

Bernice

BERNICE bər-nēs [Gk. Bernikē—‘victorious’] (Acts 25:13, 23; 26:30). The eldest daughter of Herod Agrippa I and sister of Herod Agrippa II. She was born ca A.D. 28. Her life’s story is told by Josephus (cf. also Juvenal Satires vi.156).

Her first marriage was to Marcus the son of Alexander Lysimachus the “alabarch” of Alexandria. After Marcus’ death she married her uncle, King Agrippa’s brother Herod, for whom Agrippa was able to procure the kingdom of Chalcis from Claudius (Josephus, Ant. xix.5.1). This marriage produced two sons, Bernicianus and Hyrcanus (xx.5.2). After Herod’s death in 48 she became involved in an incestuous relationship with her brother Agrippa II, with whom she listened to the defense of Paul at Caesarea before Festus. In an attempt to silence the rumors about her relation-

ship with Agrippa, she persuaded Polemo king of Sicily to undergo circumcision and marry her; but soon after they were married she left him and returned to her brother (xx.7.3).

Josephus writes that she was in Jerusalem to perform a vow at the time when Procurator Florus slaughtered many of the Jews (A.D. 66). She pleaded with him to stop the massacre; but he refused to listen to her, and she herself was almost killed by his soldiers (BJ ii.15.1). During the war that ensued, her palace—as well as that of Agrippa—was set on fire by the Jews (ii.17.6).

In later years she and Agrippa took an oath of loyalty to the emperor Vespasian. It appears that ca 75 they moved to Rome, where she became the mistress of Vespasian’s son Titus.