

THE DEATH OF HEROD THE GREAT

DAVID J. LADOUCEUR

SINCE a famous man's manner of death, his final moments, and last words were highly significant to the ancients, there developed in both classical and Judaic tradition conventional ways of reporting these incidents. Within the milieu of Hellenistic Judaism, for example, the last words or testaments of patriarchs often follow a definite arrangement (narrative section, ethical section, blessings, and curses) and thus their study has lent itself well to analysis.¹ In Graeco-Roman tradition, some forty years ago, A. Ronconi demonstrated how the Stoics adopted Plato's idealizing portrayal of Socrates both to validate and to inform the literary pattern of Stoic martyrdoms of the so-called Opposition, and how, in turn, the Christians often drew on this tradition in articulating their martyrdoms.²

If death scenes of the famous and godly became stereotyped, so also did death scenes of the infamous and godless. To set out one common paradigm, at times linked with the motif of divine retribution, the more villainous the character of a man (at least in the eyes of his historian or biographer) or the greater his sinfulness, the more ghastly the manner of his death. A specific variation of this scheme is death by loathsome disease, the revolting symptoms of which are frequently minutely described.³

While Plato's account of the death of Socrates may well have served as an *Urbild* for the first *topos*, it is less easy and inevitably arbitrary to isolate a single prototype in the latter case. Early on, examples occur in both Greek and Biblical traditions. In Herodotus, after Pheretima of Cyrene takes excessive and brutal vengeance on the Barcaeans for the murder of her son, she falls ill and, still living, swarms with worms, *ὥς ἄρα ἀνθρώποισι αἱ λίην ἰσχυραὶ τιμωρίαι πρὸς θεῶν ἐπιφθοροὶ γίνονται*.⁴ In Chronicles, Elijah prophesies a similar doom to King Jehoram, who "made high places in the hill country of Judah and led the inhabitants of Jerusalem into unfaithfulness and made Judah go astray." Thereafter God strikes him with

1. See, for example, K. Baltzer, *The Covenant Formulary in Old Testament, Jewish, and Early Christian Writings* (Philadelphia, 1971), pp. 144–61. For a recent study of the uses of last words as vehicles for revelation of the future, see A. B. Kolenkow, "The Genre Testament and Forecasts of the Future in the Hellenistic Jewish Milieu," *JSJ* 6 (1975): 57–71. For an introduction to the theme of suffering and death in Hellenistic literature, see S. Williams, *Jesus' Death as Saving Event—The Background and Origin of a Concept* (Missoula, Mont., 1975).

2. A. Ronconi, "Exitus illustrium virorum," *SIFC* 17 (1940): 332. For a more recent discussion of the role of Socrates in the development of Opposition literature, see R. Macmullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order* (Cambridge, Mass., 1966), pp. 1–45. On the later history of the figure of Socrates, see D. Jackson, "Socrates and Christianity," *Classical Folia* 31 (1977): 189–206.

3. For a discussion of the various and unseemly ends that befell *θεομάχοι*, see W. Nestle, "Die Legende vom Tode der Gottesverächter," *Arch. f. Rel.* 33 (1936): 246–69.

4. Hdt. 4. 205.

an incurable disease of the bowels and "... at the end of two years, his bowels came out because of the disease, and he died in agony."⁵

Recurring throughout the Hellenistic period, the motif quite naturally finds its way into the repertoire of apologetic historiography. In Second Maccabees, an incurable and invisible disease strikes Antiochus Epiphanes on his expedition against Jerusalem. As he continues on his way he falls from his chariot and injures every limb, *φανερὰν τοῦ θεοῦ πᾶσιν τὴν δύναμιν ἐνδεικνύμενος*. Finally, worms swarm within his body and his entire army is revolted by the stench of his corruption.⁶ So also, in Acts, Herod Agrippa, persecutor of the Christians, dies eaten of worms *σκωληκόβρωτος*.⁷

While in these cases death and disease result directly from divine intervention, in other instances the subjects' own vices inevitably cause an unseemly end. On the one hand, the lurid account of the Roman governor's death at the end of Philo's *In Flaccum* reflects that writer's conviction that God had directly interceded in the assassination in order to preserve his people.⁸ To the less engaged Plutarch, on the other hand, Sulla's death through a disease that ulcerated his bowels, rotted his flesh, and transformed it into worms was not the result of divine intervention but rather the consequence of his own licentious and immoral behavior. By consorting and drinking all day long with actresses, harpists, and theatrical people he aggravated (*ἐξέθρεψε*) a disease which had begun from some slight cause (*ἀπ' αἰρίας ἐλαφρᾶς*).⁹ Elsewhere in his work, Plutarch returns again and again to the theme of retribution and punishment exactly fitting the crime. The freedman Philologus, who betrayed Cicero, is handed over to Pomponia and forced to cut off and eat his own flesh.¹⁰ Alcibiades, who raped a girl of noble family, is trampled to death by her outraged brothers.¹¹ At times, in striving for effect Plutarch interprets the historical record through this preconceived notion and does so not without distortion: for the murder of Sabinus, his wife, and newborn son, Vespasian was punished, according to Plutarch, by the extirpation of his entire family in a short time.¹² From the fact that he passes over this theme in Sulla's life one need hardly infer that he was favorably disposed to that historical figure. The development of the genre of biography in the Hellenistic period with its more profound exploration of human personality demanded a more complex etiology—specifically a greater emphasis on personal responsibility. Hence the recurrent theme of *proairesis*, "considered choice," in the *Lives*.¹³ Sulla had elected his own mode

5. 2 Chron. 21:11–19.

6. 2 Macc. 9:5–9.

7. Acts 12: 23.

8. *In Flacc.* 191.

9. *Sull.* 36.

10. *Cic.* 49.

11. *Alc.* 39.

12. *Mor. amat.* 770D–771D.

13. For Plutarch's analysis of character and the theme of *proairesis*, A. Wardman, *Plutarch's "Lives"* (Berkeley, 1974), pp. 105–52. Wardman at times takes Plutarch's strictures against the "tragic" mode of historiography too seriously. Even the archenemy of this style, Polybius, could not resist its attractions in recounting the Carthaginian Mercenary War or the affairs of Antiochus. For a useful study of the theme of divine retribution popular in this mode of historiography, F. Brenk, *In Mist Apparelled. Religious Themes in Plutarch's "Moralia" and "Lives"* (Leden, 1977).

of life and thereby suffered the consequences. His own behavior had dictated his end.

When in the fourth century the Christian Cicero Lactantius composed his tract *De mortibus persecutorum*, he proposed to prove two theses: first, that only bad emperors had persecuted Christians; second, that each in turn had ended his life miserably. For his own apologetic ends he appropriated the first variant of this motif. What befell the emperor Galerius for his hostility to Christianity will suffice as an example. Stricken at the age of eighteen by an "incurable disease" he developed "a malignant tumor on the lower part of his genitals." Despite recourse to physicians and pagan gods "his illness became much worse. . . . His entrails rotted out and his whole fundament wasted away. . . . Though driven back momentarily by remedies his malignancy returned and seized upon his internal organs, and worms were created within him. His stench pervaded not only the palace but also the entire city. . . . He was eaten by the worms and his body in agonizing pain dissolved into putrefaction."¹⁴

Given the frequency of this motif and its vitality throughout antiquity, it is curious that scholars have spent so much effort in trying to determine from ancient authors who are at times hostile witnesses the exact disease from which prominent but disreputable figures died. M. Neuburger, for example, in his study of medicine and medical practices in Josephus attempts to analyze the disease of Herod the Great from Josephus' list of symptoms in the *Antiquities*. With uncritical confidence in the accuracy of Josephus' description he proceeds to a diagnosis of cirrhosis of the liver.¹⁵ Later, R. Eisler argued that the list of symptoms indicated venereal disease.¹⁶ More recently, A. Schalit in his voluminous study of Herod, while acknowledging the possibly topical nature of the description, expends several pages in attempting to analyze with the aid of two physicians the precise nature of the disease. The diagnoses are predictably divergent: diabetes or arteriosclerosis leading to cirrhosis hepatis.¹⁷ If we could learn the nature of Herod's disease it would perhaps add to our understanding of the career of this controversial figure. In the case of Caligula, for example, some knowledge of the illness of 37 might shed a little light on certain aspects of that ruler's policies.¹⁸ Here, however, rather than adding one more inexperienced diagnosis to this body of opinion, this paper provides some philological commentary on the description which will furnish insight into Josephus' eclecticism as a major representative of Graeco-Jewish historiography. At

14. Lactant. *De mort. pers.* 33. 1-8.

15. M. Neuburger, *Die Medizin im Flavius Josephus* (Bad Reichenhall, 1919).

16. *ΙΗΣΟΥΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΟΥ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣΑΣ*, vol. 1 (Heidelberg, 1929), p. 156.

17. A. Schalit, *Koenig Herodes* (Berlin, 1969), pp. 639-40.

18. Even here, however, researchers have been too confident in diagnosing hyperthyroidism from ancient authors' descriptions of Caligula as restless, hyperkinetic, and insomniac. For argument and counterargument as to the value of these symptoms, see R. S. Katz, "The Illness of Caligula," *CW* 61 (1972): 223-25; M. G. Morgan, "Caligula's Illness Again," *CW* 66 (1973): 327-29; R. S. Katz, "Caligula's Illness Again," *CW* 70 (1977): 451; M. G. Morgan, "Once Again Caligula's Illness," *CW* 70 (1977): 542-43.

the same time this commentary should provide several better readings for the corrupted text.

The accounts of Herod's disease occur in the *War*, written between 75–79, and the *Antiquities*, which appeared about twenty years later. In general, the attitude taken toward Herod in the second work which may have been issued after the death of his grandson Agrippa is far more critical than that found in the *War*.¹⁹ It is not surprising, then, that Josephus dwells twice as long on the agonizing symptoms of the disease in the later work.²⁰ In the *War*, moreover, it is stated without comment that it was the opinion of certain diviners that the disease was a punishment for his execution of two scholars (σοφισταί) who piously attempted to remove Herod's offering of a golden eagle from the temple.²¹ In the *Antiquities* there is a similar statement,²² but in contrast, at the very beginning of the account, Josephus, no longer neutral, adds his own concurring judgment: Ἡρώδης δὲ μειζόνως ἢ νόσος ἐνεπικραίνετο δικήν ὧν παρανομήσειεν ἐκπρασσομένου τοῦ θεοῦ.²³ Also, between the report of the execution of the scholars and the report of the disease he inserts a description of a lunar eclipse—the only eclipse mentioned in the entire corpus.²⁴

To turn to a more detailed consideration of the passage itself, one point that has not been recognized in the current literature is that the more elaborate description of Herod's disease in the *Antiquities* is modelled on Thucydides' account of the plague. While in the *War* Herod's fever is simply described as "not violent,"²⁵ in the *Antiquities* it is portrayed as deceptively mild and "thus not indicating to those touching the great extent to which inflammation added torment to the insides."²⁶ The latter description is nearly a verbatim echo of the Thucydidean observation, "... to the touch the body did not seem warm but the insides so burned that..."²⁷ The description of the convulsions in the *War*, "convulsions of all the limbs,"²⁸ is expanded in the *Antiquities* to "contraction" (σπασμός) in every limb that added "unendurable force" (ισχύς).²⁹ Again one finds a close parallel in Thucydides' report of the contractions that afflicted the plague victims: σπασμόν ἐνδιδοῦσα ἰσχυρόν.³⁰ There is also a description of more general ulcerations (ἐλκωσις),³¹ which again follows Thucydidean wording.³² The

19. For the nature and value of the literary traditions concerning Herod, see Schalit, *Koenig Herodes*, pp. 645–49.

20. In Niese's text, seven lines in *BJ* against fourteen lines in *Ant.* are devoted to the account of the disease.

21. *BJ* 1. 656.

22. *Ant.* 17. 170.

23. *Ant.* 17. 168.

24. *Ant.* 17. 167.

25. *BJ* 1. 656.

26. *Ant.* 17. 168.

27. Thuc. 2. 49. 5.

28. *BJ* 1. 656.

29. *Ant.* 17. 169. In the more recent edition of Marcus–Wikgren, σπασμός is read against Niese's ἐσπασμένος. For discussion of manuscript authorities, see R. Marcus and A. Wikgren, *Josephus with an English Translation*, vol. 8 (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), pp. vii–viii.

30. Thuc. 2. 49. 4.

31. *Ant.* 17. 169.

32. Thuc. 2. 49. 6.

symptom of disagreeable breath, not found in the *War* account, conforms to Thucydides' report of "unnatural and fetid breath."³³ In itself this symptom is perhaps not only mimesis but an essential element, somewhat debased, of the motif discussed above—an aspect of the affliction that serves to isolate or make the sufferer repugnant. One might compare here the stench of Antiochus' and Galerius' putrefaction.³⁴

Throughout the *Antiquities* there are numerous borrowings from classical historians and poets, and in Books 17–19 there are many other examples of Thucydidean mimesis.³⁵ In itself, then, the fact that Josephus fashioned his descriptions of the disease that afflicted Herod for his immorality and the murder of the σοφισταί after Thucydides' account of the plague is not extraordinary. Whether nonstylistic motivations in addition to his hostility to Herod are involved is less easily ascertainable. The single example that I know in which the Athenian plague is regarded as a divine judgment for murder is to be found in the undatable, but presumably late argument of Isocrates' *Busiris*. There it is stated that the plague that befell Athens was a divine judgment upon the Athenian people for their murder of Socrates.³⁶ Whether this absurdly anachronistic (or mysteriously proleptic) idea had any currency in the first centuries A.D. is unknown. It certainly does not appear in the extant apologetic Socratic literature which often, in line with the motifs described above, fabricated unhappy endings for Socrates' persecutors.³⁷ If it did have some currency, this passage that describes what befell Herod partly for his murder of the σοφισταί would have struck more than one familiar chord in a Greek audience. But this must remain mere speculation and one could easily be oversubtle here. Lucian's strictures on the proliferation of imitators of Thucydides, Herodotus, and Xenophon are too well known to repeat in this regard. His comments on Crepereius Calpurnianus, author of a history of the war between the Parthians and the Romans, will suffice. Having lifted from Thucydides the entire description of the Athenian plague, he visited it on the people of Nisibis who failed to take the Roman side. After reading the opening descriptions of the pestilence that "began in Ethiopia, then descended into Egypt," Lucian "left him still burying his wretched Athenians at Nisibis and went away knowing just what he was going to say after I had gone. But this is quite a fashion just now, to suppose that you're following Thucydides' style if you produce with some small alterations his own expressions."³⁸

In the past, the fact that Josephus often imitated classical authors has been helpful in solving a number of textual problems.³⁹ That he is imitating

33. Thuc. 2. 49. 2.

34. The classicist may draw a parallel with Philoctetes here.

35. For discussion, see H. St. J. Thackeray, *Josephus, the Man and the Historian* (New York, 1929; repr. 1967), pp. 100–124.

36. Hyp. ad Isoc. *Busiris*.

37. Cf. here Diod. 14. 37. 6; Cass. Dio 50. 2. 43; W. Nestle, *Griechische Studien* (Stuttgart, 1948), pp. 567–96.

38. Lucian *Hist. conscr.* 15 (trans. K. Kilburn [1959]).

39. Cf. here the use of Herodotus by S. Ek, "Herodotismen in der jüdischen Archäologie des Josephos und ihre textkritische Bedeutung," *Kungl. Hum. Vetens.* 1 (Lund, 1946), pp. 27–62.

Thucydides here may assist in understanding several difficult points in *Antiquities* 17:168–69: ἐπιθυμία δὲ δεινὴ τοῦ δέξασθαι τι ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ. Since the second symptom in the *War* account is κνησμὸς ἀφόρητος, Naber conjectured ὀδᾶξασθαι for δέξασθαι.⁴⁰ Following Naber, Marcus translates, “He had a terrible desire to scratch himself because of this.”⁴¹ Schalit concurs with Naber’s conjecture but, without argument, pronounces Marcus’ translation of ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ, “because of this,” as “was kaum zutreffen dürfte.”⁴² In fact, ἀπό meaning “in consequence of” is well attested in Josephus and αὐτοῦ may refer to πῦρ.⁴³ The phrase, therefore, is not nearly as difficult as Schalit makes it.

The real problem lies in the fact that the manuscript evidence is unanimous in reading δέξασθαι. Also, the Latin version translates “aviditas quoque inexplibilis semper inerat cibi.”⁴⁴ If we consider the Thucydidean evidence, immediately after the parallel fever account adduced above, the patient is described as being afflicted with an insatiable thirst τῇ δίψῃ ἀπαύστῳ. If Josephus had Thucydides in mind here, one should reject Naber’s conjecture, retain the hunger/thirst symptoms (δέχεσθαι τι, “to take something,” may refer to hunger and/or thirst), and perhaps read ἄπανστος for ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ. This reading would accord well both with the Thucydidean model and with the Latin “inexplibilis.” Significant reasons for these apparently minute changes and alterations of symptoms will be suggested below.

Table 1 makes readily apparent the changes that Josephus has made in the later *Antiquities* account. The significance of the eighth change has already been discussed. At first sight, other changes (ulceration and more diffuse dropsy) appear with perhaps the exception of (2) trivial. To the

TABLE 1

<i>War</i>	<i>Antiquities</i>
1. mild fever	1. deceptively mild fever
2. intolerable itching	2. insatiable hunger/thirst symptoms
3. continuous pains in the colon	3. general ulceration of entrails, especially terrible pains in the colon
4. tumors in the feet like dropsy	4. dropsical condition around the feet (ὕγρον καὶ διανγές)
5. inflammation of the abdomen	5. similar affliction of the abdomen
6. putrefaction of genitals—worms	6. sepsis of genitals with worms
7. upright breathing	7. exertion of breath
8. shortening of breath	8. bad breath
9. convulsions	9. asthma
	10. convulsions of unendurable severity

40. S. A. Naber, *Flavii Josephi opera omnia* (Leipzig, 1888–96).

41. Marcus and Wikgren, *Josephus*, p. 449.

42. Schalit, *Koenig Herodes*, pp. 638–39. He suggests ἀπαύστως.

43. See article ἀπό in H. St. J. Thackeray, *A Lexicon to Josephus* (Paris, 1930).

44. For fullest citation of variants as well as the parallel Latin version, see B. Niese, *Josephi opera omnia* (Berlin, 1890–94), app. crit. ad loc.

modern mind such a description is quite simply a register of symptoms from which to deduce a diagnosis, an interlocking matrix in which symptoms are less significant individually than in their relation to other indications. The collection of serous fluid in body cavities, to the modern physician, is not in itself, for example, a specific disease but rather a symptom of an underlying pathology, whether cardiac, renal, or pancreatic (diabetes). Herod's dropsical condition, when taken in connection with his insatiable thirst and appetite, to a modern physician might well suggest diabetes.⁴⁵

The Jew of Josephus' time, on the other hand, would tend to read the passage inductively and focus on individual items of the list not as symptoms but as specific afflictions or diseases. Dropsy, then, would be regarded not as an indication of underlying disease, but rather as a disease in its own right. Furthermore, in accord with the central doctrine of retribution there had evolved in Jewish thought the notion that specific diseases and sufferings were the results of specific sins. Accordingly, it was possible in this view not only to assign certain faults to each affliction, but also to each fault a corresponding punishment.⁴⁶ When in John 9:1-3, for example, Christ's disciples see a man who was blind from birth, their immediate question is whether the man himself or his parents sinned "that he was born blind."⁴⁷ Similarly in Luke 13:1-4 Christ must reject the notion that those men "whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices" or the eighteen upon whom fell the tower in Siloam were *prima facie* because of these sufferings "sinners above all men that dwell in Jerusalem."⁴⁸ In the Talmudic literature these etiological conceptions occur repeatedly. According to *Shabbath* 32^a, women die in childbirth for either washing their children's excrement on the Sabbath or for calling the holy ark a chest. Again in 32^b for unfulfilled vows, a man's wife dies in punishment or his children die young. In the same section, for causeless hatred, "strife multiplies in a man's house, his wife miscarries, and his sons and daughters die young." From neglect of *hallah* comes terror, consumption, and fever that consumes the eyes and makes the soul waste away (32^b). Pestilence and famine, people eating and not being satisfied, result from delayed, perverted, or careless judgment (32^a). From blasphemy, bloodshed, and perjury comes leprosy; from marital infidelity, epilepsy and the crippling of children; from slander, croup.⁴⁹

45. For the relevant modern medical argumentation which thus attempts to diagnose Herod's affliction, see S. Muntner, M.D., "Qôrôth," *Vierteljahresschrift für die Geschichte der Medizin und der Naturwissenschaften* 1 (1953): 134-42. For further medical literature and analysis, see Schalit, *Koenig Herodes*, p. 639, n. 198.

46. For the inductive approach to what are now regarded as symptoms and for these etiological conceptions, cf. H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament II* (Munich, 1924), pp. 193-97, 527-29; cf. J. Preuss, *Biblisch-talmudische Medizin*² (New York, 1971), pp. 190-95; also W. Bromily, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1964), s.v. *lâqumai*, esp. pp. 200-203; J. Snoman, *A Short History of Talmudic Medicine* (London, 1935), pp. 27-32, for a discussion of some disagreement as to natural or divine causes in certain diseases, predictable given the nature of this heterogeneous oral evidence.

47. Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar*, pp. 193-97.

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 527-29.

49. *Shabbath* 31^b-33^a.

Of immediate interest for the matter at hand is the etiology of dropsy and ulcerations. In the Talmudic literature, dropsy is regarded as a sign of sin and is in particular related to sexual offenses. Both dropsy and ulcers, moreover, are related to immorality and licentiousness.⁵⁰ For the fact that this particular connection obtained in the first century A.D. we have fortunately no better witness than Josephus himself who in the third book of the *Antiquities* specifically relates the occurrence of dropsy to sexual offenses. In the description of the ordeal of a suspected adulteress, the woman is compelled to swear that she had done her husband no wrong, that if she has violated decency, then may her leg be put out of joint and her belly swell so that she may die. If, Josephus elaborates, she has been unjustly accused, she becomes pregnant and bears the fruit of her womb. If she has proved false, her leg falls away and her belly swells with dropsy.⁵¹

Throughout *Antiquities* 17, Josephus refers again and again to Herod's licentiousness and uncontrolled sexuality; his nine wives, his immoderate love of eunuchs, his extravagant passion for Mariamme. The elaboration and slight altering of certain symptoms in the *Antiquities'* account may well then be designed to emphasize the divine etiology of Herod's affliction and testify to the specific transgressions for which he was punished. It is interesting to note in this regard that the less critical account in the *War* describes the disease as only "like" (ὡσπερ) dropsy and limits its diffusion.

Two points remain, the inclusion of the hunger/thirst symptom and the detailed description of the dropsical serous fluid. The reasons for their inclusion may be suggested here. In *Shabbath* 33^a three types of dropsy are distinguished: that which is "thick" or "palpable" (‘abbāh) and is caused by sin; that which is "distended" (thāpūach) and is caused by hunger; and that which is "small" or "impalpable" (daq) and is caused by magic. When Abbaye suffered from dropsy, Raba, to remove any doubt that the cause was sin, asserted that Abbaye practiced hunger, that is, asceticism.⁵² The statement that Herod ate and drank insatiably may thus eliminate the possibility that his dropsical condition was the result of hunger or starvation. Similarly, the detailed description of the fluid as διαγής, often translated "transparent," may eliminate the third cause. In a general sense, διαγής may refer to that which is clear or obvious.⁵³ In a medical sense, διαγείν may be used of a tumor that is obvious or palpable.⁵⁴ If this is the sense of διαγής here, then the description of the swelling as palpable would eliminate the possibility that Herod's affliction was caused by magic, in which case

50. See Bromily, *Theological Dictionary*, p. 201; also Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar*, p. 196, the parallel citation to Luke 13: 2, "Wer sich der Buhlerei ganz hingibt, an dem gehen Wunden u. Striemen hervor, s. Spr. 20, 30: 'Striemen von Wunden (treten hervor), gibst du dich ganz an das Bose hin' (so der Midr): u. nicht bloss dies, sondern er wird auch mit Wassersucht gestraft, s. das.: 'Und Schläge (Plagen) im Innersten des Bauches.'"

51. *Ant.* 3. 270-73.

52. *Shabbath* 33^a.

53. Dion. Hal. *Dem.* 5: "transparent" to refer to style.

54. Antyll. *Ap. Orib.* 46. 27. 4.

the swelling would have been small or impalpable.⁵⁵ The more detailed description of the dropsical condition may then, like the other additions and verbal changes in the passage, emphasize the divine etiology of Herod's disease.

Of course, this must remain only a suggestion since we cannot be sure that this threefold division prevailed in the first century A.D.⁵⁶ Nor with respect to part of the evidence should we be confident that we have drawn in all or entirely relevant passages, especially from that heterogeneous and at times undatable assemblage of oral evidence contained in the Talmudic literature. Since in both the *Antiquities* and *War* Herod's disease is partly associated with the judgment of the σοφισταί, one might also draw in as an illuminating parallel *Shabbath* 32^a cited above: delayed, perverted, or careless judgment results in insatiable hunger and pestilence. Not only did Herod suffer the first, but in his own person developed, according to the *Antiquities* account, the pestilence of pestilences, the Athenian plague.⁵⁷

Given our imperfect knowledge of the oral tradition in this period we may only set out a range of possible associations which might have been elicited by this literary passage. That in fact a number of associations, not only Jewish but also Greek, would have been elicited by the seemingly trivial verbal changes and additions in the later account has been the contention of this paper. Modern scholars in studying the passage as an interlocking matrix of symptoms from which to deduce a diagnosis have pursued a line, if not altogether anachronistic, at least irrelevant to the passage's original motivation. When Josephus tells us in *Contra Apionem* that the arch anti-Semite Apion developed a sore on his genitals, was of necessity circumcised, and thereafter died in agony, we hardly stand in need of a urologist to comprehend the passage.⁵⁸

55. That Josephus often uses medical words in their "technical" sense is a fact that has often been ignored much to the detriment of the understanding of his vocabulary. In discussing the luxurious accoutrements of Solomon, Josephus writes ὁ βασιλεὺς . . . ἐφ' ἄρματος αὐτὸς ὀχοῦμενος καὶ λευκὴν ἡμφιεσμένος ἐσθῆτα πρὸς αἰώραν ἔθος εἶχεν ἐξορμᾶν (*Ant.* 7. 186). Thackeray translates πρὸς αἰώραν as "for a ride." In a note he remarks that this meaning is peculiar. More than that, it is nowhere else attested and seems to be his own ad hoc improvisation. The concordance simply follows Thackeray here: αἰώρα "hovering-ride." The meaning that exactly fits this passage which describes the luxurious lifestyle of Solomon is again found in Josephus' contemporaries, the medici: "passive exercise" (see Antyll. *Ap. Orib.* 6. 23, Soranus 1. 25, and also Plut. *Mor.* 793B). The correct translation, then, is ". . . riding on his chariot and dressed in a white garment, he used to go out for passive exercise."

56. The statement in *Shabbath* 33^a is associated with "our Rabbis."

57. For an introduction to the use of Talmudic evidence and its attendant difficulties, see M. Stern (ed.), *Compendia Rerum Judaicarum ad Novum Testamentum* (Philadelphia, 1974), pp. 1-18. The incident also involved the erection of a golden image. One might cite too, therefore, *Yoma* 66^b in which Rab and Levi discuss why three forms of death befell the Israelites for the erection of the golden calf: death by the sword, plague (cf. again plague description in this Josephan passage), and dropsy. While the first two are mentioned in Scripture (Ex. 32: 27, 35), the third form apparently follows by analogy between Ex. 32: 20, the Israelites forced to drink the golden dust, and Nu. 5: 17-31, the ordeal of an adulteress forced to drink the dust of the tabernacle. This form appears to be indirectly linked to the passage in *Ant.* 3, discussed above, according to which if the adulteress proved guilty, her belly would swell with dropsy.

58. *C. Apion.* 2. 143.

The writings of the physiognomists at times influenced the ancient biographers' presentation of even the minor physical traits of certain notorious personalities. So also, in apologetic historians' descriptions of the diseases which befell such personalities, even the minute details at times may be separate reflections of the flaws and failings that marked such characters.

University of Notre Dame