


THE MACCABEES AND THE GYMNASIUM

Samuele Rocca

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3900-8037>
Ariel University / University of Haifa

Abstract

This paper focuses on the fate of the gymnasium in the wake of the Maccabean Revolt. While the vast majority of scholars postulate that the gymnasium was destroyed by the Maccabees, no such statement is made by any of the sources. The gymnasium's fate is not mentioned in the narration of Judah's conquest of Jerusalem, nor in the description of Jonathan or Simon's successive sieges and eventually conquest the Accra, the fortress where the Seleucid garrison and the Hellenists took refuge.

The main key to understand the successive fate of the gymnasium is that this term indicates an institution as well as a building. First it is necessary to figure out its location, a key element to understand its successive destiny. Furthermore, the narration of the various sieges of the Accra could provide with a perspective on the evolution of the attitude of the Maccabees and their followers towards the Hellenists, who would have included the members of the team of the gymnasium. On the other hand, an analysis of the episode of embassy sent by Jonathan to Sparta and the claim of the Jews to kinship, or *syngeneia*, with Sparta, demonstrates that the benefits of Greek education, acquired only in a gymnasium, were not lost to the Maccabees.

Thus, the paper argues that this institution, the symbol *par excellence* of the Greco-Roman world that was introduced into Jerusalem in the second century BCE, was in fact never destroyed but instead died of natural causes, which is why its demise is not mentioned in the sources.

Keywords: gymnasium, Hellenization, Jason, Jonathan, Judah, Maccabees, Menelaus, Simon, Sparta.

1. Introduction

The gymnasium was instituted at Jerusalem by the high priest Jason in 172 BCE, and it played a role in the political and cultural divisions that erupted in the city and in Judea just prior to the Maccabean Revolt. But what ever happened to it? Jonathan A. Goldstein argues that the sources are silent on this question. Nowhere is it stated that the institution of the gymnasium was abolished or that the building was destroyed. Goldstein suggests that it is possible that Menelaus, depicted as an extreme Hellenizer and who took the place of Jason as high priest, decided to bring to an end what had “provoked” God’s anger. However, in this paper I want to suggest otherwise. The point to remember is that the gymnasium is both an institution and a structure. While the building itself was probably destroyed or repurposed in the wake of the Maccabean victories, its directive body probably found refuge in the Acra and survived among the Hellenists till the institution faded away by the time of Simon’s conquest of the Acra in 141 BCE.¹

The creation of a gymnasium in Jerusalem by Jason, appointed high priest by Antiochus IV in 175 BCE, is described in relative detail by the author of 2 Maccabees. 1 Maccabees and Josephus in the *Jewish Antiquities* also mention this event, though somewhat more briefly. A common element in all three sources is that the creation of the gymnasium is associated with the rise of Hellenism and the adoption of foreign customs.² These sources have been differently interpreted by scholars, and yet, whatever the approach taken, scholars are still at odds on the particulars and the social repercussions of Jason’s act. At the beginning, Jason’s foundation of a gymnasium was understood as part of a wider cultural and religious reform. Elias J. Bickerman argued that the gymnasium was created in complete antithesis to Jewish law. The creation of this institution had set off a process whose purpose was to get rid of Jewish particularism, creating “une religion des philosophes.” On the other hand, Victor Tcherikover sets apart Jason’s moderate Hellenization of Jerusalem, and thus, the creation of the gymnasium, from Menelaus’s (subsequent) extreme Hellenization. Martin Hengel argues that Jason’s determination to transform Jerusalem into a Greek city was completely antithetical to Jewish tradition. On the other hand, according to Goldstein, Jason genuinely believed that his reforms, among them the creation of a gymnasium, were in no way antithetical to the Torah.³

Today, most scholars argue that the gymnasium was part of a political reform. Lester L. Grabbe suggests that the creation of the gymnasium would have permitted future inhabitants of Jerusalem to learn the necessary cultural and physical skills to become citizens. This process in no way would have resulted in any violation of the laws of the Torah. According to Nigel F. Kennell, the discovery of an inscription from Tyriaion

¹ Although Lee I. Levine and myself had suggested that the Letter of Claudius to Agrippa II as well as a passage of Josephus, which mentions the *xystos*, point to the possibility that a gymnasium in fact existed in Jerusalem on the eve of the Jewish War, this possibility shall not be discussed in the present framework. On the Letter of Claudius to Agrippa II, see Josephus, *AJ* 20.10–14, mainly 11; on the *xystos*, see Josephus, *BJ* 5.144; 6; Levine 1998, 85–91; Rocca 2008, 265.

² 2 Macc 4:9–16; 1 Macc 1:11–14; Josephus, *AJ* 12.240–241; Goldstein 2011, 216–217; 225–231; Schwartz 2008, 207–208, 218–227; Goldstein 1976, 199–201; Schwartz 2022, 109, 156–159; Marcus 1998, 122–123.

³ Bickerman 1978, 1073–1075; Tcherikover 1979, 166–170; Hengel 1991, 70–74, 277–283; Goldstein 2011, 227–230.

demonstrates the political function of the gymnasium, as its attendance was the condition needed to receive the local citizenship. Moreover, its primary purpose was military. In his provocative study, Robert Doran argues that the creation of the gymnasium would have necessitated the adoption of a special curriculum based on the Greek Bible. Even the original purpose of *epispasmos* was not that of rendering null and void the Holy Covenant; it was only aesthetic. Doran thus suggests a process of Hellenization “more Iudaico.”⁴ Other scholars, however, emphasize its symbolic, almost metaphysical, meaning in the context of the burgeoning conflict between Hellenism (*hellenismos*) and Judaism (*ioudaismos*) in second-century BCE Jerusalem. According to Martha Himmelfarb, the gymnasium depicted by the author of 2 Maccabees is an institution that reflects Hellenism, a system of values that is different from idolatry but that nonetheless was alien to Judaism, and Sylvie Honigman argues that the creation of the gymnasium, closely associated to the rise of Hellenism, was a symbolic element of the main topic of 2 Maccabees, that is, the conflict between Greco-Roman and Jewish culture.⁵

And yet, the distinction between the gymnasium as an institution and the gymnasium as a building has not been emphasized enough in scholarship. Once this distinction is taken into consideration, an in-depth analysis of the events points to the possibility that the gymnasium was never destroyed by the Maccabees but instead, because of the changes in political, cultural, and religious circumstances, just faded away.

2. The nature of the gymnasium in Jerusalem: What it was and what it was not

So what *was* the gymnasium? The author of 2 Maccabees, rightly, associates the erection of the latter with the transformation of the Eastern temple-city of Jerusalem into the *polis* of Antioch in Jerusalem. This topic has been at the center of scholarship ever since Bickerman’s publication of his *God of the Maccabees*, where he argues that Antiochus IV allowed the creation of a *politeuma*, or a community, which enjoyed a privileged legal status in Jerusalem and whose population lived next to Jerusalem’s native population, known as the Jewish *ethnos*. The gymnasium and its *ephebia* were perceived as the founding base of the *politeuma* as well as the practical replacement of the *polis*. However, as a consequence of the creation of the *politeuma*, the royal privileges, *philanthropa basilica*, previously granted by Antiochus III to the priestly elite of Judea and enshrined in a charter recognizing the legal autonomy of the Jews to live according to their ancestral laws, were abolished. Today, Bickerman’s notion that Jason obtained from the king permission to create a *politeuma* is not accepted by scholars.⁶ The attitude of the Seleucid

⁴ Grabbe 2010, 12–13; Grabbe 2002, 6–21; Kennell 2005, 1–24; Doran 2001, 94–116; Pélékidis 1962, 197.

⁵ Himmelfarb 1998, 19–40; Honigman 2014, 261–264.

⁶ On the creation of the gymnasium and the transformation of Jerusalem into a *polis*, see 1 Macc 4:9. These privileges, hinted at but not mentioned by the author of 2 Maccabees, are mentioned in detail by Josephus in *Jewish Antiquities* in a letter of Antiochus III Megas addressed to a certain Ptolemy on the embassy headed by John, 2 Macc 4:11; on the letter of Antiochus III, see Josephus, *AJ* 12.140–144; Bickerman 1978, 1073–1075; Bickerman 1980, 44–85.

ruler toward newly acquired local populations and their elites is mirrored by the Hefzibah Inscription, dated to 199–195 BCE, which was discovered in the sixties.⁷ Contrary to Bickerman, Tcherikover argues that Jason created a *polis*, Antiochia in Jerusalem, whose citizen body was made up of the city's upper class. The aristocratic character of the *polis* was embodied by the gymnasium. Yet Tcherikover also argues that the main consequence of the reform was the abolition of the previous privileges granted to the Jews by Antiochus III.⁸ According to Hengel, the Hellenization of Jerusalem began much earlier than the transformation of Jerusalem into a Greek *polis*. Already in the Ptolemaic period, Greek was known in Jerusalem among some of the members of the ruling class, such as the Tobiads. Familiarity with Greek indicated not only a higher social position, but also a superior education and closer ties with the surrounding world outside Judea.

Coming to Jason's reform, Hengel argues that it affected the religious life of the city, as the gymnasium was a pagan institution.⁹ Goldstein posits that the initiative of transforming Jerusalem into a Greek *polis* could be traced back to Antiochus IV's admiration for Rome. The Seleucid kingdom would be remodeled as a net of Greek cities, whose ruling class would share a common "universal" citizenship. This would have allowed the king to extend the Greek language, culture, and institutions to the members of the native elites. However, the foundation of a Greek city would have reinforced Jason's influence on and authority over the city. Jason was a "moderate Hellenizer," and his reform was a purely civic-political act.¹⁰ As well argued by Gilles Gorre and Sylvia Honigman, the creation of the gymnasium and the transformation of Jerusalem into a Greek *polis* ought to be seen in light of the Seleucid administrative restructuring of the newly acquired territories of the kingdom, Coele-Syria and Phoenicia, at the beginning of the second century BCE. The new civic institutions were used to completely overpower the local temple. Likewise, the newly founded city's elite control of the local sanctuary required the creation of an institutional framework, such as a gymnasium and *ephebia*, whose purpose was the formation of a Hellenized city-ruling class. With regard to the *philanthropa basilica*, Honigman argues that Hellenistic rulers were very careful and tried to avoid interfering with the political autonomy of the Greek cities as well as that of the indigenous populations, especially when these had a pronounced cultic character. In Judea, the most important privilege among those granted by the Seleucid ruler was political, the recognition of the hereditary principle of the Jewish high priesthood among the Oniads, as the Seleucid rulers exerted their control over the appointment of the high priest only from time to time.¹¹

The real breakout in the understanding of the purpose of the creation of the gymnasium of Jerusalem as a primary civic-political institution is epigraphic and consists in two

⁷ The apparently benevolent attitude of the Seleucid ruler toward the newly acquired local populations and their elites is mirrored by the Hefzibah Inscription, dated to 199–195 BCE and discovered in the 1960s. On this inscription, see Landau 1966, 54–70; Piejko 1991, 245–259.

⁸ Tcherikover 1979, 161–170.

⁹ Hengel 1991, 103–106, 277–283; on the Tobiads, see Hengel 1989, 35–78, esp. 62, 66, 69–70, 75.

¹⁰ See Goldstein 1976, 227–230 on the similarity between Antiochus IV's policy of Hellenization and the citizenship *per magistratum*; as against, see Bradeen 1959, 221–228; on Jason's interpretation of the Torah, see Exod 23:32–33, 34:11–16; Lev 18:3; Deut 7:1–5; and Josh 9:3–27; on his adversaries' sources, see Exod 34:12, 15; on the importance of the gymnasium, see also Strabo 5.4.7 (C246); Paus. 10.4.1.

¹¹ Gorre – Honigman 2014, 301–338; Honigman 2014, 262–266.

letters sent by the inhabitants of the village of Tyriaion in Phrygia to King Eumenes II of Pergamum, requesting civic status or *politeia*. The inscription is dated after the stipulation of the Treaty of Apamea in 188 BCE. The first letter records the granting to the Toriaitoi of the constitution (*politeuma*), their own laws (*nomoi*), and a gymnasium. The similarity between the inscription from Tyriaion with Jason's reform in Jerusalem is evident. Both the inscription as well as the author of 2 Maccabees focus on two main elements, a civic constitution and a gymnasium. According to Honigman, the interpretation given by Kennell cannot be accepted in its totality. Thus, for non-Greek communities, such as those located in Asia Minor, Phoenicia, and Jerusalem, the Greek model of civic constitution could be adapted to the needs of local native communities. The parallel process of amalgamation of the military settlement and the village of Tyriaion into a Greek city was not necessarily identical to the transformation of Jerusalem, an Eastern temple-city, into a *polis*. This can be mirrored by the statement of 2 Maccabees that the *epheboi* wore the *petasos*, which could imply that, contrary to the normal practice in the Greek-Hellenistic gymnasium, the young members of the Jerusalem priestly aristocracy trained with a sheet covering their pudenda, which would suggest a certain religious awareness among them.¹²

Yet, for Grabbe, the gymnasium was the educational and cultural center of Antiochia in Jerusalem. Together with military training, the young members of the elite would study Greek language and literature. The future citizens would acquire the skills that would allow them to lead their city as magistrates and act as ambassadors to other Greek cities.¹³ Doran, on the other hand, emphasizes the multidimensionality of the gymnasium. As the evidence that in the Hellenistic period the gymnasium's primary function was that of military training for the citizens is disputed, Doran suggests that its main purpose was that of preparing the local elite for the challenges of the surrounding Hellenistic *koine*. He argued that the curriculum would have included the study of biblical exegesis in Greek, as the requisites for future members to join the community in Judea included the study of the Scriptures, which would have been taught in Greek. Jewish-Hellenistic authors such as Demetrius, Aristobulus, and Ezekiel the Tragedian would have provided for the young *epheboi* in Jerusalem an important source for learning the Greek language and a good foundation for the intricacies of rhetoric in an educational system based on the Bible.¹⁴

While the thesis of Doran deserves consideration, there are a few obstacles it would need to overcome. The learning of the Bible, even in Greek, would not have helped the future elite when they would have been sent on a diplomatic mission to the royal court

¹² 2 Macc 4:10; 12–15; 1 Macc 1:13–14; Kennell 2005, 1–24; Honigman 2014, 363–364; Goldstein 1976, 230; Ps. 47:4 (LXX Ps. 46:4); Thucydides 1.6; Jubilees 3:31; Grabbe 2010, 12–13; on this passage of Jubilees, see also Hengel 1991, 74.

¹³ Grabbe 2010, 12–13; Grabbe 2002, 6–21.

¹⁴ Doran 2001, 94–116; on the disputed tasks of the gymnasium as a source of military training, see Delorme 1960, 253–315; Euripides, *Autolykos* frag. 282, 11; Plutarch, *Moralia* 639d, 639e; on Jewish education in the Hellenistic period, see Collins 1997, 38; also among the DSS, see the Rule of the Congregation (IQSa) 1:6–9 on the age to pay the Temple tax (Exod 30:14) and on the age to serve in the army (Num 1:3); see the Wisdom of Sirach on the exemplar teacher (37:23); on the ideal Wisdom (24:34); on the educational process (38:34–39:10); for Greece, see Theognis 1.27–38; Plato, *Protagoras*, *Letter 7*, 341c; Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.20, 1393a23–1394a18; *Topics* 1.13–14, 105a23–105b18; on Demetrius, see Gruen 1998, 114–117, 134–135.

or to another “Greek” city of Gentile extraction. Homer was the most important shared cultural element that defined belonging to the Greek world. Its absence would have been an insurmountable problem. Likewise, the young priestly elite of Jerusalem had to learn the intricacies of the Greek language. The learning of the Greek language was the first priority. Yet, there is no reason to think that the curriculum of the gymnasium would not have included the study of the Scriptures in Greek, possibly the Septuagint (LXX). This would have introduced the future city magistrates to the knowledge of Jewish law, which still would have served them as judges or jurists.

However, the problem that most worried the first generation of scholars was whether the frequenting of the gymnasium comported with the worship of the Greek gods, especially Hermes and Hercules. According to Bickerman, the athletic competitions held in the gymnasium were closely associated with their cult as well as with the cult of the Seleucid rulers. And yet, the representatives of the “Antiochenes in Jerusalem” sent to Tyre on the occasion of the games held in honor of Melqart-Hercules presented the money as a gift to be used for the construction of war triremes and not to the sanctuary itself as was Jason’s intention. Hengel argued that no sources mention any association between the gymnasium and the Greek tutelary deities, and that Antiochus IV is never mentioned as its special patron. Tcherikover as well argued that the gymnasium could not have been directly associated with idolatry. More recently, Himmelfarb argued that even Jason’s wish to contribute money to the Temple of Hercules in Tyre cannot be perceived as “a very ardent form of idolatry.” Also, Daniel Schwartz does not associate the gymnasium with the cult of Hermes and Hercules. On the other hand, the fact that the delegation is welcome demonstrates that by then Jason had realized his ambitions and Jerusalem was recognized by a fellow “Greek” *polis*.¹⁵ Thus, no source, even the very hostile author of 2 Maccabees, mentions any direct connection between the tutelary deities of the Greco-Roman gymnasium and the gymnasium in Jerusalem.

Yet the creation of the gymnasium and its use by the priestly elite of Jerusalem is associated by the author of I Maccabees and by Josephus with *epispasmos*, a surgical procedure that covered a person’s circumcision. Tcherikover tries to minimize this observation, but Hengel argues that this procedure demonstrated how far some younger members of the priestly elite went to assimilate themselves to Greek culture. Goldstein argued that as Greeks perceived circumcision as a physical maim, some of the young persons, though very few, because the operation was very painful, opted out of shame, to have the procedure. Grabbe argues for similar reasons that very few would have undergone this operation, while Doran was convinced that in the mid-second century BCE *epispasmos* was not perceived as a violation of Jewish law. The purpose of *epispasmos* was to modify the perception that the Gentiles had of the Jews as a people with a strong antisocial tendency and inimical to foreigners as enshrined in the writings of Hecateus of Abdera. Since, as Schwartz argues and Robert Hall demonstrates, the only evidence for *epispasmos* comes from 150 years later, the term indicates that some of the Hellenists no longer circumcised their offspring. Moreover, the fact that it is nowhere stated that the Maccabees, and later the Hasmonean kings, obliged the Jews to renew the practice

¹⁵ 2 Macc 4:19–20. On the Games held in Tyre every four years, see Arrian, *Anab.* 2.24.6; Bickerman 1978, 1075; Hengel 1991, 73–75; on Solomon and Suron, see Eusebius, *Pr. Ev.* 9.34.16; *FGrHist* 723 I.2.34.16; on Abraham and Hercules, see *FGrHist* 727 I.2.34.16; Grabbe 2002, 6–21; Schwartz 2008, 227–228.

of circumcision can be taken as evidence that no Jew underwent this dangerous operation at this time.¹⁶ It seems to me that, as mentioned by Ralph Marcus, since Josephus relates the creation of the gymnasium to Menelaus, *epispasmos*, whatever this term indicated, ought to be associated with the extreme policy of Hellenization initiated by Menelaus.

To the real gymnasium, the civic institution as well as the building, ought to be opposed to the imaginary “ideal” gymnasium as craftily constructed by the author of 2 Maccabees, which functions as a metaphor for Hellenism. According to Himmelfarb, it embodies the values of Hellenism, is reviled not as the quintessence of evil but because it leads astray the Jews from the commandments of the Torah.¹⁷ Honigman focuses on the literary structure chosen by the author of 2 Maccabees to emphasize the contrast between the gymnasium and the Temple, a metaphor for Judaism. Both institutions are presented in opposition to one another in synecdochic terms so as to portray Jason as the impious high priest who departs from the law given by God to the Jewish people.

The accusation of impiety is first and foremost political and serves to deny his political legitimacy as high priest of Judea. Additionally, the claim that Jason as well as his successors Menelaus and Alcimus were impious and evil furthers also the delegitimization of the Seleucids as foreign overlords of Judea. For the author of 2 Maccabees, the sin associated with Jason, the erection of the gymnasium, was the first step toward the total disruption of the Temple cult, which later took place when Antiochus IV desecrated the sanctuary. The passage describing the activities that took place in the gymnasium is of primary importance because it is here that the latter assumes the functions of the primary metaphor of Hellenism, its *synecdoche*. To the physical spaces and activities of the gymnasium are opposed those of the sacred area of the Temple. Thus, the disruption of sacrifices ought to be understood as a metaphor for the disruption of Jewish society as a whole following Jason’s reforms. Scholars such as Goldstein associated this passage of 2 Maccabees with the penetration of Hellenism. Schwartz maintained that the author of 2 Maccabees twice compares the service of the Temple, deemed lawful and rightful, but which is neglected, to the distribution of the oil used in the exercises in the *palaestra*, perceived as lawless, using the same term, *litourgia*. Furthermore, the author of 2 Maccabees implicitly compares and opposes the call of the discus, which indicated the beginning of the exercises held in the *palaestra*, which was enthusiastically answered by the young priests to the call of the gong, which summoned the priests to the service of the Temple. The end of the passage emphasizes the contrast between the “ancestral values,” the honors of taking part in the Temple service, now neglected, to the honors attained in the agons in the gymnasium, to which the young priests started to give their priority. The opposition between the values of Judaism and Hellenism cannot be more strident here.¹⁸

¹⁶ 1 Macc 14–15; Josephus, *AJ* 12.240–241; Tcherikover 1979, 163–166; Hengel 1991, 74; Goldstein 2011, 227–230; on contemporary sources, see Jubilees XXX; Enoch 90.6–9; Test Moses 5:1–6; 8:3; Dan 7–12; also Goldstein 2008, 199–201; Grabbe 2010, 12–13; Grabbe 2002, 6–21; also Doran 1990, 99–109; Doran 2001, 94–116; on *epispasmos* in Rabbinic literature, see M Avot 3:12; T Shabbat 16:9; BT Yevamot 72a; Diodorus 40.3.4; Rubin 1989, 106–108; Schwartz 2022, 157–158; also 1 Macc 1:48; 2:46; Hall 1988, 71–86.

¹⁷ Himmelfarb 1998, 19–40.

¹⁸ 2 Macc 4:12–15; Honigman 2014, 44–45, 119–146, 211–214, 217–220; Goldstein 1976, 230; Grabbe 2010, 12–13; Schwartz 2008, 223–225.

3. The location of the gymnasium

The location of the gymnasium puzzled generations of scholars. First, it is necessary to look at the topography of Jerusalem in the Early Hellenistic period, focusing on the Temple Mount and the Acra, a fortress erected in the Hellenistic period, whose location still puzzles scholars. Archaeological excavations have demonstrated that the city of Jerusalem was quite small. Its walls encompassed the Temple Mount and the City of David, located southward on a long ridge, set between the Tyropoeon Valley to the west, the Kidron Valley to the east, and the Hinnom Valley to the south. The Temple Mount was the focus of the city. It is quite difficult to reconstruct its appearance in the early Hellenistic period, as the later Herodian rebuilding almost completely wiped out its structure. It seems that in the late Hellenistic period, under the aegis of the high priest Simon (the Just), the Temple Mount was redesigned into a more agreeable Hellenistic structure.¹⁹ It was defended by a small fortification, the Birah, or Baris, probably located on the northwestern corner of the Herodian Temple Mount and later covered by the Antonia. Possibly destroyed at the beginning of the Hellenistic period, it was probably reconstructed in the late Hasmonean period.²⁰

A second fortification, the Acra, is mentioned by 1 and 2 Maccabees and by Josephus. Its location till recently was the topic of much speculation. According to Bezalel Bar-Kochva, the Acra was first built under Ptolemaic rule, possibly during the reign of Ptolemy V. It is mentioned for the first time by the author of 2 Maccabees in connection with Sostratus, the commander of the Seleucid garrison at the time of Menelaus, responsible for the collection of taxation. The main problem in the identification of the location of the Acra stems from the discrepancies between the narrations of 1 Maccabees and Josephus. While the former narrates in the *Jewish Antiquities* that the Acra was located somewhere in the area of the City of David, the latter stated that it was located in the “Lower City.” In fact, in Josephus’s time, the area of the Lower City, included the City of David as well as the Valley of the Tyropoeon, which divided it from the “Upper City,” which was erected roughly on the area of the Western Hill. Josephus, however, also says that Simon, after the conquest of the Acra, in 141 BCE, levelled the hill on which the fortress had been built, which is quite problematic: the levelling of a hill of more than forty meters in height in three years would have been virtually impossible. It seems that Josephus’s statement, which also appears in *Jewish War*, stems from the writing of the historian Nicolaus of Damascus.²¹

These historiographical problems have made it almost impossible for archaeologists to pinpoint the exact location of the fortress. According to the archaeologist Yoram Zafir,

¹⁹ Josephus, *Contr. Apion*. 198–200. Most scholars believe that the text quoted by Josephus should be attributed not to Hecataeus of Miletus but to another anonymous author, perhaps a Jew, known as Pseudo-Hecataeus I; Stern 1974, 35–44, no. 12; Sir 50:1–4; Josephus, *AJ* 12.141; 17.162; *Let. Arist.* 84–101; Shanks 1995, 62–69; Avigad 1983, 161–165, figs. 177–182. On the Temple Mount described in the *Letter of Aristeas* as a reflection of late-second-century – early-first-century BCE reality, see Harari 1987, 96–106; Bonfil 1971, 131–142; Patrich 2019, 263–326.

²⁰ On the Baris, see Josephus, *BJ* 1.149–151; 2.344; *AJ* 20.189–192; Nielsen 1995, 155; Wightman 1991, 7–35.

²¹ On the Ptolemaic Acra, see Josephus, *AJ* 12.138; on the City of David, see Neh 3:15; 2 Chr. 32:30, 33:14; 1 Macc 14:36; on the Seleucid Acra, see 2 Macc 4:28; 1 Macc 7:32; 14:36; Josephus, *BJ* 1.50; 5.137–139; 252–253, 6.354; *AJ* 12.252–253, 362; 13.215, 217.

the Acra must have been located southeast of the Temple Mount, near the “seam,” a part of the eastern wall of the Temple Mount located thirty-two meters north of the southeast corner of the podium later built by Herod. A plastered pool, dug in this area, must be considered as part of the fortress courtyard. More recently, Bar-Kochva has argued that the Acra was erected somewhere else, namely, in the area of the City of David, the “Lower City” on the south-eastern hill of Jerusalem. According to Ayala Zilberstein, the excavations on the western slope of the south-eastern hill of the City of David did reveal the foundations of a building with a military character, which excavators identified with the Acra. The glacis was erected in the second half of second century BCE, while its destruction dates to the end of the second or to the early first century BCE.²²

So, now we must ask: where was the *gymnasium* located? The only hint at its location is the statement of the author of 2 Maccabees that Jason “with relish he laid the foundations for a gymnasium directly beneath the acropolis.”²³ Scholars have interpreted differently the term “acropolis,” as it could refer to the Temple Mount or to the Acra or to the Western Hill. According to Hengel, the term refers to the Temple Mount. Jason had the gymnasium erected near the Temple Mount, more specifically close to the Baris. While the identification of the acropolis with the Temple Mount can be accepted, Hengel, who wrote his book well before the results of the archaeological excavations around the Temple Mount were published, seems to miss mark, as the Baris stood on the north-western corner of the Temple Mount. On the other hand, Bar-Kochva argues that our term refers to the Acra, though he also claims we should not put too much faith in the geographical references mentioned in 2 Maccabees. A third possibility, argued for by Doran, is the western hill, which was separated from the City of David by the Tyropoeon Valley. This area would have fit best, because it was still unoccupied in the early second century BCE. Doran’s description of the Jerusalem’s gymnasium is of a rather impressive structure, but such a huge building would have left at least a few traces behind. Schwartz, however, argues that the term “acropolis” really does refer to the Temple Mount. Thus, the passage in 2 Maccabees that locates the gymnasium “directly beneath the acropolis” would indicate an area near the Temple.²⁴

In my view, the introduction by Jason of a gymnasium as an institution does not necessarily correspond to the erection of a building, which would have been created *ex nihilo* for that specific purpose. There is no doubt that the *epheboi* met somewhere near the acropolis, but the fact that the gymnasium was created almost immediately after the king gave his permission, as the author of 2 Maccabees emphasizes, points to the possibility that an existing building was adapted to the needs of a gymnasium. A real gymnasium would have taken quite a while to build, and it would have been quite expensive. It would also have been quite difficult to carve out a large surface in the relatively small space of the City of David because of the density of the population. One possibility is that Jason erected a very small building; another possibility, which is more likely, is that an existing building was adapted to serve as a gymnasium. And yet, Bar-Kochva’s

²² Laperrousaz 1979: 99–14; Tsafirir 1980: 17–40; Ben-Dov 1981, 22–35; Ben-Zion 1981, 31–40; Tal 2006; Bar-Kochva 1989, 445–465; Schwartz 2008, 233; Shalev et al. 2021, 17–37; Zilberstein 2021, 37–53.

²³ 2 Macc 4:12.

²⁴ Hengel 1991, 51 n.131; Bar Kochva 1989, 459–460; Doran 2001, 94–116; Schwartz 2008, 51, 222–223; Strabo, 16.2.37.

suggestion that the gymnasium stood on the western hill can be taken almost at a face value. The open fields, where the young *epheboi* could have exercised in running, wrestling, and javelin-throwing, would have taken the place of the *xystos*. This possibility cannot be discarded so easily because in the days of the Roman Republic the youngsters of Rome's ruling class made use of the open fields of the Campus Martius in this way. Also, in Archaic and Classic Greece, *gymnasia* as buildings are not documented. It is probable that the young *epheboi* trained in the open fields that surrounded the *polis*. But then, we have to assume that the gymnasium of Jerusalem was not a single building, but that the activities generally associated with the gymnasium were carried out in spaces quite far from one other. If the gymnasium is perceived first and foremost as an institution, not as a building, this suggestion would be easier to accept.

4. The gymnasium after the Maccabean revolt

It is difficult to try to fathom the fate of gymnasium in the wake of the Maccabean rebellion as the sources are silent. And yet, a look at the stance of the Maccabees and their followers towards the Jewish Hellenists, who would have included amongst them the people associated to the gymnasium, could give a hint to their attitude to the gymnasium. In fact, the destiny of the gymnasium was probably associated to that of the defenders of the Acra, where the Jewish Hellenists took refuge, joining the Seleucid garrison.

The Maccabees for the first time faced the might of the Acra during the conquest of Jerusalem by Judah Maccabee and the successive reconsecration of the Temple. The author of 2 Maccabees refers to the defenders of the Acra with the term *allophyloi*. While the term generally has a neutral connotation, Schwartz claims, rightly in my view, that in this framework the term is used pejoratively. This term, at first glance, refers only to the Seleucid garrison, the "foreigners," the Gentiles, and could not be understood to refer to the Hellenists. On the other hand, as the whole passage is a late insertion, the use of the term *allophyloi* does not hint at the author of 2 Maccabees' attitude to the Gentile soldiers who made up the garrison of the Acra and to the Hellenists, who had fled to the Acra. However, the author of I Maccabees refers to the defenders of the Acra, using the term "those in the Acra." The term is also present in Josephus. For Schwartz, the use of the term "those in the Acra" is not neutral but serves to address the reader to a previous passage, which states that the people in the Acra were "sinful" people, transgressors of the law. Thus, the phrase "those in the Acra" refers not only to the Seleucid garrison but also to the Jewish Hellenists, perceived as transgressors of the law. The overall image of the defenders of the Acra is not flattering. If the author of I Maccabees wished to convey the feelings of Judah and his followers, it is clear that the Hellenists could not expect much sympathy from Judah. This situation, then, could explain why they decided to flee and seek refuge inside the Acra in the first place.

The only possible hint as to the fate of the gymnasium can be inferred from Josephus's narration of the events in *Jewish War*. Josephus says that there was a confrontation between the Seleucid garrison and the Maccabees on the western hill, which he puts in the "Upper City." The conquest of the western hill brought to an end the primary function

of the gymnasium, the military training of the elite. Moreover, if the gymnasium occupied a building, located somewhere in the City of David, it would have been occupied but probably not destroyed by the followers of Judah Maccabee. There was no motivation to destroy an empty building, which could have been used for any other purpose. But this brought also an end to the gymnasium as an educational and cultural center for the elite. On the other hand, it is more than probable that both the *epheboi* and the training team would have sought refuge in the Acra.²⁵

The next round between Judah the Maccabee and the defenders of the Acra took place probably in April 162 BCE. As the defenders of the Acra continued to present a threat to the Temple Mount, Judah planned a siege. Then, some of the defenders of the Acra, soldiers of the Seleucid garrison together with some renegade Jews, escaped successfully and reached the young king, Antiochus V. According to Bar-Kochva, no less than Menelaus, the non-Aaronite high priest, headed the delegation of Hellenists. The Jewish Hellenists reminded the king that they accepted to serve the king's father, Antiochus IV, and to obey to his edicts, which possibly included edict that outlawed the observance of Judaism. Thus, the Hellenists bewail the consequences that they would face should they fall into the hands of Judah and his followers, which would amount to death sentence at worst or the seizure of their property at best. According to Goldstein, 1 Maccabees gives to the Jewish Hellenists an ambiguous standing. On the one hand, they are not perceived as Jews, but on the other hand, their distinction from the Gentiles is emphasized. The position of the Jewish apostates was peculiar. By the 160s BCE, Judaism was no longer forbidden as a consequence of the amnesty granted by Antiochus IV before his death. Moreover, there were probably inside the Acra other Jews, such as pietists, who opposed Judah's ambitions, and other Hellenists who never denied their religion but who did not agree with the intended policies of the Maccabees. And yet, all these Jews were a marginal element of the population of the Acra. Most of it would have consisted of Gentile mercenaries. Thus, this passage makes clear that half a decade after the start of the Maccabean Revolt the feeling of aversion and animosity toward the Jewish Hellenists were still strong among Judah and his followers.²⁶

The last confrontation between Judah the Maccabee and the defenders of the Acra took place after March 161 BCE in the wake of Nicanor's defeat at the Battle of Adasa. Alcimus, the high priest, fled from Jerusalem together with his followers, while the Seleucid garrison and the Jewish Hellenists had to barricade themselves in the relative security of the Acra. The author of 2 Maccabees mentions that the torso of Nicanor was hung

²⁵ On Judah's conquest of Jerusalem and his first confrontation with the garrison of the Acra, see 2 Macc 10:1–2, which mentions only the conquest of the Temple and the city; 1 Macc 4, 41; Josephus, *BJ* 1.38–39; *AJ* 12.316–318. While, according to the author of 1 Maccabees, Lysias's expedition took place before the purification of the Temple. According to the author of 2 Maccabees it took place in its aftermath. On the problems of chronology associated with Judah's conquest of Jerusalem, see Goldstein 2011, 377; Schwartz 2008, 371, 375, 402, 418–420; Goldstein 1976, 285; Schwartz 2022, 229–230; Bar Kochva 1989, 275–283. This letter written by "King Antiochus," possibly Antiochus IV, to the *gerousia* and the people of Jerusalem is part of four official letters gathered together and conserved in 2 Maccabees. On the four letters, see 2 Macc 11:16–38; on Letter C, see 2 Macc 11:27–33; Habicht 2006, 106–124; Ma 2020, 80–94; Honigman 2014, 92–93.

²⁶ 1 Macc 6:18–21, 32; Josephus, *AJ* 12.362–365; on the chronology of the siege of the Acra, see Goldstein 1976, 314–319; Bar-Kochva 1989, 445–465; Schwartz 2022, 251, 259–260, 264.

on the gates of the Acra. However, I Maccabees narrates that the head and right hand of Nicanor were impaled in front of the city, evidently outside the city walls. Bar Kochva believes that this episode, as narrated in 2 Maccabees, never took place as the body would have contaminated the city with its impurity. On the other hand, Goldstein accepts the version of the events handed down by the author of 2 Maccabees. Also, Schwartz accepts or at least does not cast doubt on the possibility that the head and hands of Nicanor were nailed to the gates of the Acra. Judah's menacing act could be understood as an invitation to the Jewish Hellenists to surrender, in which case, they would have been given quarter; otherwise, their fate would be like that of Nicanor. This attitude, which hints at realpolitik, mirrored the outlook of the author of I Maccabees who strives to present the Maccabees as the chosen leaders of all Jews. These Jewish Hellenists provided support and legitimacy to Seleucid rule in Judea, but it is important to note that the situation had changed from that of the winter of 164 BCE. The religious persecution, even if it took place, as suggested by Honigman, had ended. Additionally, the restoration of the Temple cult, the successive execution of Menelaus, and the appointment of Alcimus as high priest had in part restored the prestige of the Seleucids also amid more moderate Hellenists and even among the *asidaioi*. The king strove to isolate Judah and his followers. By now, the bulk of the Jewish population of the Acra would have included "moderate" Hellenists, Jews who supported the Seleucids but did not oppose the traditional Temple cult. Extreme Hellenists were by now a minority.²⁷

Yet, Judah was defeated and killed a few months later at the Battle of Elasa in April of 160 BCE. Bacchides occupied Jerusalem and took hostages from some of the most important families of Judea, who were locked up in the Acra. Alcimus, restored as high priest, ruled till 159 BCE. While it would not have been surprising if Alcimus restored the gymnasium as initially envisaged by Jason, such an act is not mentioned by the author of I Maccabees or Josephus. In fact, there is no attempt whatsoever to restore the gymnasium because Jerusalem was no longer a *polis*. The author of I Maccabees and Josephus depict Jerusalem as a city fortress, an Eastern Temple-city, ruled by Alcimus, the high priest, and the seat of Seleucid *strategos* of Judea. On the other hand, it is quite possible that some of the people associated with the gymnasium had from the very beginning of the rebellion deserted to Judah and his followers. Schwartz cogently argues that the two ambassadors of Jonathan to Rome, namely, Numenius, son of Antiochus, and Antipater, son of Jason, could have studied at the gymnasium of Jerusalem. This possibility makes it clear that already among the supporters of Judah, maybe even if not from the beginning, there were Hellenized Jews, a few of them, who probably had enjoyed the opportunity to study in the gymnasium.²⁸

²⁷ The Acra is mentioned, albeit indirectly, in 1 Macc 7:32, which narrates that in the aftermath of the defeat of Kafar Salama, the rest of Nicanor's army fled to the City of David. On the nailing of Nicanor's torso to the gates of the Acra, see 2 Macc 15:31–35; on the impaling of the head and right hand of Nicanor in front of the city, see 1 Macc 7:47; see also JT Megillah 1.6 (70c); JT Taanit 2.13 (66a); BT Taanit 18b; Noam 2003, 118–119; Goldstein 2011, 501–502. According to Bar-Kochva and Schwartz, the term "City of David" indicates the Acra: see Bar Kochva 1989, 368–372; Schwartz 2022, 279; Schwartz 2008, 492, 508–509. On the beheading of defeated enemies in the Bible, see 1 Sam 17:54; 1 Chr 10:10; Judith 13:7–10; in the Classical world, *Iliad* 17.39–40; Herodotus, *Hist.* 5.114; Polyb. 11.18.4–8; Plutarch, *Cicero* 49.

²⁸ On the two ambassadors of Judah to Rome, Eupolemus son of Accos and Jason son of Eleazar, see 1 Macc 8: 17; Josephus, *AJ* 12.415; Schwartz 2022, 347.

Jonathan, Judah's brother and successor, who entered Jerusalem in 153–152 BCE, never conquered the Acra. Six times the author of I Maccabees and Josephus associate the Acra with Jonathan: (1) the episode of the liberation of the hostages taken by Bacchides in 152 BCE; (2) the letter of Demetrius I, which mentions a pledge to deliver the Acra to Jonathan; (3) the attempted siege of the Acra in 145 BCE when the Hellenists fled to Demetrius II; (4) a missive of Jonathan to Demetrius II, in which he complained that the "population" of the Acra was harassing the population of Jerusalem, asking the monarch to expel them; (5) a second attempt to besiege the Acra, probably in 144–143 BCE; and (6) when Jonathan was already a prisoner of Trypho, runaways from the Acra reached the Seleucid ruler, inviting him to besiege Jerusalem.²⁹

The first episode relevant to understanding the changing feelings toward the Jewish Hellenists is that of the liberation of the hostages. Although the Jewish Hellenists are not specifically mentioned, it is probable that they were included among "the people of the Acra." According to Goldstein, the author of I Maccabees differentiates between the population of Jerusalem and the "traitors" and "foreigners" in the Acra. Moreover, the various Seleucid garrisons, with the exception of Beth Zur, deserted their posts, leaving all the fortresses of Judea to Jonathan. The Gentile members of the Seleucid garrisons are mentioned with the term *allogeneis*, while the Jewish Hellenists that did not leave Beth Zur are referred to as "some of those who had abandoned the law and the commandments." While at the beginning of the sentence the term *allogeneis* refers only to the Gentile members of the Seleucid garrison, and the impression conveyed is that all the Seleucid forts are manned by Gentiles, at the end of the sentence the reference to the Jewish apostates suggests that the term *allogeneis* includes them as well. As emphasized by Schwartz, although the soldiers of the Seleucid garrison are termed "foreigners" because Judea is not their country, the term *allogeneis* also includes the Jewish apostates. If there were Jewish Hellenists who took refuge in the fortifications of Judea, there were also some inside the Acra. In the parallel passage of *Jewish Antiquities*, Josephus refers to the men in the Acra as "the unfaithful and the fugitives who took refuge in the Acropolis." Josephus makes use of terms such as *asebeis* ("unfaithful") and *fugades* ("fugitives" or even "renegades"). Once more, Josephus refers to the Jewish Hellenists as *asebeis* and *pefeugetes* when he narrates that all the soldiers of the Seleucid garrisons of Judea fled to Antioch with the exceptions of those who were garrisoned in the citadels of Beth Zur and Jerusalem. It seems to me that the terms used by I Maccabees and Josephus to denote the Jewish Hellenists reflect their ideology. By now, the hard-core Hellenists had no real strength and they would be a minority. Most of these Hellenists who took refuge in the Acra or in Beth Zur would have been moderate Hellenists. Their only "crime" would have been a misplaced loyalty to the Seleucids. But then, the author of I Maccabees, who strives to present the Hasmoneans as the leaders of all

²⁹ On the missive of Demetrius I to Jonathan, granting him the return of the hostages and their return, see 1 Macc 10:6–9; Josephus, *AJ* 13.39–40; on the letter of Demetrius I, in which the various pledges included a promise to give up the Acra, see 1 Macc 10:32 Josephus, *AJ* 13.51; on Jonathan's siege of the Acra in 145 BCE, see 1 Macc 11:20–23; Josephus, *AJ* 13.121–124; on Jonathan's successive request to withdraw the garrison from the Acra and the king's vague promise, see 1 Macc 11:41–42; Josephus, *AJ* 13.133–134; on the erection of a wall to isolate the Acra, see 1 Macc 12:35–37; Josephus, *AJ* 13.181–182; on the emissaries sent by the "people of the Acra" to Trypho, see 1 Macc 13:21; Josephus, *AJ* 13.208.

Jews, prefers to play down the fact that the enemies of Jonathan and the Maccabees included not just apostates but also moderate Hellenists and possibly some of the *asidaioi*, referring to them as “foreigners.”³⁰

The Jewish Hellenists as a peculiar group are mentioned once more when in 145 BCE, at the beginning of the reign of Demetrius II, Jonathan starts to besiege the Acra. The author of I Maccabees refers to the Jews who were inside the Acra as “some of those who hated their people, transgressors of the law.” Goldstein argues that in this framework the use of this term to refer to the Hellenists mirrors the ideology of the author of I Maccabees, who believes that all the Jews that did not recognize the legitimacy and the authority of the Hasmoneans went against the will of God. Josephus, in a parallel passage, refers to the Jewish Hellenists as “unfaithful, who had fled the customs of the fathers.”³¹ Yet, the troubles with the Acra were far from over. Not long afterwards, Jonathan complained to the Seleucid ruler that the garrison of the Acra continued to harass the civil population of Jerusalem, asking him to expel them. The author of I Maccabees states that they were “always fighting Israel.” Josephus refers to the Jewish Hellenists in the Acra as “the Jews, fugitives and unfaithful.”³² The last time that the population of the Acra is mentioned in association with Jonathan is when Trypho took Jonathan as a hostage and began to march to Jerusalem. The population of the citadel sent emissaries to Trypho, inviting him to Jerusalem and asking for provisions. This time, both I Maccabees and Josephus refer to the Seleucid garrison and the Hellenists just as the “people in the Acra.” Possibly in this framework, the author of I Maccabees did not feel that it was necessary to distinguish between the two groups, as they had a common interest. It is also possible that, as demonstrated by a close reading of the previous passages relating to the population of the Acra, the Hellenists were by now seen for what they were, political adversaries of the Hasmoneans and loyal subjects to the Seleucid authority, be it the legitimate ruler or the usurper. Thus, the author of I Maccabees refers to the Jewish Hellenists alternatively as “transgressors of the law” but also as *allogeneis*, or “foreigners.” Their identity is thus blurred. Besides, the use of two different terms could indicate that their attitude was mixed and that by then the hatred shown toward them, so evident at the beginning of the struggle, was subsiding.³³

The Acra was conquered by Simon, almost immediately after his rise to power, at the beginning of 141 BCE. There are serious discrepancies between the three sources that describe the siege and conquest of the Acra by Simon, I Maccabees and Josephus in *Jewish War* and *Jewish Antiquities*, which raises many problems. The most important discrepancy in this framework is related to the identity of the people living in the Acra, who surrendered and were then expelled. While I Maccabees is silent on their identity, Josephus, on the other hand, possibly hints that the people in the Acra included the Jewish Hellenists, the “renegades.” However, this is an inference, because in Josephus’s account the

³⁰ 1 Macc 10:6–11; Josephus, *AJ* 13.37–42; Goldstein 1976, 399–401; Schwartz 2022, 310–311.

³¹ 1 Macc 11:20–27; Josephus, *AJ* 13.121–124; Goldstein 1976, 430; Schwartz 2022, 337; these terms are used first and foremost with a narrative purpose and serve to emphasize the rekindling of the conflict.

³² On the letter of Demetrius II, see 1 Macc 11:30–37; on Jonathan’s successive request to withdraw the garrison from the Acra and the king’s vague promise, see 1 Macc 11:41–42; Josephus, *AJ* 13.133–134; Goldstein 1976, 430–431, 437–438; Schwartz 2022, 340.

³³ 1 Macc 13:21; Josephus, *AJ* 13.208; Goldstein 1976, 474; Schwartz 2022, 361, 369.

Jewish Hellenists are mentioned specifically only in the speech of Simon to the assembly, which refers to a past situation. However, a close reading of the description of the purification of Gezer and the Acra by Simon, described by the author of I Maccabees, could provide an answer as to the presence of the Jewish Hellenists in the Acra. For Goldstein, the Gentiles of the garrison of the fortification of Gezer and of the citadel of the Acra are those deemed responsible for the pollution, as the term *miasmaton* indicates idols, which was perceived as the main source of ritual impurity. The Jewish Hellenists, who were not idol worshippers, and who were allowed to leave together with the Gentiles without harassment, are not mentioned. Thus, the process of ritual cleansing raises the possibility that by then there were no more Jewish “renegades” in the Acra.

However, a comparison between the successive passages describing the settlement of a Jewish garrison at Gezer and at Jerusalem could offer a clue about the presence of the Jewish Hellenists in the Acra. The author of I Maccabees states that Simon settled in Gezer a garrison composed of “law-observant” Jews. This statement possibly hints that the Jews that were previously there, the Jewish Hellenists, were not. Further, the text of the successive decree, which explicitly stated that at Jerusalem Simon garrisoned the citadel with Jewish men, also could suggest that among the defenders of the Acra were the Jewish Hellenists. The Jewish Hellenists, expelled from the Acra, are depicted as people who did not observe Jewish law, an offence that implies not only their religious but also their political illegitimacy. However, their exile was a far cry from the menaces of death and confiscation of their property, which were associated with what Judah and his followers would want to mete out.³⁴

And yet, a letter written by Jonathan to Sparta, probably in 142 BCE, conveyed by two ambassadors, Numenius son of Antiochus and Antipater son of Jason, whose purpose was to renew the existing brotherhood and friendship between the two polities, demonstrates beyond any doubt that among the supporters of the Maccabees there were members of the elite, who were fully Hellenized and possibly acquired their knowledge of Greek culture in the gymnasium. The correspondence quoted by I Maccabees consists of three letters. The first letter is that of Jonathan to the Spartans conveyed by two ambassadors. This request answered an “earlier” letter, quoted at the end, which was sent by Areus, King of Sparta, to Onias, the high priest, which claims that an ancient document states that the Spartans and the Jews are brothers, because they both descend from Abraham. The last letter is the answer of the Spartans to Simon. Josephus, on the other hand, quotes in *Jewish Antiquities* only the first two letters in their entirety. There are many discrepancies between the two versions. The genuineness of this correspondence is debated among scholars. For Arnaldo Momigliano and for Oliver Curty, the first two letters are forgeries

³⁴ 1 Macc 13:49–52; on the conquest of the Acra mentioned in the praise of Simon, see 1 Macc 14:7, and on the decree, see 1 Macc 14:36–37; Josephus, *BJ* 1.50; *AJ* 13.215–217. The conquest of the Acra, which took place in the month of Iyar in the 171st year of the Seleucid-Babylonian calendar, thus in April–May of 141 BCE, was considered one of the most important of Simon’s achievements. The event is commemorated in *Megillat Taanit*; see Noam 2004, 66; Goldstein 1976, 482–483, 490–491, 505–506; Schwartz 2022, 368–370, 375; and in the decree (382, 386–387). On the law-observant men settled in Gezer, see 1 Macc 13:48; on Jewish men settled in the citadel, see 1 Macc 14:37; on the procedure for the cleansing, see Lev 14:39–42 and Temple Scroll (11Q19) 49:11–13; on the dumping of material that belonged to Gentiles as part of ritual cleaning, see Seger 1973, 389–395; on the ritual baths found at Gezer, which show that the dictates of ritual purity were followed by the garrison settled by the Hasmoneans, see Reich 1988, 48–52.

and only the last letter, the answer of the Spartans to Simon, is authentic. However, first Bickerman, and then Burkhardt Cardauns and Goldstein argued that all three letters are genuine. Schwartz rightly argues that, while the first and third letter are probably authentic, the reliability of the second letter, that of Areus to Onias, is problematic.³⁵

It seems that Jonathan had good reason to open a diplomatic relationship with Sparta, which was in this period a close ally of the Roman Republic. According to Goldstein, Jonathan was aware that a claim to kinship, or *syngeneia*, with a “close” ally of Rome would improve Judea’s relationship with the latter. Besides, Sparta, a small city set against the kings of Macedonia, and the Jews, a small *ethnos*, which was successfully affirming its independence from the Seleucid kingdom, were in a similar situation. Ranon Katzoff argues that the motivation that lied behind Jonathan’s embassy was that a relationship with Sparta, a city-state that notwithstanding its own educational system was perceived as one of the most respected Hellenic *poleis*, would have improved the standing of Judea among the Hellenized Jews who still perceived the Hasmonians with suspicion. Therefore, behind the wish to establish a kinship with Sparta did not represent a complete adoption of Hellenism nor its total rejection; rather it was a multifaceted process of making use of Hellenistic institutions and customs, such as *syngeneia*, in order to vindicate Jewish cultural autonomy from the Greek world.³⁶

The term *syngeneia*, which indicates kinship, ought not to be confused with a formal declaration of friendship and military alliance; it indicated a bond of mutual hospitality or a closer diplomatic relationship. Already Hengel pointed out that the Spartans and the Jews possessed similar characteristics. Possibly, as well argued by Katzoff, in the eyes of the Greeks and other Hellenized peoples the Jews and the Spartans shared not only an innate conservatism and suspicion of anything new, but also their education, laws, and customs made them peculiar, the Spartans as a people of warriors and the Jews as a people of philosophers. As well argued by Steve Mason, Josephus was well aware that total devotion to ancestral laws was paradigmatic of both peoples. However, it was obvious to Jonathan that, while the Jews were not perceived by the surrounding Greek world as “Hellenes,” the Spartans, even with their peculiarities, were perceived as representing the quintessence of Hellenism. Therefore, for the Jews, the recognition of the *syngeneia* with the Spartans would bring them a deferential standing.³⁷

It seems that this kinship, contrary to what was stated in the letter of Areus to Onias, was invented by a Jew who had a deep knowledge of Greek culture, in particular of mythology. At the basis of this legend stood a passage from Genesis that describes the progeny of Abraham and Keturah. An echo of this legend comes from the Jewish

³⁵ On the letter of Jonathan to Sparta, see 1 Macc 12:6–18; on the earlier letter of Areus to Onias, see 1 Macc 12:19–23; on the letter of the Spartans to Simon, which acknowledged a treaty of friendship with the Jews, see 1 Macc 14:20–23; on the letter of Jonathan to the Lacedaemonians, see Josephus, *AJ* 13.166–170; on the letter of Areus to Onias, see Josephus, *AJ* 12.225–227. See also Momigliano 1931, 141–170; Curty 1992, 246–248; Curty 1995, 218–220; Cardauns 1967, 317–324; Goldstein 1976, 447–452; Schwartz 2022, 377.

³⁶ Goldstein 1976, 447–449, argues not so convincingly that when John Hyrcanus had the almost total backing of the Roman Republic, Pergamum and Athens ingratiated themselves with the Jewish ruler with the purpose of improving their relationship with the Roman Republic. Pergamum would also boast that their friendly relationship went back to the time of Abraham. On the decree of Athens, see Josephus, *AJ* 14.149–155; on the decree of Pergamum, see *AJ* 14.247–255; see also Katzoff 1985, 485–489.

³⁷ Hengel 1991, 72; Schwartz 2022, 347–349; Mason 2007, 219–261.

Archaeologia written by Hecateus of Abdera and conserved by Diodorus Siculus. However, there is another version of the legend, passed down by Alexander Polyhistor and quoted by Josephus in the *Jewish Antiquities*. This time, the descendants of Abraham and Keturah are related to Sparta through the Greek hero Hercules, who was also one of the patrons of the *gymnasia*, a fact that would add glamor to the Jewish claim of kinship with Sparta. It is quite improbable that this legend could have been conceived in late-third-century BCE Jerusalem. According to Hengel, the origin of this legend, which predates the Maccabean period, ought to be associated with Jason and his political allies, who wished to transform Jerusalem into a *polis*. Jason's purpose, the latter having ended his days at Sparta, was to demonstrate to his fellow Jews less interested in embracing Hellenism, that he did not want to abandon the traditional customs and laws peculiar to Judaism. It seems to me that it is also possible that the two ambassadors, Numenius son of Antiochus and Antipater son of Jason, who had knowledge of Greek, or more possibly that they heard it when they frequented the gymnasium, created this legend with the purpose of obtaining from Sparta some sort of support for the ambitions of the Hasmoneans. However, it would have been doubtful if the Spartans would have accepted this kinship, which related to Abraham, a non-Greek "hero." Josephus was aware that the Greek myths were "ethnocentric" and that Greeks were not eager to pay any tribute to non-Greek *ethne*. And yet, Erich S. Gruen persuasively argues that Greek and Roman writers often showed a profound respect for the achievements of peoples alien to them by culture, "barbarians," even devising imaginary affiliations, including kinship. Many of the Jewish intellectuals took up the challenge offered by the Classical world, presenting themselves as part of a broader cultural heritage and creating an imagined kinship with other peoples. In this case, the Jewish priestly elite of Jerusalem could successfully claim that Abraham, described in Genesis as the father of many peoples, was the common ancestor of the Jews and the Spartans.³⁸ It is not clear whether in the end Jonathan was able to confirm the Jews' claims of kinship, or whether these were rejected. Certainly, he was not successful in attaining a military alliance, a *symmachia*. However, it seems that he obtained the friendship, or *philia*, of the Spartans, at least at an informal level—which was no mean achievement. Thus, at the end this kinship concocted by a Jewish intellectual possibly helped the Hasmonean ruler to achieve his aim. Therefore, it seems that the legend of kinship with Sparta could be associated with Jonathan's ambassadors.

³⁸ On Dedan, one of the descendants of Abraham and Keturah, see Gen 25:14; Josephus, *AJ* 1.238; on the parallel driving out of Dardanus and Cadmus from Egypt, see Hecateus of Abdera *apud* Diodorus 40.3.2; on the descendants of Danaus, who settled in the Peloponnesus, see Pindar, *Pythian* 4.48–49; on Perseus and Hercules as the ancestors of the Spartan royal dynasties, see Homer, *Iliad* 19.95–133; Herodotus, 2.91; 6.53. On the name of Leumim, son of Dedan, translated as Yawan, see Targum at Gen. 25:3. On Alexander Polyhistor, who quotes Cleodemus Malchus, see Josephus, *AJ* 1.240–241; Bickerman 1937, 188–223. *On Abraham and the Egyptians*, attributed to Hecateus of Abdera by Josephus, *AJ* 1.159, and by Clemens Alexandrinus, *Strom.* 5.113.1 (= *FGrHist* 264.F.24); Goldstein 1976, 457–459; Schwartz 2022, 347–349; Curty 1995; Gruen 2011.

5. Conclusion

While there is an agreement among scholars that the creation of the gymnasium was a consequence of the transformation of Jerusalem into a *polis*, there is less agreement on what went on in the gymnasium, whether it had a primarily military purpose, as suggested by Kennell, or whether its primary purpose was cultural, as suggested by Grabbe and Doran. It looks like the institution had both purposes, and while the sources do not associate the gymnasium with the cult(s) of foreign gods, there is no doubt that the future elite of the city would be exposed to Greek culture. This, and the fact that with the extreme Hellenization of Menelaus the gymnasium was associated with *epispasmos*, can explain why the author of 2 Maccabees associated its creation with the struggle between *hellenismos* and *ioudaismos*. Its exact location also is a source of disagreement. While 2 Maccabees associates its location with the “acropolis,” a term that could indicate the Temple Mount as well as the Akra, it seems that the open fields of the western hill were used as its main training ground while its classes were held in a building located somewhere in the City of David. The fate of the building can be fathomed through an analysis of the sources, which narrates Judah’s conquest of Jerusalem in 164 BCE and the successive reconsecration of the Temple. The destruction of the building is nowhere mentioned, and this likely because the training ground located on the Western Hill and the building, in the City of David, were abandoned by the Jewish Hellenists and occupied by the Maccabees. On the other hand, the fate of the gymnasium as an institution is most plausibly associated with that of the defenders of the Akra, because many of the members of the team of the gymnasium as well as the *epheboi*, as the other Jewish Hellenists, to whom they were assimilated, found refuge there. A close look at the sources demonstrates that the attitude toward the Jewish Hellenists evolved from utter hatred to that of disinterest and detachment. By the time of Simon’s conquest, the Jewish Hellenists could leave unhindered. This evolving attitude probably mirrors as well the stance vis-à-vis the gymnasium, which in the end was ambivalent, as some of the Jewish Hellenists, who had joined the Maccabees, probably from the beginning of the struggle, demonstrated the usefulness of the institution created by Jason. However, by then, Jerusalem was no more a *polis*, and thus the gymnasium as institution was no longer relevant. Thus, it was not necessary for the Maccabees to destroy the gymnasium, which had become the symbol of *hellenismos*, even if they had wished to do so; it just faded away.

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