

Jewish Queens and the Flawed Men Who Love Them: Female Rulers in Early Judaism

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Torah in Motion
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Timeline:

BCE:

587-586: Babylonians destroy the Jerusalem Temple; Babylonian Exile complete
539-538: Persia destroys the Babylonian Empire; allows Judeans to return
515: Building of the Second Temple is complete
334-333: Persian Period ends; Alexander the Great defeats Persia and the Hellenist Period begins
200: Judea has been mainly controlled by Ptolemies (Egyptian Greeks); it now comes under the control of Seleucids (Syrian Greeks)
175-164: Hasmonean Rebellion
103–76: Alexander Jannaeus rules Judea
76–67 BCE: Salome Alexandra reigns as Queen of Judea
63: Hasmonean period ends; Judea becomes a client kingdom of Rome
c.37–4: Herod reigns Judea
c. 20: Philo of Alexandria is born

CE:

6: Judea becomes fully incorporated into the Roman Empire
c.32: Jesus is crucified by the Romans
37: Josephus is born
28: Berenice, great-grand-daughter of Herod, is born
c. 30: Queen Helena of Adiabene converts to Judaism
38-41: Riots against the Jews in Alexandria, supported by Flaccus the governor and largely ignored by Gaius Caligula the emperor
c. 40: Philo writes *Embassy to Gaius*
c. 50: Helena dies
67-70: Jerusalem riots; Temple destroyed by Romans
c. 81: Berenice dies
135: Bar Kokhba revolt: Jews expelled from Jerusalem (which is renamed Aelia Capitolina); Rabbinic community moves to Yavneh and the Galilee
200: Mishnah edited and likely completed
500s (1st half): Babylonian Talmud edited and redacted (it will still be subject to small revisions over the next three centuries)

I. Salome Alexandra (141–67 BCE)

1. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 13.16.1–6:¹

Alexandra, when she had taken the fortress, acted as her husband had suggested to her, and spake to the Pharisees, and put all things into their power, both as to the dead body, and as to the affairs of the kingdom, and thereby pacified their anger against Alexander, and made them bear goodwill and

¹ All translations of Josephus's Greek text on this source sheet are taken from William Whiston, trans. *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1980). Translation of Roman sources in Latin are taken from the Loeb Classical Library edition. Translation of rabbinic sources are from www.Sefaria.org, unless stated otherwise.

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friendship to him; who then came among the multitude, and made speeches to them, and laid before them the actions of Alexander, and told them that they had lost a righteous king; and by the commendation they gave him, they brought them to grieve, and to be in heaviness for him, so that he had a funeral more splendid than had any of the kings before him. Alexander left behind him two sons, Hyrcanus and Aristobulus, but committed the kingdom to Alexandra. Now, as to these two sons, Hyrcanus was indeed unable to manage public affairs, and delighted rather in a quiet life; but the younger, Aristobulus, was an active and a bold man; and for this woman herself, Alexandra, she was loved by the multitude, because she seemed displeased at the offenses her husband had been guilty of.

She made Hyrcanus high priest, because he was the elder, but much more because he cared not to meddle with politics, and permitted the Pharisees to do everything; to whom also she ordered the multitude to be obedient. She also restored again those practices which the Pharisees had introduced, according to the traditions of their forefathers, and which her father-in-law, Hyrcanus, had abrogated. So she had indeed the name of the regent, but the Pharisees had the authority; for it was they who restored such as had been banished, and set such as were prisoners at liberty, and, to say all at once, they differed in nothing from lords. However, the queen also took care of the affairs of the kingdom, and got together a great body of mercenary soldiers, and increased her own army to such a degree, that she became terrible to the neighboring tyrants, and took hostages of them: and the country was entirely at peace, excepting the Pharisees; for they disturbed the queen, and desired that she would kill those who persuaded Alexander to slay the eight hundred men; after which they cut the throat of one of them, Diogenes; and after him they did the same to several, one after another, till the men that were the most potent came into the palace, and Aristobulus with them, for he seemed to be displeased at what was done; and it appeared openly, that if he had an opportunity, he would not permit his mother to go on so. These put the queen in mind what great dangers they had gone through, and great things they had done, whereby they had demonstrated the firmness of their fidelity to their master, insomuch that they had received the greatest marks of favor from him; and they begged of her, that she would not utterly blast their hopes, as it now happened, that when they had escaped the hazards that arose from their [open] enemies, they were to be cut off at home by their [private] enemies, like brute beasts, without any help whatsoever. They said also that...if she had determined to prefer the Pharisees before them, they still insisted that she place them in her fortresses; for if some fatal demon hath a constant spite against Alexander's house, they would be willing to bear their part, and to live in a private station there.

As these men said thus, and called upon Alexander's ghost for commiseration of those already slain, and those in danger of it, all the bystanders brake out into tears. But Aristobulus chiefly made manifest what were his sentiments, and used many reproachful expressions to his mother, [saying,] "Nay, indeed, the case is this, that they have been themselves the authors of their own calamities, who have permitted a woman who, against reason, was mad with ambition, to reign over them, when there were sons in the flower of their age fitter for it." Alexandra, not knowing what to do with any decency, committed the fortresses to them...About this time news was brought that Tigranes, the king of Armenia, had made an irruption into Syria with five hundred thousand soldiers, and was coming against Judea...

After this, when the queen was fallen into a dangerous distemper, Aristobulus resolved to attempt the seizing of the government; so he stole away secretly by night, with only one of his servants, and went to the fortresses, wherein his friends, that were such from the days of his father, were settled; for as he had been a great while displeased at his mother's conduct, so he was now much more afraid, lest, upon her death, their whole family should be under the power of the Pharisees; for he saw the inability of his brother, who was to succeed in the government; nor was any one conscious of what he was doing but only his wife, whom he left at Jerusalem with their children. He first of all came to Agaba, where was

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Galestes, one of the potent men before mentioned, and was received by him. When it was day, the queen perceived that Aristobulus was fled; and for some time she supposed that his departure was not in order to make any innovation; but when messengers came one after another with the news that he had secured the first place, the second place, and all the places, for as soon as one had begun they all submitted to his disposal, then it was that the queen and the nation were in the greatest disorder, for they were aware that it would not be long ere Aristobulus would be able to settle himself firmly in the government...Now the elders of the Jews, and Hyrcanus with them, went in unto the queen, and desired that she would give them her sentiments about the present posture of affairs, for that Aristobulus was in effect lord of almost all the kingdom, by possessing of so many strong holds, and that it was absurd for them to take any counsel by themselves, how ill soever she were, whilst she was alive, and that the danger would be upon them in no long time. But she bid them do what they thought proper to be done; that they had many circumstances in their favor still remaining, a nation in good heart, an army, and money in their several treasuries; for that she had small concern about public affairs now, when the strength of her body already failed her.

Now a little while after she had said this to them, she died, when she had reigned nine years, and had in all lived seventy-three. A woman she was who showed no signs of the weakness of her sex, for she was sagacious to the greatest degree in her ambition of governing; and demonstrated by her doings at once, that her mind was fit for action, and that sometimes men themselves show the little understanding they have by the frequent mistakes they make in point of government; for she always preferred the present to futurity, and preferred the power of an imperious dominion above all things, and in comparison of that had no regard to what was good, or what was right. However, she brought the affairs of her house to such an unfortunate condition, that she was the occasion of the taking away that authority from it, and that in no long time afterward, which she had obtained by a vast number of hazards and misfortunes, and this out of a desire of what does not belong to a woman, and all by a compliance in her sentiments with those that bare ill-will to their family, and by leaving the administration destitute of a proper support of great men; and, indeed, her management during her administration while she was alive, was such as filled the palace after her death with calamities and disturbance. However, although this had been her way of governing, she preserved the nation in peace. And this is the conclusion of the affairs of, Alexandra.

2. Josephus, *War*, 1.5.1–2.

Alexander left the kingdom to Alexandra his wife, and depended upon it that the Jews would now very readily submit to her, because she had been very averse to such cruelty as he had treated them with, and had opposed his violation of their laws, and had thereby got the good-will of the people. Nor was he mistaken as to his expectations; for this woman kept the dominion, by the opinion that the people had of her piety; for she chiefly studied the ancient customs of her country, and cast those men out of the government that offended against their holy laws. And as she had two sons by Alexander, she made Hyrcanus the elder high priest, on account of his age, as also, besides that, on account of his inactive temper, no way disposing him to disturb the public. But she retained the younger, Aristobulus, with her as a private person, by reason of the warmth of his temper.

And now the Pharisees joined themselves to her, to assist her in the government. These are a certain sect of the Jews that appear more religious than others, and seem to interpret the laws more accurately. Alexandra hearkened to them to an extraordinary degree, as being herself a woman of great piety towards God. But these Pharisees artfully insinuated themselves into her favor by little and little, and became themselves the real administrators of the public affairs: they banished and reduced whom they pleased; they bound and loosed [men] at their pleasure; and, to say all at once, they had the enjoyment of the royal

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authority, whilst the expenses and the difficulties of it belonged to Alexandra. She was a sagacious woman in the management of great affairs, and intent always upon gathering soldiers together; so that she increased the army the one half, and procured a great body of foreign troops, till her own nation became not only very powerful at home, but terrible also to foreign potentates, while she governed other people, and the Pharisees governed her.

3. Babylonian Talmud Taanit 23a

בעתם בלילי רביעיות ובלילי שבתות שכן מצינו בימי שמעון בן שטח שירדו להם גשמים בלילי רביעיות ובלילי שבתות עד שנעשו חטים ככליות ושעורים כגרעיני זיתים ועדשים כדינרי זהב וצוררו מהם דוגמא לדורות להודיע כמה החטא גורם שנאמר (ירמיהו ה, כה) עונותיכם הטו אלה וחטאתיכם מנעו הטוב מכם. וכן מצינו בימי הורדוס שהיו עוסקין בבנין בהמ"ק והיו יורדין גשמים בלילה למחר נשבה הרוח ונתפזרו העבים וזרחה החמה ויצאו העם למלאכתן וידעו שמלאכת שמים בידיהם:

As we found in the days of Shimon ben Shetah that rain invariably fell for them on Wednesday eves and on Shabbat eves, until wheat grew as big as kidneys, and barley as big as olive pits, and lentils as golden dinars. And they tied up some of these crops as an example [dugma] for future generations, to convey to them how much damage sin causes, as it is stated: "The Lord our God, Who gives rain, the former rain and the latter rain, in its season that keeps for us the appointed weeks of the harvest. Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withheld the good from you" (Jeremiah 5:24–25).

And we likewise found that in the days of Herod that they were occupied in the building of the Temple, and rain would fall at night. And the next day the wind would blow, the clouds would disperse, the sun would shine, and the people would go out to their work. And as rain would fall only at a time when it would not interfere with their labor, the nation knew that the work of Heaven was being performed by their hands.

4. Leviticus Rabbah, 35.10.

דבר אחר, ונתתי גשמיכם בעתם, בלילות. בימי הורדוס המלך היו גשמים יורדין בלילות, בשחרית נשבה הרוח נתפזרו העבים וזרחה החמה נתנגבה הארץ, והיו פועלים יוצאים ועוסקין במלאכתן ויודעין שרצון אביהם שבשמים מעשיהם. דבר אחר. ונתתי גשמיכם בעתם. בלילי שבתות. מעשה בימי שמעון בן שטח ובימי שלמצה המלכה שהיו גשמים יורדים בלילי שבתות עד שנעשו חטים ככליות ושעורים כגרעיני הזיתים ועדשים כדינרי זהב, וצברו מהם חכמים והגיהומם לדורות הבאים להודיע כמה חטא גורם, לקים מה שנאמר ירמיהו ה, כה עונותיכם הטו אלה וחטאתיכם מנעו הטוב מכם.

II. Berenice (28–c.81 CE)

1. Josephus, Antiquities, 19.5.1.

[Claudius] further liberated Alexander the alabarch, an old friend of his, who had acted as guardian for his mother Antonia and had been imprisoned by Gaius in a fit of anger. The son of Alexander married Berenice, the daughter of Agrippa. After the death of Marcus, son of Alexander, who was her first husband, Agrippa gave her to his own brother Herod, after asking Claudius to give him the kingdom of Chalcis.

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2. Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 2.15.1:

Agrippa's sister Bernice, however, who was at Jerusalem, witnessed with the liveliest emotion the outrages of the soldiers, and constantly sent her cavalry-commanders and bodyguards to Florus to implore him to put a stop to the carnage. But he, regarding neither the number of the slain nor the exalted rank of his suppliant, but only the profit accruing from the plunder, turned a deaf ear to her prayers. The mad rage of the soldiers even vented itself upon the queen. Not only did they torture and put their captives to death under her eyes, but they would have killed her also, had she not hastened to seek refuge in the palace, where she passed the night surrounded by guards, dreading an attack of the troops. She was visiting Jerusalem to discharge a vow to God; for it is customary for those suffering from illness or other affliction to make a vow to abstain from wine and to shave their heads during the thirty days preceding that on which they must offer sacrifices. These rites Bernice was then undergoing, and she would come barefoot before the tribunal and make supplication to Florus, without any respect being shown to her, and even at the peril of her life.

3. Suetonius, *The Lives of Twelve Caesars, The Life of Titus*, 7:

Besides cruelty, he was also suspected of riotous living, since he protracted his revels until the middle of the night with the most prodigal of his friends; likewise of unchastity because of his troops of male prostitutes and eunuchs, and his notorious passion for queen Berenice, to whom it was even said that he promised marriage. He was suspected of greed as well; for it was well known that in cases which came before his father he put a price on his influence and accepted bribes. In short, people not only thought, but openly declared, that he would be a second Nero.

4. Juvenal, *Satires*, 6:

[An unnamed aristocratic woman bought herself a] legendary diamond...once given by the barbarian Agrippa to his incestuous sister to wear.

5. Tacitus, *Histories*, 2:2-4:

Some believed that [Titus] turned back [to fight for the throne] because of his passionate longing to see again Queen Berenice; and the young man's heart was not insensible to Berenice, but his feelings towards her proved no obstacle to action.

6. Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 65:15 (155–235 CE):

Berenice was at the very height of her power and consequently came to Rome along with her brother Agrippa. The latter was given the rank of praetor, while she dwelt in the palace, cohabiting with Titus. She expected to marry him and was already behaving in every respect as if she were his wife; but when he perceived that the Romans were displeased with the situation, he sent her away.

7. Acts 25:13-26:31

After several days had passed, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to welcome Festus. ¹⁴Since they were staying there for several days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, 'There is a man here who was left in prison by Felix. ¹⁵When I was in Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me about him and asked for a sentence against him. ¹⁶I told them that it was not the custom of the Romans to hand over anyone before the accused had met the accusers face to face and had been

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given an opportunity to make a defense against the charge. ¹⁷So when they met here, I lost no time, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought. ¹⁸When the accusers stood up, they did not charge him with any of the crimes that I was expecting. ¹⁹Instead they had certain points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, but whom Paul asserted to be alive. ²⁰Since I was at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wished to go to Jerusalem and be tried there on these charges. ²¹But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of his Imperial Majesty, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to the emperor. ²²Agrippa said to Festus, ‘I would like to hear the man myself.’ ‘Tomorrow’, he said, ‘you will hear him.’

On the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city... Agrippa said to Paul, ‘You have permission to speak for yourself.’ Then Paul stretched out his hand and began to defend himself: ² ‘I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, ³because you are especially familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews; therefore I beg of you to listen to me patiently. ‘All the Jews know my way of life from my youth, a life spent from the beginning among my own people and in Jerusalem. ⁵They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I have belonged to the strictest sect of our religion and lived as a Pharisee. ⁶And now I stand here on trial on account of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors, ⁷a promise that our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship day and night. It is for this hope, your Excellency, that I am accused by Jews! ⁸Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?...

²⁴ While he was making this defense, Festus exclaimed, ‘You are out of your mind, Paul! Too much learning is driving you insane!’ ²⁵But Paul said, ‘I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking the sober truth. ²⁶Indeed the king knows about these things, and to him I speak freely; for I am certain that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this was not done in a corner. ²⁷King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.’ ²⁸Agrippa said to Paul, ‘Are you so quickly persuading me to become a Christian?’ ²⁹Paul replied, ‘Whether quickly or not, I pray to God that not only you but also all who are listening to me today might become such as I am—except for these chains.’ Then the king got up, and with him the governor and Bernice and those who had been seated with them; ³¹and as they were leaving, they said to one another, ‘This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.’

8. M. Sotah 7:8:

King Agrippa received [the scroll] standing and read it standing, and for this the Sages praised him. When he reached [the verse in Deuteronomy 17:15 that reads,] “You may not put a foreigner over you who is not your brother,” his eyes flowed with tears. But [the rabbis] said to him, “Do not fear, O Agrippa! You are our brother; you are our brother!”

III. Helena of Adiabene: (d. c. 50 CE)

1. Josephus, (Antiquities 20.2.1; 20.4.3):

Helena, queen of Adiabene, Monobazus, king of Adiabene, and their son Izates became converts to Judaism under the following circumstances. Monobazus, surnamed Bazaeus, king of Adiabene, seized with a passion

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for his sister Helena, took her as his partner in marriage and got her pregnant. On one occasion as he was sleeping beside her, he rested his hand on his wife's belly after she had gone to sleep, whereupon he thought he heard a voice bidding him remove his hand from her womb so as not to cramp the babe within it, which by the providence of God had had a happy start and would also attain a fortunate end. Disturbed by the voice, he at once awoke and told these things to his wife; and he called the son who was born to him Izates. He had an elder son by Helena named Monobazus and other children by his other wives; but it was clear that all his favour was concentrated on Izates as if he were an only child. In consequence of this, Izates' half-brothers by their common father grew envious of the child. Their envy grew into an ever-increasing hatred, for they were all vexed that their father preferred Izates to themselves. Although their father clearly perceived this, he pardoned them, for he attributed their feeling not to any bad motive but rather to the desire that each of them had to win his father's favour for himself. Yet, as he was greatly alarmed for the young Izates, lest the hatred of his brothers should bring him to some harm, he gave him an abundance of presents and sent him off to Abennerigus the king of Charax Spasini, to whom he entrusted the safety of the boy...

Monobazus, being now old and seeing that he had not long to live, desired to lay eyes on his son before he died. He therefore sent for him, gave him the warmest of welcomes and presented him with a district called Carron. The land there has excellent soil for the production of amomum in the greatest abundance; it also possesses the remains of the ark in which report has it that Noah was saved from the flood—remains which to this day are shown to those who are curious to see them. Izates, accordingly, resided in this district until his father's death. On the day when Monobazus departed this life, Queen Helena ... set up Monobazus, her eldest son, as king. Putting the diadem upon his head and giving him his father's signet ring and what they call the sampsera, she exhorted him to administer the kingdom until his brother's arrival. The latter, on hearing of his father's death, quickly arrived and succeeded his brother Monobazus, who made way for him.

Now during the time when Izates resided at Charax Spasini, a certain Jewish merchant named Ananias visited the king's wives and taught them to worship God after the manner of the Jewish tradition. It was through their agency that he was brought to the notice of Izates, whom he similarly won over with the co-operation of the women. When Izates was summoned by his father to Adiabene, Ananias accompanied him in obedience to his urgent request. It so happened, moreover, that Helena had likewise been instructed by another Jew and had been brought over to their laws....

When Izates had learned that his mother was very much pleased with the Jewish religion, he was zealous to convert to it himself; and since he considered that he would not be genuinely a Jew unless he was circumcised, he was ready to act accordingly. When his mother learned of his intention, however, she tried to stop him by telling him that it was a dangerous move. For, she said, he was a king; and if his subjects should discover that he was devoted to rites that were strange and foreign to themselves, it would produce much disaffection and they would not tolerate the rule of a Jew over them. Besides this advice she tried by every other means to hold him back. He, in turn, reported her arguments to Ananias. The latter expressed agreement with the king's mother and actually threatened that if he should be unable to persuade Izates, he would abandon him and leave the land. For he said that he was afraid that if the matter became universally known, he would be punished, in all likelihood, as personally responsible because he had instructed the king in unseemly practices. The king could, he said, worship God even without being circumcised if indeed he had fully decided to be a devoted adherent of Judaism, for it was this that counted more than circumcision. He told him, furthermore, that God Himself would pardon him if, constrained thus by necessity and by fear of his subjects, he failed to perform this rite. And so, for the time, the king was convinced by his arguments. Afterwards, however, since he had not completely given up his desire, another Jew, named Eleazar, who came from Galilee and who had a reputation for being extremely strict when it came to the ancestral laws, urged him to carry out the rite... Withdrawing into another room, he summoned his physician and had the

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prescribed act performed. Then he sent for both his mother and his teacher Ananias and notified them that he had performed the rite. They were immediately seized with consternation and fear beyond measure that, if it should be proved that he had performed the act, the king would risk losing his throne, since his subjects would not submit to government by a man who was a devotee of foreign practices, and that they themselves would be in jeopardy since the blame for his action would be attributed to them. It was God who was to prevent their fears from being realized. For although Izates himself and his children were often threatened with destruction, God preserved them, opening a path to safety from desperate straits. God thus demonstrated that those who fix their eyes on Him and trust in Him alone do not lose the reward of their piety. But I shall report these events at a later time.

Helena, the mother of the king, saw that peace prevailed in the kingdom and that her son was prosperous and the object of admiration in all men's eyes, even those of foreigners, thanks to the prudence that God gave him. Now she had conceived a desire to go to the city of Jerusalem and to worship at the temple of God, which was famous throughout the world, and to make thank-offerings there. She consequently asked her son to give her leave. Izates was most enthusiastic in granting his mother's request, made great preparations for her journey, and gave her a large sum of money. He even escorted her for a considerable distance, and she completed her journey to the city of Jerusalem. Her arrival was very advantageous for the people of Jerusalem, for at that time the city was hard pressed by famine and many were perishing from want of money to purchase what they needed. Queen Helena sent some of her attendants to Alexandria to buy grain for large sums and others to Cyprus to bring back a cargo of dried figs. Her attendants speedily returned with these provisions, which she thereupon distributed among the needy. She has thus left a very great name that will be famous forever among our whole people for her benefaction. When her son Izates learned of the famine, he likewise sent a great sum of money to leaders of the Jerusalemites. The distribution of this fund to the needy delivered many from the extremely severe pressure of famine.

2. Josephus, Jewish War, 5.6.1

Now, while these factions fought one against another, the people were their prey on both sides, as we have said already; and that part of the people who would not join with them in their wicked practices were plundered by both factions. Simon held the upper city, and the great wall as far as Cedron, and as much of the old wall as bent from Siloam to the east, and which went down to the palace of Monobazus, who was king of the Adiabeni, beyond Euphrates; he also held that fountain, and the Acra, which was no other than the lower city; he also held all that reached to the palace of queen Helena, the mother of Monobazus. But John held the temple, and the parts thereto adjoining, for a great way, as also Ophla, and the valley called "the Valley of Cedron."

3. Josephus, The Jewish War, 6.6.3

[Titus] gave orders to the soldiers both to burn and to plunder the city; who did nothing indeed that day; but on the next day they set fire to the repository of the archives, to Acra, to the council-house, and to the place called Ophlas; at which time the fire proceeded as far as the palace of queen Helena, which was in the middle of Acra; the lanes also were burnt down, as were also those houses that were full of the dead bodies of such as were destroyed by famine.

4. Mishnah Yoma 3:10

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King Munbaz had the handles of all the vessels used on Yom Kippur made of gold. His mother Helena made a golden candelabrum over the opening of the Temple sanctuary. She also made a golden tablet, on which the portion concerning the suspected adulteress was inscribed. Nicanor's gates were the subject of miracles. And they were all mentioned in praise.

5. M Nazir 3:6

If a man vows a naziriteship of long duration and completes it and then arrives in the Land [of Israel], Beth Shammai say that he is a nazirite for thirty days, but Beth Hillel say that his naziriteship commences again as at first. It is related that Queen Helena, when her son went to war, said: 'if my son returns in peace from the war, I shall be a nazirite for seven years. Her son returned from the war, and she observed a naziriteship for seven years. At the end of the seven years, she went up to the Land [of Israel] and Beth Hillel ruled that she must be a nazirite for a further seven years. Towards the end of this seven years, she contracted ritual defilement, and so altogether she was a nazirite for twenty-one years. R. Judah said: she was only a nazirite for fourteen years.

6. b. Sukkah 2b-3a

A Sukkah that is more than twenty cubits high is unfit. Rabbi Yehuda deems a Sukkah fit even if it is up to forty or fifty cubits high. Rabbi Yehuda said: There was an incident involving Queen Helene in Lod where her Sukkah was more than twenty cubits high, and the Elders were entering and exiting the Sukkah and did not say anything to her about the Sukkah not being fit. The Rabbis said to him: Is there proof from there? She was, after all, a woman and therefore exempt from the mitzva of Sukkah. Consequently, the fact that her Sukkah was not fit did not warrant a comment from the Elders. Rabbi Yehuda said to them in response: Didn't she have seven sons and therefore require a fit Sukkah? And furthermore, she performed all of her actions only in accordance with the directives of the Sages.

7. Genesis Rabbah, 46:10:

וּנְמַלְתֶּם אֶת בְּשַׂר עַרְלַתְכֶם (בראשית יז, יא), (פְּנוּמִי הִיא תְלוּיָהּ בְּגוּף, וּמַעֲשֵׂה בְּמִנְבֹּו הַמְּלָךְ וּבְזוֹנוֹס בְּנָיו שֶׁל תְּלָמִי הַמְּלָךְ שֶׁהָיוּ יוֹשְׁבֵי וְקוֹרְיֵן בְּסִפְרָ בְּרֵאשִׁית, כִּינֹן שֶׁהִגִּיעוּ לְפָסוּק הַזֶּה וּנְמַלְתֶּם אֶת בְּשַׂר עַרְלַתְכֶם, הִפְדָּ זֶה פָּנָיו לְפִתְלֵל וְהִתְחִיל בּוֹכָה וְזֶה הִפְדָּ פָּנָיו לְפִתְלֵל וְהִתְחִיל בּוֹכָה, הִלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם וְנִמְלוּ, לְאַחַר יָמִים הָיוּ יוֹשְׁבֵי וְקוֹרְיֵן בְּסִפְרָ בְּרֵאשִׁית כִּינֹן שֶׁהִגִּיעוּ לְפָסוּק הַזֶּה וּנְמַלְתֶּם אֶת בְּשַׂר עַרְלַתְכֶם, אָמַר אֶחָד לְחֶבְרוֹ אֵי לָךְ אָחִי, אָמַר לִיה אֵת אֵי לָךְ, לִי לֹא אוֹי, גִּלּוֹ אֵת הַדָּבָר זֶה לְזֵנָה, כִּינֹן שֶׁהִרְגִישָׁה כְּהוֹן אֶמֶן הִלְכָה וְאַמְרָה לְאַבְיָהוֹן כְּנִידָ עֲלֵתָה גּוֹמָא בְּבִשְׂרֹן, וְגִזַּר הַרּוֹפֵא שֶׁיִּמְלוּ, אָמַר לָהּ יִמְלוּ.

Izates and his brother Monobazus were once reading the book of Genesis and came to the verse "And ye shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin" (Gen. 17:11). Both began to weep and independently decided on circumcision. Sometime later, when they once again read from Genesis and reached this verse, each lamented that the other was uncircumcised. They then confided in each other and informed their mother, who, in turn, told their father that a sore had broken out on their sons' flesh and that the physician had ordered circumcision. Thereupon the father gave his consent to what had already been done.

8. Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, 2.12:

Jewish Queens and the Flawed Men Who Love Them: Female Rulers in Early Judaism

Dr. Malka Z. Simkovich

Torah in Motion

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Splendid monuments of this Helen, of whom the historian has made mention, are still shown in the suburbs of the city which is now called Ælia. But she is said to have been queen of the Adiabeni.