



National Zoo Lovers Day: Celebrating Wildlife and Conservation

National Zoo Lovers Day, observed on April 8, celebrates the role of zoos in wildlife conservation, education and animal care. The day encourages people to visit zoos, learn about different species and understand the importance of protecting wildlife and their natural habitats. Modern zoos also contribute to breeding programmes and conservation initiatives aimed at preserving endangered animals. Educational activities and awareness campaigns organised on this day help visitors, especially children, develop a deeper appreciation for biodiversity. National Zoo Lovers Day reminds us that protecting wildlife and respecting nature are essential for maintaining the planet's ecological balance.

#FLATULENCE

When Gut Bacteria Do the Talking

Flatulence is more than just a social inconvenience

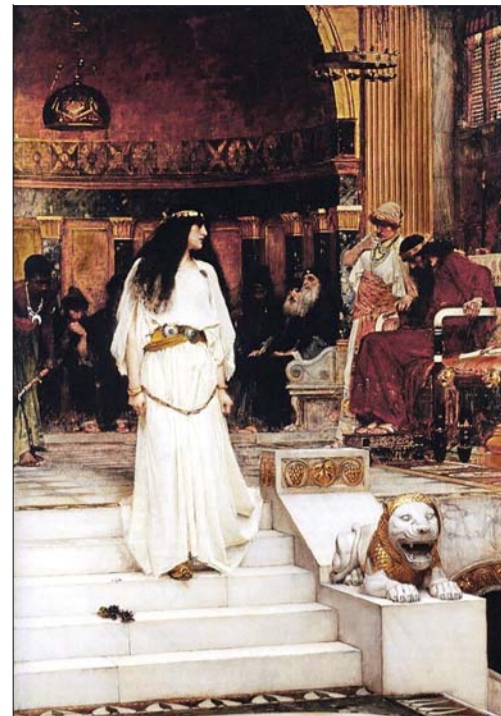


For something so often joked about, flatulence is actually a complex and fascinating biological process, one that offers insight into the unseen world of human microbiota. Recent studies continue to affirm what scientists have long known: the majority of gas expelled during flatulence is not produced by the human body itself, but rather by the trillions of bacteria living in our intestines.

Gas by Fermentation
Flatulence primarily arises from the metabolic activity of anaerobic bacteria in the large intestine. These microbes play a crucial role in breaking down dietary fibers and carbohydrates that escape digestion in the upper gastrointestinal tract. Through microbial fermentation, the gut bacteria convert these substances into short-chain fatty acids (beneficial for colon health), and in the process, they release gases such as hydrogen (H2), carbon dioxide (CO2), methane (CH4), and nitrogen (N2).

Functional Biomarker?
While these gases are mostly odorless, trace amounts of sulfur-containing compounds such as hydrogen sulfide (H2S), are what give flatulence its distinctive smell. The presence and balance of these compounds vary depending on individual microbiome composition, diet, and transit time through the gut.

A Microbial Signature
Interestingly, the specific composition of intestinal gas can serve as an indicator of gut health. For instance, an overproduction of methane, largely generated by methanogenic archaea, has been linked to slower intestinal motility and constipation. On the other hand, excessive hydrogen production may be associated with bloating or irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).



'Mariamne Leaving the Judgement Seat of Herod', by painter John William Waterhouse.

Herod the Great Was Mostly Terrible

Herod's growing paranoia led him to further bloodshed within his own family. One of the most tragic events of his reign was the execution of his brother-in-law, Aristobulus. Aristobulus was drowned in 27 BCE, allegedly because he posed a threat to Herod's rule. Herod's suspicions grew to such an extent that he could not trust even those closest to him. Aristobulus's death not only marked the continuation of Herod's violent consolidation of power but also revealed the extent of his personal and political insecurities.



Herod I as portrayed in the movie "The Nativity."

#Kshema Jatuhkarna

History has bestowed on him the descriptive title, 'the Great.' The primary Jewish chronicler of his period, Josephus, was the first to use the actual phrase 'Herod the Great' in his *Antiquities of the Jews*. He used the phrase to distinguish Herod from his sons and grandsons of the same name. In other words, he used the title in the sense of 'the Greater' or 'the Older.'

Whatever the original reason, the name has stuck on the one who ruled as the 'king of the Jews' from 37 to 4 B.C. Although Herod died soon after Jesus' birth, his shadow continued to loom over the New Testament through his huge building projects and his descendants, who continued to rule over the Jewish people in Israel throughout the first century A.D. We could question whether Herod deserved to have the Great added to his name. As we shall see, his personal and family life was



such that he deserved more the title of 'the Terrible.' On the other hand, he certainly left a 'great' mark on history and well deserves the title. Understanding it can provide clues to your diet, digestion, and even your disease risk."

Herod the Great, a figure whose name has become synonymous with ruthlessness, power, and paranoia, was born around 73 BCE and rose to power as the King of Judea under Roman patronage. His reign, which spanned from 37 BCE to 4 BCE, is remembered for grand construction projects, political intrigue, and a volatile relationship with both his family and the people of Judea. Herod's early days were marked by ambition and insecurity, traits that would shape his rule and make him one of history's most complex and controversial figures.

Early Life and Insecurities
Herod was born into a family with strong ties to both the Jewish Hasmonean dynasty and the Roman Empire. His father, Antipater the Idumean, had risen to prominence under the Roman general Pompey

#PARANOID RULER



and through his family connections, Herod was positioned for power. However, his early years were filled with instability and political machinations, as he had to contend with the power struggles within the region. Despite being born into a prominent family, Herod's insecurities were clear from the outset, and he was constantly concerned about his position and legitimacy as a ruler.

These insecurities would shape his reign. Herod's efforts to secure his power led him to accuse his wife, Mariamne I, of adultery, even though she was likely innocent. This act of cruelty was rooted in his intense paranoia and his desire to consolidate control by eliminating potential threats, even those closest to him. His actions against Mariamne were emblematic of his growing paranoia and suspicion of anyone who might challenge his authority.

Rise to Power: Appointed King of Judea

Herod's rise to power came with the backing of the Roman Empire. In 40 BCE, the Roman Senate, under Mark Antony's influence, appointed Herod as King of Judea, despite his Idumean (and therefore non-Jewish) heritage. This was a crucial moment for Herod, as he sought to solidify his claim to the throne in the eyes of the Jewish people. However, the appointment also set him on a collision course with the traditional Jewish leaders, who were not pleased with the Romans' imposition of a foreign king.

Herod's early years as king were marked by significant efforts to gain the loyalty of the Jewish population, but his non-Jewish heritage and his reliance on Roman support made him a deeply unpopular ruler among many Jews. He was caught between Roman interests and the needs of his Jewish subjects, and his reign would be defined by this tension.



Map of Judea as it was in the 1st century AD.

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Herod's path to the throne was not without its challenges. His greatest adversary in the early years of his reign was Antigonos, the last Hasmonean king of Judea. Antigonos had been placed in power by the Parthians, and his rule was seen as a threat to Herod's legitimacy. After a prolonged military campaign, Herod captured Antigonos and brought him to Rome, where he was executed in 37 BCE. This victory solidified Herod's position as king, but it also marked the end of the Hasmonean dynasty, leaving Herod to deal with the consequences of his actions and the fallout from the Jewish population.

Marriage to Mariamne: Political Alliances and Paranoia

In an effort to strengthen his position, Herod married Mariamne I, a Hasmonean princess, in 37 BCE. This marriage was politically motivated, as it gave Herod a connection to the prestigious Hasmonean dynasty, which had ruled Judea before the Romans intervened. However, Herod's passion for Mariamne was more than just political; it was intense, obsessive, and ultimately destructive.

Herod's relationship with Mariamne was a turbulent one. His paranoia and insecurities continued to grow, and he accused her of infi-

delity, which may have been fabricated in his mind. In an emotional fit, he ordered her execution in 29 BCE, further exacerbating his own emotional instability. Herod's obsession with Mariamne did not end with her death; his intense love for her lingered, leading him to build lavish structures in her honour, including the Herodium.

Conflict with Antigonos: The Fall of the Hasmoneans

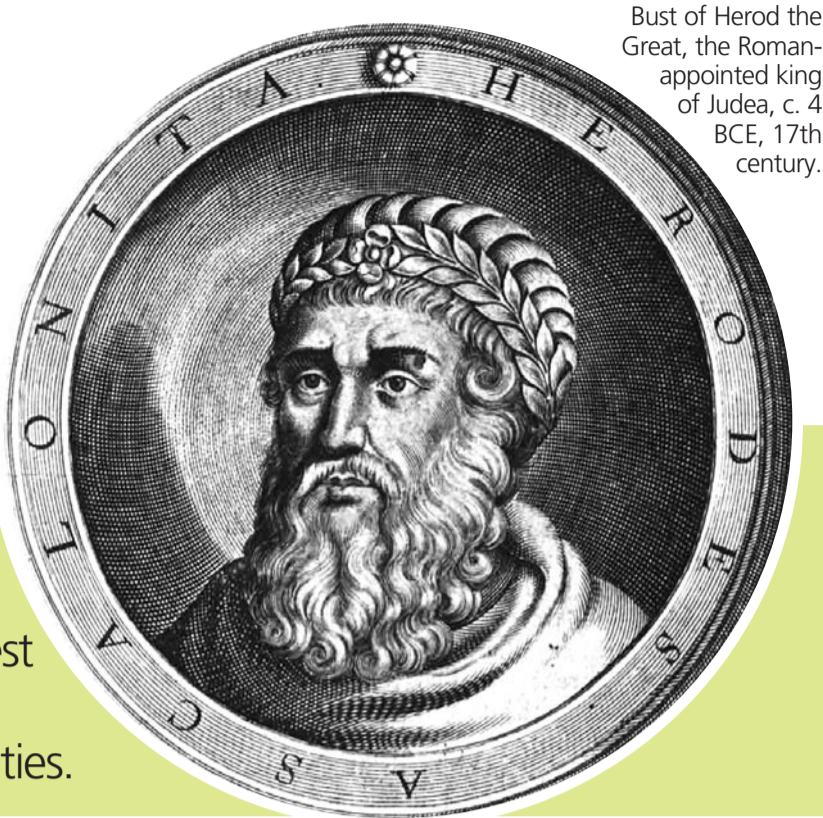
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The Execution of Aristobulus: A Family Tragedy

Herod's growing paranoia led him to further bloodshed within his own family. One of the most tragic events of his reign was the execution of his brother-in-law, Aristobulus. Aristobulus was drowned in 27 BCE, allegedly because he posed a threat to Herod's rule. Herod's suspicions grew to such an extent that he could not trust even those closest to him. Aristobulus's death not only marked the continuation of Herod's violent consolidation of power but also revealed the extent of his personal and political insecurities.

Herod's Construction Projects: A Legacy of Grandeur

Despite his violent and paranoid nature, Herod's reign was also marked by remarkable achievements in construction and urban



Bust of Herod the Great, the Roman-appointed king of Judea, c. 4 BCE, 17th century.



A still from Victor Tourjansky's 1959 film Herod the Great.

development. He embarked on numerous ambitious projects to secure his legacy and to gain favour with both the Jewish people and the Roman Empire. His most famous construction project was the expansion of the Second Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, which became a symbol of his power and influence. Herod also built the Herodium, a fortress-palace in the desert, as a symbol of his authority and a place of refuge for himself and his family.

These grandiose construction projects were also a way for Herod to establish his reputation in the eyes of the Roman Empire and secure his legacy as a powerful ruler. However, they also represented a conflict between Roman values and Jewish religious traditions, with some Jews resenting the lavishness of these structures and the cultural implications of Herod's alliances with the Romans.

The Execution of His Sons and Legacy

Herod's paranoia would ultimately extend to his own children. In a shocking act, he ordered the execu-



tion of three of his sons, Alexander, Aristobulus, and Antipater, on charges of treason, fearing they might attempt to usurp his throne. This brutal act ensured that Herod's dynasty would not survive him and contributed to the legacy of cruelty that surrounded his reign.

Herod's final years were marked by intense physical suffering, likely from chronic kidney disease, as suggested by modern medical studies. His health deteriorated rapidly, and as his death approached, he ordered that prominent citizens be killed after his passing so that his death would be mourned. This act of cruelty exemplified his need for control, even in death. Herod died in 4 BCE, leaving behind a legacy that was marked by both grandeur and bloodshed. His reign was a mixture of ambitious construction projects, violent purges, and deep paranoia. His rule also occurred at a time when the Roman Empire was experiencing political upheaval, and Herod's ability to navigate Roman politics ensured his survival for as long as he did.

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#EDUCATION IN 19TH CENTURY BENGAL

Dalit Teachers and the British Transformation

British colonial and missionary interventions formalized education in ways that centralized authority, privileged Western knowledge, and erased indigenous contributions



Education in Bengal during the early 1800s was a complex system deeply intertwined with social hierarchy, caste, and colonial intervention. Before the widespread introduction of Western-style education by the British, much of the teaching in villages and towns was carried out by local educators from marginalized communities, including Dalits, who played a crucial role in spreading literacy and basic learning.

Dalit Teachers: The Grassroots Educators

In pre-colonial Bengal, formal schools were scarce, and most education happened in toll (traditional schools), pathshalas, or even in private homes. Teachers, known as guru or pathshala instructors, were often recruited from communities outside the traditional Brahminical elite. In many villages, Dalit teachers were entrusted with teaching children basic literacy, arithmetic, religious texts, and practical knowledge. These educators were respected within their communities for their skills, patience, and ability to make education accessible, even if social norms limited their status in wider society.

The Role of William Ward and Early Missionary Education

The early 19th century saw the arrival of Christian missionaries in Bengal, among whom



William Ward, an English missionary of the Serampore Mission, became a prominent figure. Ward and his colleagues aimed to provide education not just to the upper castes but to the poor and marginalized communities.

Ward was instrumental in establishing vernacular schools that taught in Bengali and other local languages, making learning more accessible to children from non-elite backgrounds. While he valued education for all, the introduction of missionary schools began to formalize and standardize education, shifting it away from the traditional Dalit teachers who had run informal schools for generations.

British Intervention and Systematic Change

With the expansion of British colonial administration in Bengal, the education system underwent profound changes. The British introduced Western-style schools, textbooks, and curricula, focusing on English language, European literature, and Western sciences. This system often undermined traditional teaching methods and marginalized the existing network of Dalit educators.

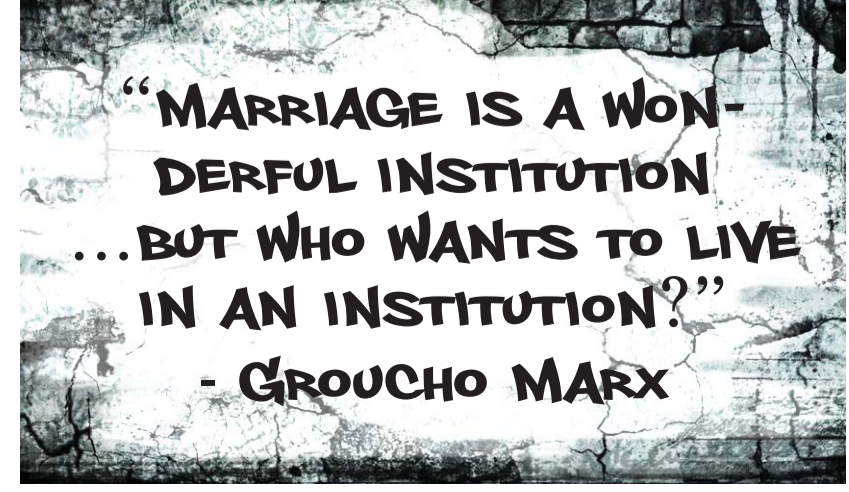
The emphasis on English proficiency and Western pedagogy shifted prestige and authority towards schools funded by missionaries or colonial officials. Dalit teachers, who had previously been central to local education, were gradually pushed to the periphery, their contributions largely unrecognized in official records.

At the same time, British education policies also opened new opportunities for marginalized communities, as missionary schools and later government institutions allowed some Dalit children to access literacy, numeracy, and eventually professional positions that had previously been closed to them.

Legacy and Impact

The transition in 19th century Bengal's education system reflects a double-edged legacy. On one hand, Dalit teachers had historically ensured that education reached the grassroots, sustaining literacy in local communities. On the other, British colonial and missionary interventions formalized education in ways that centralized authority, privileged Western knowledge, and often erased indigenous contributions. Today, understanding the role of Dalit educators in 1800s Bengal highlights the resilience and agency of marginalized communities in spreading knowledge, even under constraints of caste and social hierarchy. It also provides insight into how colonialism's education policies transformed Indian society, sometimes opening doors while simultaneously redefining authority and access in ways that still influence the modern education system.

THE WALL



BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman