself is not of interest to the passage. Instead, it is only used to back up one's line of argumentation. Numbers 14 and 21 do not have value in terms of chronology, but are theological constructs conveying theological standings of two competing schools. Likewise, Helena's motivation of the vow emphasizes her portrayal as a caring mother

used for a house, estate, room, 'school', etc., see Sokoloff 2002: 208). In both *t. Megillah* 3(4):30 and *BT Niddah* 17a, the practice of the house of Munbaz is quoted as a separate opinion and it is presented as different from the standard practice. In short, *t. Megillah* 3(4):30 is concerned with the right use of the mezuzah. The standard practice is to place a mezuzah upon the gates, but Rabbi Judah also recalls the practice of the house of Munbaz which used to place the mezuzah on a stick and hang it behind the door at inns, in order to be able to carry it with them while travelling (see Schiffman 1987: 300; Kalmin 2010: 65-66). Additionally, *BT Niddah* 17a discusses various ways of checking impurity after sexual intercourse (see Schiffman 1976: 272-273; Barish 1983: 135); the practice of the house of Munbaz in this regard is mentioned as a separate opinion: they used their beds in the day time (the common practice: "at night"), examined their beds with wool (instead of any other kind of fabric) and *even* observed the rules of uncleanness and cleanness in the case of snow.

⁵⁸⁰ The edition and translation used here is that of Theodor/Albeck 1912 and of Neusner 1985.

⁵⁸¹ Ilan 1995: 181; Chepey 2005: 189.

⁵⁸² Schiffman 1987: 298; Chepey 2005: 88.

⁵⁸³ Ilan 1999: 67-68.

⁵⁸⁴ Schiffman 1987: 298; Ilan 1999: 26.

⁵⁸⁵ Ilan 1995: 211-212.

and a pious queen who knows a famous biblical truth that the victory depends on God and not on human strength (Ps 147). Further, the aim of Helena's trip to Israel is not motivated with anything else than with her vow to bring divine assistance to her son. The idea of her pilgrimage as part of the conversion process⁵⁸⁶ is a result of reading *m. Nazir* 3.6 through the perspective of Ant. 20:17-96. Thus, *m. Nazir* 3:6 cannot be treated as a source of chronology or history of the 1st c. CE Adiabene dynasty⁵⁸⁷, since such issues did not interest its authors at all. What *m. Nazir* 3:6 does tell us, however, is that Helena was seen as a queen whose piety won the admiration of the Rabbis⁵⁸⁸.

Another tannaitic story referring to Queen Helena's observance of the law is tractate *t. Sukka* 1.1 (*BT* 2b, *PT* 1:1 [51d]) which is concerned with the validity of certain *sukkot*. The tannaitic text declares each sukkah that is higher than 20 cubits to be invalid (so *m. Sukka* 1.1 too), but also recalls a separate opinion of Rabbi Judah that such a sukkah is valid. In fact, the text gives an exchange of arguments and counter arguments between Rabbi Judah and the *elders* (זקנים). Rabbi Judah recalls the practice of Queen Helena in order to defend his own position on the matter⁵⁸⁹. According to the story of Rabbi Judah, Helena built a sukkah higher than twenty cubits and was not only frequently visited by elders, but also never criticized by them on the account of the height of her sukkah. The *elders* in turn reply to that argument of Rabbi Judah that the elders did not express disapproval because Helena as a woman was not obligated to fulfill commandments and so it was not mandatory for Helena to build the sukkah according to the details of the law⁵⁹⁰. Then Rabbi Judah resorts to a different argument: the sukkah was not only hers, but also belonged to her seven sons.

After this counter argument the discussion starts to differ between the *Yerushalmi* and *Bavli* versions (*PT* 1:1 [51d], *BT* 2b). Namely, in the *Yerushalmi* text, Rabbi Judah holds that her sons were sages (*PT Sukkah* 1:1 [51d]), while the *Bavli* only states that Helena had sons and everything she did was in accordance with the instructions of the sages (*BT Sukkah* 2b)⁵⁹¹.

Again, Helena's exemplary law-observance is taken as a basis for a discussion between two schools of law interpretations. Surely, Helena's role is accentuated by Rabbi Judah and slightly downplayed by the other school on the grounds that she was a *female* observant. However, one may ask if this downplaying is not to be attributed to the polemic character of discussion in the first place. Namely, Rabbi Judah and the sages are just turning from one argument to another trying to overturn one's previous statement. The rhetorical tactics seem to lie in raising further distinctions and objections so as to weaken the opponents' point. According to Kalmin, the difference in the portrayal of *Helena's sons* between two Talmudic versions, especially the fact that the *Bavli* does not contain the reference to them being sages, shows that the *Bavli* consciously aims to downplay the importance of members of the Adiabene royal family⁵⁹². But, one may wonder if there is not

⁵⁸⁶ So Schiffman 1987: 305-306.

⁵⁸⁷ Schiffman 1987: 298.

⁵⁸⁸ Similarly Schiffman 1987: 298-299.

⁵⁸⁹ Schiffman 1987: 298-299.

⁵⁹⁰ See an interesting suggestion by Ilan 1997: 189 and Ilan 1999: 35-36, 68-71 that in fact Queen Helena was an observant of the Shammaite interpretation of the *halakha*.

⁵⁹¹ Gafni 1970-1971: 211.

⁵⁹² Kalmin 2010: 63-64. In fact, Kalmin 2010 builds up a whole theory about a negative attitude of the Babylonian redactors of the Talmud towards the royal family of Adiabene, and a lot of his argument is based on the traditions about the *house* of Munbaz and *Rabbi* Munbaz (see above, pp. 99-100, n. 579). Indeed, the practice of laws on the side of the house of Munbaz is not presented as a majority opinion, but their overall picture is positive. For instance, in *BT Niddah* 17a their conduct is quoted as a minority opinion, but at the same time it is explicitly said to be "remembered with praise" (וּמְזִכְרֵיהֶן אֶחָד לְשָׁבָה). Even if Kalmin's observations should be accepted, there is still a long way to go before one can find very precise reasons for the Babylonian Rabbis' negative attitude towards the Adiabene royalty. Perhaps, instead of imposing very precise reasons (the Rabbis knew of their foreign descent), there are others at hand, being more general but also more evident. Namely, Babylonian Jews are known for their tendency to consider themselves as the purest representatives of Jewish traditions, and consequently were at variance with many other Jewish communities, especially from other Mesopotamian regions. For instance, they clearly considered their brethren Jews

too much emphasis being laid by Kalmin upon this fact, especially that Helena is still said to perfectly follow the sages⁵⁹³. Can one be praised for the following all the commandments of the sages and at the same time be presented as “halakhically eccentric”? Quite to the contrary: while it is evident that the two schools, that of Shammai and that of Hillel, counter each other, and probably the school of Shammai is more willing to refer to Helena as an legitimate example of observance⁵⁹⁴, the school of Hillel simply does its best to refute the arguments of their opponents. Nevertheless, in doing so, the school of Hillel does not explicitly criticize Helena, but finds reason to evade the argument of Rabbi Judah. In the end, the *Bavli*’s statement that Helena did, in fact, always follow the *elders*, i.e. probably the school of Hillel⁵⁹⁵, looks like an attempt to take over Helena’s authority from Rabbi Judah’s hands and use it for its own sake. Thus, we conclude that again Helena is presented as enjoying a great deal of respect among Rabbis.

Moreover, in *t. Sukka* 1.1, Helena is accompanied by other family members – her sons. Yet, the Rabbis do not exhibit any interest in expounding who the sons were or how old they were in the sense that modern scholars are interested in⁵⁹⁶. Instead, the reference is very general and makes use of a symbolic round number⁵⁹⁷. Thus, it is not methodologically sound to pair this reference with Josephus’ data (*Ant.* 20:91 in particular) and to try to combine them at all costs⁵⁹⁸. Further, the text as such is not about Helena’s journey to Israel and its details⁵⁹⁹, although her presence there is indeed implied. Next, the text does not say where Helena dwelled but at most where she built her *sukka* during the festival of Tabernacles. What is more, some scholars place the story about Helena and her *sukka* in Lydda, but the evidence that it should be Lydda (בלוד) ⁶⁰⁰ is extremely weak, since in most manuscripts and medieval citations the expression “in Lydda” does not appear⁶⁰¹.

The next tannaitic reference to Helena can be found in *m. Yoma* 3.10 (*t. Kippurim* 2:3) where not only Helena appears again, but her son King Munbaz comes to the fore, too. The Rabbinic tradition describes different parts of the Temple vessels to the east of the Temple court. The mention of individual objects is often connected with the reference to their donors. This is the case with the golden handles of the vessels for the Day of Atonement⁶⁰² which are attributed to the generosity of King Munbaz, whereas a golden candlestick made over the door of the hekal and a golden tablet, on which the biblical verses pertaining to the *soṭah* (a woman suspected by her husband of adultery) is presented as a donation of his mother, Queen Helena.

M. Yoma 3.10 and *t. Kippurim* 2:3 are of different character than *t. Sukkah* 1.1 and *m. Nazir* 3.6. The focus of the texts is to locate and describe various cultic objects, the reference to donors serves to praise their piety. Thus, the tradition of the tannaim holds memory of Munbaz’ and Helena’s *pious* benefactions to the Temple. This time, Helena’s family member is not anonymous,

from Characene as second-rate Jews (note Izates’ contact with Characene). Likewise, Rabbinic traditions do not show much respect toward Adiabene itself, though the references are sparse (see *BT Šabbat* 121b). Thus, their tendency to downplay the significance of the dynasty of royal converts from Adiabene could simply result from regional rivalry.

⁵⁹³ What is more, Kalmin 2010: 70 speaks about *Bavli* redactors “omitting the reference to the sons of Helena as Rabbis”, but the verb “omit” may be completely misleading, since it presupposes that *Bavli* Rabbis had the same version of text as redactors of the Palestinian Talmud, which is, however, not proven at all.

⁵⁹⁴ Ilan 1999: 67-71.

⁵⁹⁵ Brüll: 1874: 75, n. 16.

⁵⁹⁶ Namely, to combine these data with *Ant.* 20:71 (where Izates is said to send his five sons for education to Jerusalem). A classic example of this approach can be found in Brüll 1874: 77 and Schiffman 1987: 299.

⁵⁹⁷ Schiffman 1987: 299.

⁵⁹⁸ So in fact Schiffman 1987: 299.

⁵⁹⁹ Again, some scholars try to utilize this reference to date Izates’ wars (with Vardanes and Vologases). See Brüll 1874: 74-75.

⁶⁰⁰ Derenbourg 1867: 225; Otto 1912: 2836-2837.

⁶⁰¹ Gafni 1970-1971: 211; Schiffman 1987: 309, n. 18.

⁶⁰² According to *m. Yoma* 3:10, but according to *t. Kippurim* 2:3: the golden handles of the knives used on the Day of Atonement.

he is instead called by a name and a royal title, what is more, his person comes first, and Helena is named “his mother”. This shows that some Rabbinic traditions know not only of Munbaz alone or Helena alone or Helena with anonymous family members, but are aware of the relationship between these two royal figures (unlike in *Gen. Rab.* 46:11, see below pp. 100-101). Secondly, although the placement of Munbaz as first can result from the reference order that is given according to the objects in the Temple court, calling Helena “his mother” may indicate that the primary role in the image of benefactor in some Rabbinic traditions belongs to Munbaz⁶⁰³. At any rate, Munbaz is cast as an independent character, a pious benefactor to the Temple, and not merely reduced to “Helena’s son”.

The donations of king Munbaz are also echoed in *t. Pe’ah* 4:18 (*BT Baba Batra* 11a, *PT Pe’ah* 1:1 [15b])⁶⁰⁴, where his brothers and his father’s household criticize him for having squandered a family fortune in the years of scarcity. To counter this charge, Munbaz replies that while his predecessors were saving up only for this earth, he saved his fortune for the future life. This account has all the trappings of a haggadic poem, since its language is full of literary devices⁶⁰⁵. His brothers’ protest is a pun based on the similar sound of two words: the king’s name and the verb “to squander”: “Munbaz (מנבז) squandered (בנבז) his treasure”. Further, Munbaz replies with his own play on words based on the repetition and contrast: “My fathers stored up (ניני) below [on earth], but I have stored (ניני) above [in heaven]”⁶⁰⁶.

The text has an instructive aim. It is not concerned with historical issues, but uses the story of king Munbaz to illustrate the importance of taking care of one’s spiritual as much as of one’s material well-being. Those scholars who want to reconcile *t. Pe’ah* 4:18 with what we know from Josephus *Ant.* 20:51-53⁶⁰⁷ (and partly *Ant.* 20:75) encounter insurmountable problems and, above all, end up implying something that is not expressed by the text. In *Ant.* 20:51-53 Helena appears as the main benefactor and Izates plays second fiddle to her, but, nevertheless, does appear in the story. By way of illustration, Schiffman suggest that either the Rabbis “did not know the personal name of Izates and referred to him by his father’s name, using it as a dynastic title ...” (Monobazos I), or ... “thought that the famine occurred in the reign of Monobazos II, Izates’ brother”⁶⁰⁸. Yet, although the Rabbis are well aware of Helena’s family members in general and know the name of Monobazos, they never mention Izates. Further, what *Ant.* 20:51-53 describes as a famine (λιμός) becomes a more general topic of scarcity (בשני בצורה) in *t. Pe’ah* 4:18⁶⁰⁹. Thus, although *t. Pe’ah* 4:18 recalls a Rabbinic memory of King Munbaz as a pious benefactor, the story is not concerned with historical issues at all.

The last Rabbinic source concerning the Adiabeneans is a passage in the midrash, *Genesis Rabbah* 46:11. This story aims to explain the niphal form, וניחם (“you shall circumcise”) from the book of Genesis 17:11⁶¹⁰. The philological explanation is illustrated by a story (מעשה) which is about the conversion of Munbaz and Zoitos, sons of Ptolemy the king⁶¹¹. According to this source, both brothers came to a decision on circumcision by reading the passage in the Torah about circumcision, and they converted at the same time. Next, their mother explained this act to their father as a medical necessity recommended by a doctor. The father accepts this, and the story comes to a happy ending by the mention of God’s help to the brothers in war.

⁶⁰³ Schiffman 1987: 299.

⁶⁰⁴ Schiffman 1987: 299 and 310, n. 18.

⁶⁰⁵ Schiffman 1987: 299.

⁶⁰⁶ Likewise Schiffman 1987: 299.

⁶⁰⁷ So Schiffman 1987: 299-300.

⁶⁰⁸ Schiffman 1987: 300.

⁶⁰⁹ See Gapp 1935: 261-262 – while scarcity was a common concern in ancient times; an actual famine occurred only sporadically.

⁶¹⁰ Schiffman 1987: 301.

⁶¹¹ Schiffman 1987: 301.

Gen. Rab. 46:11 recalls a tradition that features a number of striking reminiscences with Ant. 20:34-48. First, we have two names of boys, Munbaz and Zoitos, who are easily identifiable as Monobazos and Izates of Josephus' Ant. 20:34-48, though with a little distortion in the case of the second name⁶¹². The text knows the royal background of its protagonists and echoes a few other circumstances of the conversion of Izates and Monobazos as related by Josephus in Ant. 20:17-96 (reading the Bible, the role of the mother, the importance of the rite of circumcision, political danger resulting from it and God's salvation in war)⁶¹³. However, the authors of the Midrash fail to mention the name of the mother, and give a mistaken name of the father, wrongly identified as King Ptolemy⁶¹⁴. Especially striking is the fact that the mother remains unnamed, though Queen Helena was very well known to tannaitic traditions⁶¹⁵. This shows that the Rabbis preserved a tradition that they no longer understood in the original context⁶¹⁶. Especially the link between the traditions on Queen Helena and *Gen. Rab.* 46:11 was lost to them⁶¹⁷. Therefore, the author of this haggadic text did not know that he was dealing with princes of Adiabene⁶¹⁸. Nevertheless, the question still remains as to the source of so many striking similarities between *Gen. Rab.* 46.11 and Ant. 20:17-96. Three possibilities can be suggested⁶¹⁹. First, the midrash and Josephus draw from a common source; secondly, the midrash (as a younger source) is dependent on Josephus; thirdly, either Josephus or the midrash "are independent versions of the same historical event"⁶²⁰. As far as the third option is concerned, we think that neither Rabbis nor Josephus could be suspected to be eye-witnesses to the conversion of Izates and Monobazos in Adiabene, and so both are dependent on oral or written traditions. Therefore, the real choice is only between the first and the second option. This dilemma is not easy to resolve, and in fact touches on a broader problem of relation between Josephus and Rabbinic tradition in general, since there are many other cases of parallels between both literary corpuses⁶²¹. As for *Gen. Rab.* 46:11 and Ant. 20:17-96, it seems that a parallel between the midrash's conclusion (including a progressive promise of God's salvation) and Josephus' concluding grand manifesto in Ant. 20:48 is too striking to allow anything else than a direct relation between Josephus and the midrash, since the idea of God's protection is undoubtedly Josephus' own input in Ant. 20:17-96⁶²². However, acknowledging a direct dependence of the midrash on Josephus one must still allow some chronological distance including an oral or written development on the side of Rabbinic traditions, because the Rabbis did not understand the circumcision story in its original context, and even confused the names of the *dramatis personae*⁶²³.

To summarize, Rabbinic traditions present to us two royal figures in the first place – Helena and Munbaz. Helena is seen as a pious queen who cares about her children, strictly follows commandments as taught and expanded by the Rabbis, and contributes to the Temple in

⁶¹² Schiffman 1987: 301; Ilan 1997: 281.

⁶¹³ Gafni 1970-1971: 209; Schiffman 1987: 301.

⁶¹⁴ The explanation that Ptolemy was a general name for kings in this period is not based on any examples (Derenbourg 1867: 225, n. 3 and Brüll 1874: 73, n. 14). It rather serves for the kings of Egypt, and definitely not for royalty from Syria or Adiabene (Schiffman 1987: 301).

⁶¹⁵ Ilan 1995: 213, n. 23.

⁶¹⁶ Ilan 1997: 280-282; Ilan 2005: 40.

⁶¹⁷ Ilan 1997: 281; Ilan 2005: 40.

⁶¹⁸ Schiffman 1987: 301.

⁶¹⁹ Barish 1983: 132.

⁶²⁰ Barish 1983: 132.

⁶²¹ See a collection of parallels in Derenbourg 1867 and a brief modern discussion of S.J.D. Cohen 1986.

⁶²² Likewise Barish 1983:132-134: plus the argument of Barish 1983:129-130 and 156-157, n. 88 that an awkward Hebrew sentence in the conclusion of the midrash, עשי לי טעה פיסטון, can be best understood as a calque for a Greek phrase, πίστις ποιείν (to pledge) used in Greek literature (e.g. Hdt., *Hist.* 9.92; *Thuc.* 4.51).

⁶²³ Likewise Barish 1983: 134.

Jerusalem⁶²⁴. When it comes to Munbaz, his benefactions to the Temple, and to the needy, are his primary features in the Rabbinic portrayal. Both Helena and Munbaz are presented as examples of right conduct. Helena is even taken as an exemplary figure whose precedent could decide in legal dispute between two competing schools. Though the school of Hillel is willing to categorize Helena as someone strictly following their interpretation of the law, Helena's link with Rabbi Judah may speak for her affiliation with the school of Shammai, which recommended a most strict adherence to the laws⁶²⁵. Lastly, the literary tannaitic tradition does not recognize members of the Adiabene royal family as converts; they instead appear to be as Jewish as Rabbi Akiva, which in turn shows a deep level of their intergration into Jewish society⁶²⁶.

⁶²⁴ Gafni 1970-1971: 212; Schiffman 1987: 300; Ilan 1995: 137.181.213. For the Rabbinic strains of piety, see Zahavy 2000: 181-190.

⁶²⁵ Ilan 1999: 67-71.

⁶²⁶ By contrast, see Kalmin 2010: 63, 68 who claims "the tannaim were aware that the Adiabene monarchs were converts to Judaism ... "and that it "runs counter to the claim of modern scholars that the tannaitic Rabbis did not know that Helena the queen and Munbaz the king were converts". Actually, the question discussed here is not whether the Rabbis did know or not, but what the tannaitic tradition conveys as a literary product. To begin with, in no place of the tannaitic tradition, are Helena or King Munbaz explicitly called converts. Secondly, it would be unusual to refer to *female* and/or *converted* persons as authorities in debates among the most eminent Rabbinic schools. Likewise Ilan 1999: 26 says: "This does not imply that the Rabbis did not know of her conversion, but rather that this was irrelevant for the sources that recorded Helene's actions".

