


THE FAILURE OF A RELIGIOUS REFORM: OBSERVATIONS ON THE HELLENISTIC REFORM IN JERUSALEM

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Abstract

One of the most significant moments of the so-called Hellenistic reform in Jerusalem was the introduction of polytheistic worship into the Jerusalem temple around 168 BCE. This led to the repression and persecution of Judaism's followers, which, according to the accounts of 1 and 2 Maccabees, became the direct cause of the Maccabean revolt. Today, the role of religious aspects in the origins of the Maccabean revolt is often downplayed in favor of economic factors. However, there is no doubt that both played equally important roles. Nevertheless, much evidence suggests that the manner in which the polytheistic reform was implemented sparked armed resistance among the population. The author argues that this reform should not be viewed as a top-down religious policy of the Syrian king, but rather as being linked to establishing a *polis* in Jerusalem.

Keywords: Antiochus IV, Jason, Menelaus, the Hellenistic reform, Jerusalem.

The extant evidence indicates that Greek and Roman polytheists who sought new religious experiences readily became adherents of monotheistic faiths, such as Judaism or Christianity. In contrast, relatively few adherents of monotheism converted to polytheistic faiths. Some examples of such a scenario occurred during the so-called Hellenistic reform under Antiochus IV (175–164).¹

Our understanding of both the nature of this reform and its implementation relies primarily on the accounts found in 1 and 2 Maccabees, as all other surviving accounts of these events draw on these sources.² The descriptions of events related to this reform

¹ All dates are BCE. I would like to express my thanks David Jacobson for his comments and assistance with the English style of this paper. All errors of interpretation remain the sole responsibility of the author.

² References and allusions to this reform can be found in several sources, including the Book of Daniel (11.30–32), Diodorus (34/35.1.3–4), the works of Josephus (*BJ* 1.34–35; *AJ* 12.240–256; *Contra Apionem* 2.83–84), and even Tacitus (*Hist.* 5.8.2). However, their limited value stems from two factors: they are

presented in those two sources are notably concise, preventing us from establishing either a definitive chronology of the surrounding events or ascertaining which significant details the authors may have omitted. Since the respective authors appear evidently partial to the Hasmoneans, emphasizing their achievements in the struggle against the Seleucids and in defense of Judaism, their record includes only events they deemed worthy of remembrance, with their subjective selection accounting for significant disparities between narratives in 1 and 2 Maccabees. Furthermore, each Book expresses many partisan judgments and assessments that, in many cases, prevent us from ascertaining the unfolding of events determining the events' unfolding or understanding their significance. Despite these limitations, both Books nonetheless contain sufficient data to enable a more or less precise reconstruction of the events in Jerusalem associated with the implementation of Hellenistic reform. This does not imply, however, that all scholars agree upon the same interpretation of these events, as certain aspects remain subject of ongoing debates. The interpretation proposed below aims to shed new light not only on the nature of some of the relevant events but also on the character and objectives of the aforementioned reform.

After the political upheaval following Alexander the Great's death, in 301 the southern part of Syria (known as Syria Koilê/Coele-Syria) and Judea came under the control of Egypt's ruler Ptolemy I. These territories remained under his successors until 198, when Antiochus III (223–187) defeated the Egyptian forces in the Fifth Syrian War (202–195) and brought them under Seleukid rule. We know that successive Ptolemaic rulers made various efforts to encourage Greeks to settle along the Nile to promote faster Hellenisation of Egypt. They pursued similar policies in their Near Eastern territories, but with regional differences in regard to their urbanization policies: they founded many cities and settlements in southern Syria, but only few in Palestine.³ In other words, the Ptolemaic approach to Judea focused not on settlement but on cooperation with influential local clans.

The conquest of Judea by Antiochus III altered this state of affairs. To consolidate his position in Judea, where pro-Egyptian sympathies remained strong, Antiochus III offered favorable terms of cooperation to local social elites.⁴ These conditions created such an amenable climate for the development and strengthening of mutual relations that some members of these elites soon emerged who were willing to adopt patterns of Greek culture and acquire knowledge of the Greek language to advance their careers in service to the Syrian rulers. The circle of supporters advocating cooperation with the Seleucids and the Hellenisation of Judea, commonly referred to as Hellenizers,⁵

either loose paraphrases of one of the main sources—as is the case with much of Josephus' account, which largely draws on 1 Maccabees with added commentary—or they discuss the events related to the Hellenistic reform so vaguely that anything they have to add has little scholarly value. See Bickermann 1937, 17–35 = Bickerman 1979, 9–23; Mittag 2006, 228.

³ See Johanssen 2023, 59–109.

⁴ Josephus, *AJ* 11.134, 138–146. For further information on these privileges, see Bickermann 1935, 4–35 (= Bickerman 2007, 315–356); Corsaro 2001, 256; Sartre 2001, 309–311; Babota 2014, 40–44; Honigman 2014a, 302–310; Girardin 2022, 123–143; Eckhardt 2024, 191–204; Kratz 2024, 60–72.

⁵ Naming this group of Judean inhabitants “Hellenizers” predominates in academic literature, being seen as the most fitting term to capture their ideological orientation. The authors of 1 and 2 Maccabees used various terms to refer to members of this group, emphasizing their departure from Judaism: see Dąbrowa 2012, 353–355. Regarding the group's social composition, see Grabbe 2020, 324–328.

grew sufficiently numerous and influential that after Antiochus IV's (175) ascendancy to power, its leaders were positioned to initiate measures to accelerate and deepen the process of Hellenisation. However, the implementation of their objectives necessitated the assistance of the Syrian king, who possessed the authority to establish instruments for implementing the policy of Hellenisation. The author of 2 Maccabees identifies two fundamental components of this reform: the establishment of a gymnasium in Jerusalem and the granting of *polis* status to the city.⁶ A third element, not mentioned *expressis verbis* by the author of 2 Maccabees, was the introduction of polytheistic worship. The implementation of the Hellenistic reform occurred in two distinct phases. The first phase—the establishment of the gymnasium and the conferral of *polis* status on Jerusalem—is associated with Jason, the high priest of the Jerusalem temple (175–172), while the second phase—the introduction of polytheistic worship—is connected with the high priest Menelaus (172–162).

Contrary to what 2 Macc suggests, the implementation of the reform did not begin during the first months of Antiochus IV's reign. The king's ascension to power, likely in early October 175, happened under rather complex political circumstances. Stabilizing internal affairs in Syria required considerable time and effort, making it reasonable to conclude that Judean matters were not among Antiochus' main priorities at that time. Taking advantage of both the change in the Syrian throne and the absence of high priest Onias III from Jerusalem, his brother Jason⁷ approached Antiochus IV requesting to be appointed as the new high priest in place of Onias.⁸ Given the prestige and authority that the high priests of the Jerusalem temple commanded within Judean society, which made them among the most significant public figures, Jason's pursuit of this coveted title appears entirely understandable. Since Antiochus IV required substantial financial resources in his efforts to restore the Seleukid state's political and military prominence, Jason's request presented him with an excellent opportunity to acquire such resources with minimal effort. Moreover, he gained a willing political partner prepared to cooperate and assume responsibility for the situation in Judea. The king most likely appointed Jason as high priest only after receiving his promise to accept the royal terms.⁹ The sources remain silent on whether the principles of Hellenistic reform were presented to Antiochus IV during these negotiations. Even if they were, the king could have offered, at most, his general support for the initiative.

Based on known Hellenistic practices—and it would be difficult to assume these were not applied in Jason's case—the official confirmation of royal promises required the preparation of appropriate documentation by the royal chancellery, a process that could take

⁶ 2 Macc 4:9: πρὸς δὲ τούτοις ὑπισχνεῖτο καὶ ἕτερα διαγράφειν πεντήκοντα πρὸς τοῖς ἑκατόν, ἐὰν ἐπιχωρηθῇ διὰ τῆς ἐξουσίας αὐτοῦ γυμνάσιον καὶ ἐφηβείον αὐτῷ συστήσασθαι καὶ τοὺς ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις Ἀντιοχεῖς ἀναγράψαι. 1 Maccabees (1:14–15) mentions only the establishment of the gymnasium and the negative consequences of attending it.

⁷ 2 Macc 4:7. See VanderKam 2004, 197–203.

⁸ 2 Macc 4:7. We cannot be certain whether the king and Jason met in person. The verb ἐπαγγελλόμενος (2 Macc 4:8) employed in the passage on this matter could denote either personal meeting or communication through intermediaries. The latter scenario appears more plausible, not least because the unstable situation in Jerusalem may have made Jason reluctant to risk losing control of the city during a prolonged absence.

⁹ Cf. Bernhardt 2017, 143–144.

several months.¹⁰ No actions were possible without such documentation, as it contained the detailed conditions for implementing the royal decision. The sovereign's consent did not imply that the petitioner gained complete and unrestricted freedom of action, as the king could oversee the implementation of its conditions.¹¹ Therefore, in seeking approval for implementing Hellenistic reform, Jason had to precisely define its objectives and implementation method, while being aware that the king could monitor his activities and intervene at his discretion. Considering the lengthy cycle of chancellery procedures, it can be surmised that Jason likely received the king's approval no earlier than 174.

The establishment of the gymnasium in Jerusalem was met with strong approval among those social groups whose socioeconomic status enabled them to participate in its physical and intellectual activities. The gymnasium's popularity is attested by the authors of 1 and 2 Maccabees, who sharply criticize participation in its activities. In their view, the gymnasium not only diverted people from their daily duties but, more importantly, served as a center for disseminating culturally foreign norms that threatened traditional Jewish practices and conventions.¹² However, the gymnasium's establishment was a prerequisite for implementing the second component of Hellenistic reform: the transformation of Jerusalem into a city with a Greek character.¹³ This development required citizens familiar with Greek customs and the operational principles of the *polis*. In Jerusalem, such knowledge could only be acquired within the gymnasium's walls.

While the essential connection between gymnasium and *polis* was self-evident in the Greek world, the question of Jerusalem's elevation to *polis* status, as mentioned in 2 Macc, remained a subject of scholarly debate for an extended period. Many researchers questioned this account's reliability,¹⁴ despite overt textual references to citizens of this *polis*.¹⁵ Decisive evidence supporting 2 Maccabees' account emerged with the discovery of an inscription at Toriaion/Tyriaion in Pisidia.¹⁶ This inscription contains three letters from Eumenes II, ruler of Pergamum, addressed to that city. These letters concern a situation nearly identical to Jerusalem's case—namely, the inhabitants' petition to their ruler requesting permission to establish a gymnasium and grant the city *polis* status. The content of these letters is particularly valuable as it reveals the official procedure through which such requests were processed. These documents have largely resolved the debate regarding Jerusalem's *polis* status, as Toriaion's analogous requests corroborate the hypothesis that Jerusalem was reorganized under an entirely new administrative structure when granted the *polis* status, constitution, and bearing its own name.¹⁷ Based on relevant references, scholars suggest that the new polis

¹⁰ Cf. Kennell 2005, 14–17; Chrubasik 2019, 120–121.

¹¹ Cf. Capdetrey 2007, 195–196, 224.

¹² 1 Macc 1:14–15; 2 Macc 4:13–17; Josephus, *AJ* 12.241; Kennell 2005, 17–19.

¹³ Cf. Kennell 2005, 23: “Thanks to the Tyraion inscription, no reasonable doubt remains that Jason's intention was to transform Jerusalem into a polis along Greek lines.”

¹⁴ Parente 1994, esp. 37–38. See also Cohen 1994, 243–245.

¹⁵ 2 Macc 4:9; 4:14.

¹⁶ Jonnes – Ricl 1997, 3–4 (= *SEG* 47.1745); Ameling 2003; Kennell 2005, 11–24; Eckhardt 2018, 988–989; Eckhardt 2021, 185–186; Kratz 2024, 78–83. For more information on this city's name: Jonnes – Ricl 1997, 8.

¹⁷ Cf. Ameling 2003, 108; Kennell 2005, 14–15. Much has been written about the nature of the *polis* in Jerusalem and its relation to the city proper. The current consensus holds that the *polis* was an independent administrative structure, cf. Mittag 2006, 239–242; Ma 2012, 75–77. But this view must be contested. Jerusalem

may have been called Antioch-in-Jerusalem or Antioch-at-Jerusalem (Ἀντιοχεῖς ἀπὸ Ἱεροσολύμων).¹⁸ Jason himself compiled the citizenship roster of the new *polis*.¹⁹ It is believed that two groups were represented on the roster: Jewish Hellenizers and hellenised residents of Jerusalem of Greek or Macedonian origin who resided there.²⁰ Regarding the first group, it likely included not only Hellenizers living in Jerusalem and its vicinity but all supporters of Jason's reforms.²¹ This arrangement may have been motivated by both propagandistic considerations—allowing Jason to flaunt a sufficiently large number of citizens of the new *polis* to the king—and practical ones, ensuring that Jewish citizens predominated in its governance. Unfortunately, nothing is known about the structure of municipal authorities in the new *polis* or their operational procedures.²² However, considering which social group sought to obtain *polis* status, one can state with certainty that power in the Jerusalem *polis* rested with oligarchs,²³ despite their lack of experience in long-term participation in *polis* life and their unfamiliarity with the functioning of municipal administration. Indeed, it appears evident that the establishment of the Jerusalem *polis* served not only to accelerate the process of Hellenisation but also, and perhaps primarily, to secure power for those Jewish elites who saw their interests promoted by fostering close ties to the Seleucids.²⁴

The establishment and functioning of the Jerusalem *polis* came with a new model of civic communal life that emphasized religion within operations of its various institutions. In the gymnasium, ephebes certainly participated in religious practices that had nothing in common with Jewish traditions, as confirmed unequivocally by the authors of both 1²⁵ and 2²⁶ Maccabees. These practices were connected with the cults of the patron deities of gymnasia, Hermes and Heracles. Ephebes in Greek cities of that era also participated in the cults of other municipal deities and in the ruler cult. Therefore, questions naturally arise about the religious life of the new *polis*, who spearheaded it, and where its places of worship lay. Answers to these questions are sought in vain in our sources, as it is difficult to imagine that their authors would describe in detail phenomena they condemned and considered harmful to adherents of Judaism. Beyond mentions of ephebic religious practices, there is no evidence of other manifestations of religious activities in the new *polis*. Nevertheless, they must have taken place, since various religious practices constituted an inseparable part of public life in all Greek

was not the only case of a Hellenistic polity that simultaneously encompassed several administrative entities of different status. Babylon, due to its ethnic stratification, also was administratively divided into different (?) structures, see Kennell 2005, 15–16; Capdetrey 2007, 221–223; van der Spek 2009, 107–110, 112–113. For other examples see Hengel 2001, 566–567, note 1.

¹⁸ Tcherikover 1999, 165. The name is reconstructed from some references in 2 Macc (4:9; 19).

¹⁹ 2 Macc 4:9; Bringmann 1983, 84–85; Ameling 2003, 109; Kennell 2005, 15–16.

²⁰ Sievers 1994, 198–202; Ameling 2003, 109; Ma 2012, 78. Cf. Cohen 1994, 257–258. Some scholars include Syrian soldiers and veterans into that group, cf. Mittag 2006, 255 and note 111 *contra* Honigman 2014a, 394.

²¹ Hengel 2001, 567, 573–575.

²² Bringmann 1983, 86–89, 90–94; Bernhardt 2017, 136–137.

²³ Cf. 2 Macc 11:27.

²⁴ Bernhardt 2017, 139.

²⁵ 1 Macc 1:14–15.

²⁶ 2 Macc 4:12–17.

poles.²⁷ Antiochus IV, in defining the shape of the Jerusalem *polis*, certainly did not overlook its religious life. The functioning of some forms of polytheistic cult in the new *polis* is indirectly confirmed by the account concerning Jason's dispatch of a delegation to Tyre to present an offering in the temple of Heracles, the occasion being athletic games being held there.²⁸ However, upon arrival, the delegation members decided to redirect the funds intended for the offering to another purpose, unrelated to religious matters.²⁹

Jason's delegation to Tyre deserves closer attention, illuminating certain finer points about the Hellenizers' attitude toward polytheistic worship. The author of 2 Maccabees explicitly states that Jason initiated the undertaking and selected the members of this delegation. However, it seems doubtful that the games at Tyre were the primary motivation for sending the delegation; more likely, the real reason was Antiochus IV's presence there.³⁰ One may surmise that the appearance of a Jerusalem delegation among the games' guests was intended to demonstrate to the king that Jason was fulfilling his commitments regarding the implementation of Hellenistic reform. The delegation members' behavior is particularly noteworthy: they can hardly be characterized as zealous adherents of polytheistic worship, given that they collectively decided not to sacrifice to Heracles as their orders commanded. Nevertheless, the delegation's appearance at the theater during ceremonies attended by the king suggests that it may have still achieved its political objectives.³¹ The delegates' conduct suggests they were not advocates of radical departure from Judaism. Since Jason himself selected them, one might conclude that their behavior to some extent reflects Jason's own attitude toward polytheistic worship.³²

Jason's role in implementing various elements of the Hellenistic reform raises questions about the nature of his political position. His authority undoubtedly stemmed from his position as high priest of the Jerusalem temple, obtained under unusual circumstances while Onias III, who had been absent from Jerusalem for an extended period, formally retained the position. This absence resulted from accusations of financial misconduct leveled against him by Simon, the Temple administrator.³³ To prove these allegations baseless, Onias III had traveled to Antioch to offer his explanations to the king himself.³⁴ Although Jason belonged to a high-priestly family of biblical lineage, the circumstances of his appointment leave little doubt that this nomination had little to do with his concern for the religious life of Judaism's adherents. Instead, it amounted to an act of political corruption that effectively transformed Jason into

²⁷ Citizens of the Jerusalem *polis* of the Greek or Macedonian extraction surely participated in these cults, cf. Ameling 2003, 110.

²⁸ 2 Macc 4:18–20.

²⁹ 2 Macc 4:20.

³⁰ 2 Macc 4:18: Ἀγομένου δὲ πενταετηρικοῦ ἀγῶνος ἐν Τύρῳ καὶ τοῦ βασιλέως παρόντος...

³¹ The organizers would open the games by welcoming all attending guests and proclaiming their origin. Accordingly, the presence of the Jerusalem delegation must have been announced publicly.

³² Mittag 2006, 244–247; Grabbe 2020, 330–334.

³³ 2 Macc 3:4–6.

³⁴ 2 Macc 4:1–6. Should one follow the account in 2 Maccabees (4:33–34), Onias III never met the king due to the machinations of royal officials. He was subsequently murdered at Menelaus' instigation in 172 (2 Macc 4:33–34). According to the different account given by Josephus (*AJ* 12.237), it was Onias III's natural death that supposedly opened Jason's path to the high priesthood.

a royal official.³⁵ Through royal appointment, he gained political authority previously unknown to high priests,³⁶ providing him with the power and freedom to implement Hellenistic reform and govern the Jerusalem *polis* as he saw fit.³⁷ His role in the latter capacity is evidenced by his nomination of delegation members to Tyre. Based on the description and critique of Jason's activities given in our sources, we can conclude that he maintained a rather restrained attitude regarding the introduction of polytheistic worship in Jerusalem. One gets the impression that his operational approach in this matter involved a gradual, long-term softening of Judaism's adherents' stance on polytheism. However, this approach did not meet with understanding from the more radical elements among the Hellenizers, and indirectly, from the king himself. This conclusion is supported by subsequent events involving Menelaus, brother of Simon, the administrator (προστάτης τοῦ ἱεροῦ) of the Jerusalem temple.³⁸

In 172, Menelaus was dispatched to Antioch by Jason to deliver the funds due to Antiochus IV and to negotiate urgent matters of state.³⁹ One can only surmise that these matters included the continuation of Hellenistic reform, which might indicate the king's ongoing interest in developments in Jerusalem. The fact that during his stay in Antioch, Menelaus succeeded in persuading Antiochus IV to appoint him as high priest in Jason's stead, by promising increased contributions to the royal treasury,⁴⁰ speaks less to Menelaus' powers of persuasion than to the king's dissatisfaction with the outcome of Jason's administration in Jerusalem. Menelaus himself undoubtedly contributed to this negative assessment. His appetite for power and complete lack of scruples in pursuing his objectives suggest that he certainly did not miss the opportunity to present Jason's actions to the king in the most unfavorable light.⁴¹

The change in the high priesthood immediately precipitated serious consequences. Jason was forced to flee Jerusalem and seek refuge with Hyrcanus the Tobiad, while Menelaus set up a regime that quickly gave Antiochus cause for displeasure,⁴² because the promised funds failed to materialize in his treasury.⁴³ Summoned before the king, Menelaus managed to retain his position through the assistance of corrupt officials, despite reports reaching Syria about the brutal administration of Jerusalem by Menelaus'

³⁵ Orthodox adherents of Judaism considered Jason a usurping high priest, with the author of 2 Macc (4:13) denouncing the legitimacy of Jason's priesthood.

³⁶ Although some scholars claim otherwise, high priests of the Jerusalem temple under the Ptolemies did not participate in the civil governance of Judea, but only attained some political significance under the Seleucids, cf. Nihan 2024, 170–173, 179, 180.

³⁷ 2 Macc 4:10; Bringmann 1983, 92; Ma 2012, 74.

³⁸ 2 Macc 4:23; VanderKam 2004, 203–226.

³⁹ 2 Macc 4:23.

⁴⁰ 2 Macc 4:24. It is noteworthy that Menelaus' declared payments did not include the addendum specified in Jason's agreement. According to the latter, Jason was to pay 360 talents in taxes from Judea, plus a separate sum of 80 talents, which may have constituted his personal contribution from his income as high priest. Following Nihan's persuasive arguments regarding the high priest's obligation to pay a separate tax to the Ptolemaic treasury, it cannot be ruled out that this additional tax continued to apply to high priests after the Seleucids assumed control over Judea (Nihan 2024, 170–176). For the Jerusalem temple's finances, see Honigman 2014a, 331–344.

⁴¹ 2 Macc 4:24–25.

⁴² 2 Macc 4:26.

⁴³ 2 Macc 4:27.

brother Lysimachus, who had acted as his deputy during his absence. Lysimachus' cruel conduct ultimately provoked civil unrest in Jerusalem, during which he met his death.⁴⁴

The sources remain silent on whether and to what extent Menelaus continued the implementation of Hellenistic reform during his early years as high priest. In 2 Maccabees, this period is characterized as a time of brutal abuse of power by both brothers and their plunder of the Temple treasury. Menelaus likely used these treasury resources to pay the promised sums to the king, while Lysimachus presumably drew on them to finance a private army.⁴⁵ A significant turning point came with the Sixth Syrian War (170–168), waged by Antiochus IV primarily in Egypt. Rumors reaching Jerusalem about the king's death caused considerable unrest among the Jews and uncertainty about the future, which Jason exploited. Supported by Hyrcanus the Tobiad, Jason seized the city, committing violence against its inhabitants.⁴⁶ However, he failed to capture Menelaus or remove the Syrian garrison from Jerusalem.⁴⁷ News of these events in Jerusalem prompted an immediate response from the king, who feared they might presage a rebellion in Judea. The Syrian army, returning from Egypt, occupied Jerusalem, and its inhabitants faced repression.⁴⁸ Simultaneously, the king entered the Temple, which, along with its treasury, he plundered.⁴⁹ During this visit to the Temple, Menelaus accompanied the king as a guide.⁵⁰

The unrest caused by Jason prompted Antiochus IV to strengthen the Syrian presence in Jerusalem. This was to be achieved through the construction of a new fortress known as the Akra.⁵¹ Beyond its military functions, it served as a center for Syrian fis-

⁴⁴ 2 Macc 4:40.

⁴⁵ 2 Macc 4:40.

⁴⁶ 2 Macc 5:5–7. According to Josephus (*AJ* 12.239), Jason enjoyed the support of Jerusalem's general population, while Menelaus was backed by the Tobiads. During Jason's attack, they reportedly sought refuge "in the acropolis" (εἰς τὴν ἀκρόπολιν) before joining the Hellenizers. When comparing his version with other accounts, one concludes that his narrative offers limited historical value. However, it is clear that Jason's attempt to reclaim power in Jerusalem represented a power struggle between rival factions within the Jewish elite (cf. Ziembra 2024).

⁴⁷ 2 Macc 5:5.

⁴⁸ The sources present significantly different accounts of these repressions and their chronology. 1 Maccabees describes two distinct episodes: initially in 169, during Antiochus IV's return from Egypt (1 Macc 1:20–28), and subsequently in 167, triggered by a royal tax collector (1 Macc 1:29–32). The latter incident reportedly prompted the decision to construct the citadel known as the Akra (1 Macc 1:33). 2 Maccabees also mentions two waves of repressions: the first during the king's return from Egypt (2 Macc 4:11–14), and the second shortly thereafter, involving two officials—Philip the Phrygian as Jerusalem's administrator (*epistates*) and Apollonius, captain of the Mysians. However, this account makes no connection between these officials and the Akra's construction. The scale of repressions depicted is likely exaggerated, as the casualty figures cited are implausible given Jerusalem's relatively small population at the time. Moreover, the suggestion of mass slaughter that would have depopulated the city is contradicted by subsequent events. It appears the repressions primarily affected non-citizens of the *polis* (cf. also Josephus, *AJ* 12.246–247).

⁴⁹ First and Second Maccabees (1 Macc 1:20–24; 2 Macc 5:16; 21) differ from Josephus' account (*AJ* 12.248–250), which places the plundering of the Temple during the king's second visit to Jerusalem in 167—a visit whose timing and outcome is confirmed by neither Maccabean book. See the note above. Cf. also Honigman 2014a, 387–397; Kratz 2024, 88–93.

⁵⁰ 2 Macc 5:15.

⁵¹ 1 Macc 1:33–38; Josephus, *AJ* 12.252; cf. Cohen 2006, 256–258, 262–263. Prior to the Akra's construction, the Syrian garrison was stationed in a citadel built by the Ptolemies (2 Macc 4:12; 4:27–28; 5:5–6; Josephus, *AJ* 12.133; 138; cf. Pseud.-Arist. 100–104; Bar-Kochva 1989, 462–465; Wightman 1989–1990, 29–31). It was here that Menelaus sought refuge when Jason attacked Jerusalem (2 Macc 5:5: ὁ Μενέλαος

cal and administrative authorities⁵² and most likely housed the governing bodies of the Jerusalem *polis*.⁵³ Although 1 Maccabees contains no explicit mention of this latter function—apart from noting that it provided shelter for the Hellenizers⁵⁴—it is difficult to imagine that, given the tensions caused by Syrian repression and the growing resistance of the population to Menelaus’ actions, the *polis* authorities could have functioned safely among the agitated masses of Jerusalem’s inhabitants.

The pacification of Jerusalem enabled Menelaus and the Hellenizers to resume the Hellenistic reform.⁵⁵ It is difficult to determine how much of this was Menelaus’ own initiative, as pressure from Antiochus IV appears to have been decisive. The king evidently desired to complete the Hellenistic reform initiated by Jason. Similar expectations existed within Hellenist circles. This is corroborated by the testimony of the author of 1 Maccabees, which indicates that the polytheistic reform introduced by Menelaus received societal support.⁵⁶

The sequence of events that took place during this phase of Hellenistic reform have long attracted scholarly attention and sparked considerable controversy due to inconsistencies and omissions of extant sources, obfuscated even further by adoption of martyrological perspectives. The authors of these texts write with such restraint and generality that they appear almost reluctant to address current events, mentioning them only when their ramifications need to be explained to readers. Nevertheless, these skewed and selective accounts still yield sufficient data to reconstruct, in broad strokes, the milieu in which the final phase of Hellenistic reform was being implemented. A concise presentation of concurring events will constitute an opening for our subsequent analysis.

The sequence of events was initiated by what is known as Antiochus IV’s “religious edict.”⁵⁷ A comparison of the accounts in 1 and 2 Maccabees indicates that the content of this document was far more complex than might be assumed, with the two narratives

εις τὴν ἀκρόπολιν ἐφυγάδευσεν). The exact location of Seleucid fortress is also subject of long discussion, see Shotwell 1964; Tsafirir 1975; Decoster 1989; Bar-Kochva 1989, 445–462; Wightman 1989–1990, 31–39; Bieberstein – Bloedhorn 1994, 388–390; Cohen 2006, 258; Keel 2007, 1158–1159; Galor – Bloedhorn 2013, 74–75; Bernhardt 2017, 221, note 22; Bloedhorn 2017, 113; Dąbrowa 2020, 226, note 11.

⁵² 2 Macc 4:28; Sievers 1994, 203–205.

⁵³ Cf. 1 Macc 15:28. Scholars debate whether the Akra was incorporated into the Jerusalem *polis* or maintained as a separate administrative entity (cf. Sievers 1994, 205–206, 208; Cohen 2006, 256, 261–262, note 10). Regardless of its administrative status and function, the Akra certainly served as a refuge and residence for Jewish Hellenizers (cf. 1 Macc 1:34. See Cohen 2006, 260–261, note 8; Honigman 2014a, 394–396; Bernhardt 2017, 221–222). Archaeological evidence seems to suggest that the Akra’s establishment led to increased Greek population in Jerusalem (cf. Ma 2012, 78), likely including veterans who settled in and around the city after completing their service (Cohen 2006, 255–256).

⁵⁴ 1 Macc 1:34–35; 14:36; Josephus, *AJ* 12.252. It remains uncertain whether the term Akra referred exclusively to the citadel or—as Bickerman suggests (Bickermann 1937, 77–80, 84, 89 = Bickerman 1979, 51–53, 56, 60)—also encompassed the adjacent fortified quarter of Jerusalem (for similar views expressed by other scholars, see Cohen 2006, 257). However, there is insufficient compelling evidence to support this interpretation. References to the Akra during the reign of Antiochus IV unambiguously point to the fortress rather than a city quarter.

⁵⁵ 2 Macc 5:23.

⁵⁶ Dan 11:32; 1 Macc 1:43; 52–53; Josephus, *AJ* 12.255.

⁵⁷ See Hengel 2001, 576–586; Mittag 2006, 256–268.

differing in many significant details.⁵⁸ According to 1 Maccabees, Antiochus IV ordered all his subjects to adopt common Hellenistic customs.⁵⁹ Moreover, the subsequent passage reveals that this directive effectively mandated the adoption of Greek religion by all subjects, including the Jews.⁶⁰ In contrast, 2 Maccabees reports that shortly after the plundering of Jerusalem in 168, the king dispatched several officials: including Philip the Phrygian as administrator (*epistates*) of Jerusalem and Apollonius as commander of the Mysians, who were expected to collaborate with Menelaus.⁶¹ The role assigned to Menelaus by the king indicates that the Syrian ruler continued to regard Menelaus as a reliable partner and had no intention of upsetting him.⁶² The group of officials sent by Antiochus IV was tasked with suppressing the unruly population.⁶³ It was only later that Geron the Athenian, sent by Antiochus IV to Jerusalem, arrived with specific royal orders to compel the Jews to abandon their religion and customs and to introduce Greek worship in the Temple.⁶⁴

According to our sources, the key elements of the religious reform included: the removal of all Judaic cult objects from the Temple,⁶⁵ a universal prohibition on practicing Judaism in any form and all associated customs,⁶⁶ a ban on possessing the Bible,⁶⁷ the introduction of polytheistic worship in the Jerusalem temple with its dedication to Zeus Olympios,⁶⁸ and the institution of sacrifices in honor of the king.⁶⁹ Along with polytheistic worship, a new sacrificial altar was supposedly installed in the Temple,⁷⁰ designed for rituals characteristic of Greek religion.⁷¹ Beyond Jerusalem, authorities are told to have mandated the construction of altars for polytheistic worship,⁷² the establishment of sacred groves, and the placement of statues of Greek deities in public spaces.⁷³ The sources claim that both Jerusalem's residents and those in surrounding areas⁷⁴ were compelled

⁵⁸ Josephus' account on these events (*AJ* 12.253–256) comes from 1 Macc, while the mention in the *Bellum Judaicum* (1.32; 34–35) sketches them out only in the vaguest detail. Mittag (2006, 257) compiles and juxtaposes putative contents of Antiochus IV' "religious edict" excerpted from a range of sources.

⁵⁹ 1 Macc 1:41–42: Καὶ ἔγραψεν ὁ βασιλεὺς παση τῇ βασιλείᾳ αὐτοῦ εἶναι πάντας εἰς λαὸν ἓνα καὶ ἐγκαταλιπεῖν ἕκαστον τὰ νόμιμα αὐτοῦ. καὶ ἐπεδέξαντο πάντα ἔθνη κατὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ βασιλέως.

⁶⁰ 1 Macc 1:44–50.

⁶¹ See Bringmann 1983, 29–40.

⁶² 2 Macc 5:22–24.

⁶³ Cf. 2 Macc 5:24–26.

⁶⁴ 2 Macc 6:1–2.

⁶⁵ Cf. 1 Macc 2:9.

⁶⁶ 1 Macc 1:45–46; 48–49; 2 Macc 6:6; Josephus, *AJ* 12.253.

⁶⁷ Dan 11:31; 1 Macc 1:56; Josephus, *AJ* 12.256. More on this question, see Kratz 2024, 119–147; Niesiołowski-Spano 2026.

⁶⁸ 2 Macc 6:2; cf. 1 Macc 1:54; 2:7, 12. Against Bickermann's views on this cult (1937, 92–96 = Bickerman 1979, 62–65), the majority of scholars asserts that it was dedicated to this Greek deity: Millar 2006, 85–88; Bernhardt 2017, 222–229, 235; Grabbe 2020, 353–355, 358.

⁶⁹ 1 Macc 1:59; 2 Macc 6:7; Bernhardt 2017, 228–235.

⁷⁰ See Bickermann 1937, 105–109 = Bickerman 1979, 69–71; Honigman 2014b, 64–66.

⁷¹ 1 Macc 1:54; 59; 2 Macc 6:5; Josephus, *AJ* 12.253.

⁷² According to Honigman (2014b, 69–70), these altars were built by Syrian settlers; however, one must remember that the construction of these altars was deemed one of key elements of the polytheistic reform.

⁷³ 1 Macc 1:47, 50, 54; Josephus, *AJ* 12.253. Statues are said to have been erected in Jerusalem as well: 2 Macc 10:2.

⁷⁴ 1 Macc 1:51; 54.

to participate in sacrificial ceremonies to Greek deities and make public declarations of loyalty to the king⁷⁵ under the penalty of death.⁷⁶ In practice, the Temple supposedly became a place of worship for both Zeus Olympios and other Greek deities, with the new practices found shocking by Jewish authors.⁷⁷

The compelling nature of both accounts led to their long-standing scholarly acceptance as reliable sources. Although critical analyses have challenged their portrayal of events, subsequent scholarly interpretations have not always achieved consensus. Particularly controversial and debated issues include: the actual role of Antiochus IV in implementing the polytheistic reform and the authenticity of his decree, the extent and scope of oppression experienced by Judaism's adherents,⁷⁸ and the geographical range within which the new cult was to be practiced. Scholars also dispute whether the polytheistic reform truly constituted the immediate cause of the Maccabean Revolt. Although there is no need to present here all major positions and views held on these issues,⁷⁹ we may make an exception for Elias J. Bickerman(n). In his 1937 work *Der Gott der Makkabäer*, he argued that the Hellenizers were responsible for conceiving and spearheading the polytheistic reform,⁸⁰ and that the cult they introduced to the Temple, despite its Greek features, was essentially a Near Eastern Baal cult.⁸¹ This hypothesis, which departed in every respect from then-prevailing views, did not gain much traction among scholars,⁸² facing criticism or even dismissal, yet it had not been forgotten.⁸³ Although some of Bickerman's original arguments and hypotheses have lost their persuasive force, his main thesis regarding the Hellenizers' active role in implementing the polytheistic reform remains still influential.⁸⁴

Most relevant here, the establishment of the Akra and the installation of a Syrian garrison there marked a turning point in the implementation of the polytheistic reform, significantly accelerating its pace.⁸⁵ The connection between those events is readily apparent: neither Jason nor Menelaus possessed sufficient forces of their own to effectively implement

⁷⁵ 2 Macc 6:7.

⁷⁶ 1 Macc 1:50; 57; Dan 11:33; Josephus, *AJ* 12.254; cf. 2 Macc 6:8–11.

⁷⁷ 2 Macc 6:7; Josephus, *AJ* 12.253; cf. Bickermann 1937, 111–116 = Bickerman 1979, 73–75; Grabbe 2020, 356–358.

⁷⁸ See Bickermann 1937, 36–49, 120–126 = Bickerman 1979, 24–31, 78–83; Bringmann 1983, 148; Grabbe 2020, 350–353; Niesiołowski-Spanò 2026.

⁷⁹ Grabbe (2020, 248–261) surveyed scholarly views on these issues, with a notable exception of Ma's contribution (2012). Now see also Eckhardt 2018, 983–988; Kratz 2024, 8–22.

⁸⁰ Bickermann 1937, 129–133 = Bickerman 1979, 85–88.

⁸¹ Bickerman 1937, 92–96 = Bickerman 1979, 62–65; cf. Bringmann 1983, 103–111, 130–132, 141; Ma 2012, 72; Honigman 2014b, 66–67; Grabbe 2020, 252–253.

⁸² Notable exception was Hengel (2001, 586–589), who endorsed Bickerman's position, and used it in his own interpretation of events in the pre-Maccabean Judea and process of its Hellenisation. But Hengel's observations and conclusions were criticized by several scholars, see Grabbe 2008, 128–133. Bickerman's views to some extent were accepted also by Bringmann (1983, 130–131, 141, 145–146).

⁸³ Those who criticize Bickerman's views argue that Antiochus IV Epiphanes bears full responsibility for the polytheistic reform, implemented on his orders and by his Syrian soldiers, see Momigliano 1979, 119–120, 126; Millar 2006, 89; cf. Ma 2012, 73.

⁸⁴ See Mittag 2006, 259–268; Ma 2012, 70–78.

⁸⁵ Cf. 1 Macc 1:36–38. The connection between the erection of the Akra, the appearance of the Syrian garrison in Jerusalem and the abandonment of the Judaic cult in the Temple appears obvious for the author of 1 Macc (1:38–40).

this reform. The gymnasium's influence on Jerusalem's inhabitants was likely minimal due to its brief operational period, as was the case with the Jerusalem *polis*, since the majority of the population was excluded from participating in both institutions. The Hellenizers, lacking a sufficiently robust administrative apparatus while facing unpredictable popular sentiment, including undoubtedly numerous individuals opposed to Hellenistic reform. They lacked the tools for effective and rapid implementation of the polytheistic reform. The arrival of the Syrian garrison created a new dynamic, as it was intended not only to maintain order in the city but also, as subsequent events would demonstrate, to support Menelaus. He was compelled to take action not only through royal pressure but also by the Hellenist faction itself, which sought to capitalize on the fruits of Hellenisation as quickly as possible. Such expectations were reflected in the public support for polytheistic reform, a fact reluctantly noted by the author of 1 Maccabees.⁸⁶ Royal duress may have taken the form of threats to remove Menelaus from his position as high priest. One can readily imagine how the prospect of losing his position must have galvanized Menelaus into action.⁸⁷

The authenticity of Antiochus IV's edict meant to unify religious life throughout his kingdom has long been questioned, as there exists no corroborating evidence outside the accounts found in the Book of Daniel and both Books of Maccabees. The description of persecutions against those Jews who refused to submit to the king's will should be viewed as a literary representation of events modeled on biblical narratives, reflecting the ideological functions of these works.⁸⁸ Certainly, the administrative implementation of polytheistic worship could not have occurred without dramatic and violent responses, if only because foreign Syrian soldiers were the instruments of this implementation. It would be unreasonable to expect that soldiers carrying out their orders would not resort to force when encountering resistance. Nevertheless, for the authors of 1 and 2 Maccabees, who document the heroism and martyrdom of Jews defending their religion and traditions, the scale and forms of persecution take on an apocalyptic dimension.⁸⁹

Little is known about Menelaus' personal role in implementing the religious reform, although he reportedly demonstrated considerable activity,⁹⁰ with his actions ultimately creating significant problems for the Syrian administration in Judea and leading to his execution under Antiochus V (164–161).⁹¹

In the context of polytheistic reform, a crucial question arises: of which cult was Menelaus a priest? Given that Jewish worship was removed from the Temple and replaced with the cult of Zeus, the logical conclusion would be that he must have served as high priest exclusively of the new cult.⁹² If so, what was the scope of this position—local

⁸⁶ 1 Macc 1:43; 52–53.

⁸⁷ See Bringmann 1983, 130–135.

⁸⁸ Weizman 2004, 219–234; Honigman 2014a, 229–258; Honigman 2014b, 67–76; Schwartz 2014, 271–280; Bernhardt 2017, 262–264, 504–505; Eckhardt 2018, 991–993.

⁸⁹ Cf. Honigman 2014a, 242–257; Bernhardt 2017, 255–264. Other, secondary testimonies on these persecutions do not contribute much to the matter at hand, cf. Ma 2012, 81–83.

⁹⁰ 2 Macc 13:4 and 8; Josephus, *AJ* 12.384–385. In another passage on Menelaus, Josephus (*AJ* 12.240–241) describes events that took place at different times as concurrent.

⁹¹ 2 Macc 13:4–8; Josephus, *AJ* 12.383–385.

⁹² Undoubtedly, by virtue of his position as high priest, Menelaus was the formal leader of the Jews (cf. Bickermann 1937, 75, 77–78 = Bickerman 1979, 50, 51–52). To date, except of Bringmann (1983, 132), no scholar has attempted to define his religious function following the implementation of the polytheistic

or regional? While epigraphic sources attest to the existence of provincial high priests of the ruler cult in the Seleukid empire,⁹³ the nature of the cult introduced in Jerusalem appears to preclude the possibility that Menelaus' position pertained to ruler worship. To determine its character, we must reconsider Jason's efforts to obtain Antiochus IV's permission to establish a *polis* in Jerusalem. As previously mentioned, the king's grant of such a privilege provided him with the means to control the beneficiary, a standard practice in the Hellenistic world.⁹⁴ However, no *polis* could function without its associated territory—an essential attribute of its political and administrative existence and the foundation of its economic life. In the case of the Jerusalem *polis*, the extent and configuration of its territory were most likely determined by Antiochus IV.

However, the sources do not explicitly confirm that he delineated its territorial boundaries,⁹⁵ and we possess no data regarding its extent.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, the king most likely made such a decision, given that both Jason and Menelaus were required to pay substantial sums to the Syrian ruler's treasury in exchange for their appointment to the high priesthood. The amounts were established through mutual agreement,⁹⁷ following straightforward principles: the king waived his right to collect taxes in the territory administered by the high priests and granted them autonomy in tax collection, while they paid the pledged sum to the royal treasury. These funds certainly did not derive from tributes paid by all Judean inhabitants, as this would have undermined the purpose of maintaining the royal fiscal apparatus in the region.⁹⁸ Therefore, the monies must have come solely from areas where the high priests could collect taxes independently, the sole area in question being the territory assigned to the Jerusalem *polis* at the time of its establishment.⁹⁹ Ancient *poleis* possessed territories of varying sizes, ranging from several dozen to over 2,000 square kilometers.¹⁰⁰ We can only surmise that the *polis* of Jerusalem

reform, cf. Kratz 2024, 109: "Von Rechts wegen hat sich nichts geändert und konnte das Leben weitergehen und nach den 'väterlichen Gesetzen' geführt werden wie bisher."

⁹³ Bickermann 1937, 247–248; Capdetrey 2007, 322–327; Ma 2012, 74–75; Gera 2014, 39–41, 48–57; Cotton-Paltiel – Ecker – Gera 2017, 4–12. Among the significant responsibilities of such a priest was the supervision of all temples within his jurisdiction, which enabled him to intervene in their internal affairs.

⁹⁴ Strootman 2011, 145.

⁹⁵ The solitary, and rather ambiguous, reference to land distribution by Antiochus IV appears in the Book of Daniel (11:39). However, its general wording provides insufficient grounds to definitively connect it with settlement in the territory of the Jerusalem *polis*, cf. Bernhardt 2017, 222 and note 27. Most likely, it refers to this ruler's allocation of land to military settlers in Judea: Sievers 1994, 205–206; Cohen 2006, 256, 260, note 7.

⁹⁶ In the field, the boundaries of such territory could have been marked by boundary stones bearing appropriate inscriptions. An example of this practice can be found in the boundary stones from Gezer, erected after Simon captured the city and purged it of its Greek inhabitants (cf. 1 Macc 13:43–48), see *CIIP* IV,1, 2764–2776. However, we cannot be certain whether these marked the actual city boundaries or merely the property boundaries of its social elite: Garfinkel 2022, 387–392. The Gezer boundary stones are most likely Herodian; see Jacobson 2015.

⁹⁷ Cf. 1 Macc 11:28–29.

⁹⁸ The dual existence of royal and archpriests' fiscal apparatuses is confirmed by 2 Macc (4:28). The royal tax collector resided at the Akra.

⁹⁹ One cannot agree with Bickermann's opinion (1937, 77–78 = Bickerman 1979, 51–52) that the Jerusalem *polis* was granted its territory only after the implementation of the polytheistic reform, with the lands of the *polis* comprising former Temple properties.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Ma 2024, 14, tab. 1.

likely controlled a territory of at least several hundred square kilometers.¹⁰¹ It must have encompassed the surrounding areas within a radius of at least several dozen kilometers, including smaller towns and villages.¹⁰² One such village was Modein, located near Jerusalem, from which Mattathias, a Temple priest, issued his call to resist the polytheistic reform. The territory of the Jerusalem *polis* probably comprised Temple-owned lands¹⁰³ and royal properties. Gifting a *polis* with a royal grant was a well-known practice,¹⁰⁴ providing the recipient *polis* with a foundation for development and steady tax revenues, a portion of which would flow back to the royal treasury.¹⁰⁵

Menelaus held the position of high priest until his removal by Demetrius I (162–150) in 162.¹⁰⁶ Given that the Judaic cult had been removed from the Temple, his title must have been connected to his role as priest of the city's polytheistic cult. He likely maintained the title of high priest as a royal appointee responsible for affairs in Jerusalem. This observation suggests that after the implementation of the polytheistic reform, Menelaus served both as the leader of the Jerusalem *polis* and its religious head. This in turn leads to the conclusion that the polytheistic reform was actually more territorially confined than commonly assumed, encompassing only Jerusalem and its immediate territory rather than all of Judea. Its primary objective was the Hellenisation of the Temple—most sacred to Judaism's adherents—and the city at its foot. The Temple in the Jerusalem *polis* was intended to function as the main center of its religious life.¹⁰⁷

In Jerusalem itself, the implementation of the polytheistic reform, backed by the Seleucid authorities, appeared at least superficially successful. However, the situation beyond its walls proved more complex. Initially, the administrative methods of implementing the polytheistic reform met with spontaneous passive resistance from Judaism's adherents.¹⁰⁸ The resistance movement only assumed a more organized form when Mattathias took its leadership. His killing of a Syrian official, who had come to Modein to persuade its inhabitants to offer sacrifices in honor of the king, forced Mattathias to abandon his family estate and flee to the Judean Desert, where he gathered those willing to fight against the reform.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰¹ According to Tcherikover (1999, 168): “The conversion of Jerusalem into Antioch meant first of all the transfer of the Jewish state from one political category to another: from *ethnos* [living in Judea] to *polis*.” *Contra* Bernhardt (2017, 136, 141).

¹⁰² Cf. 1 Macc 1:54; Ma 2012, 78–80, 512–517. In our assessment, the directive mentioned by the author of 1 Maccabees (1:51, 54) concerning the construction of altars to Greek gods and the offering of sacrifices in Judean cities pertained exclusively to those cities situated within the portion of Judea that had been incorporated into the Jerusalem *polis*. Following the abolition of the Judaic cult, the properties belonging to the Temple were most likely incorporated into Jerusalem's municipal territory, cf. 1 Macc 10:43.

¹⁰³ Priests of the Temple possessed some landholdings, but we lack evidence about the Temple's landholdings under Seleucid rule, cf. Grabbe 2008, 189.

¹⁰⁴ The ruler had the authority to bestow lands under his control upon a city or a temple, cf. Corsaro 2001; Capdetrey 2007, 196–198. An example of such a grant is king Alexander Balas' bestowal of Ptolemais and its territory to the Jerusalem temple (1 Macc 10:39).

¹⁰⁵ Cf. 2 Macc 4:27–28. Regarding the taxation system in Judea under Seleucid rule, see Girardin 2020, 59–72; Girardin 2022, 123–184. On the various revenue sources of Greek cities, see also Ma 2024, 238–239.

¹⁰⁶ 1 Macc 7:9.

¹⁰⁷ Ma 2012, 78.

¹⁰⁸ 1 Macc 1:29–38, 62–63; 2:29–38.

¹⁰⁹ 1 Macc 2:15–28. The author of 2 Macc entirely glosses over Mattathias' contributions and never even names him.

Due to the leader's advanced age and the modest number of supporters, their initial activities were largely limited to destroying local polytheistic cult altars and attacking houses and properties belonging to Hellenizers.¹¹⁰ The resistance movement gained momentum only when Mattathias' son, Judah Maccabee, assumed leadership. Under his command, the movement expanded beyond Judea's borders, gradually encompassing neighboring regions, which compelled the Seleukid administration to deploy regular troops against the insurgents.¹¹¹ A crucial moment in Judah Maccabee's campaign was the rebels' capture of the Jerusalem temple in autumn 164. The Judaic cult was restored there, and the Hellenizers never regained control of it.¹¹² Though the Hellenizers' loss of control over the Temple was a significant blow to their prestige, it did not equate to the collapse of the polytheistic cult, with Menelaus remaining its high priest. As the religious and political leader of the Hellenizers, he actively supported the Seleukid authorities in suppressing the uprising.

The successes of Judas Maccabeus led Antiochus IV, who was then in the eastern provinces of the Seleukid state in spring 164, to consider granting amnesty to the insurgents, allegedly at Menelaus' suggestion.¹¹³ Antiochus appointed Menelaus as intermediary in negotiations between himself and the rebels.¹¹⁴ However, Antiochus IV's sincerity may be questioned, given that he entrusted such a delicate matter of ending the conflict to an individual who had been compromised by his previous actions.¹¹⁵ The polytheistic reform would soon fail under the pressure of the crisis in Syria, precipitated by Antiochus IV's death and the looming threat of succession warfare. Lysias, who served as guardian to Antiochus IV's nine-year-old son, proclaimed him as Antiochus V (164–161) and successor to the throne. Lysias then persuaded the new king to consent to the restoration of all rights to Judaism's adherents.¹¹⁶ Antiochus V's decision to restore all previous rights to the Jews and reinstate Jewish worship in the Jerusalem temple should be considered the formal end of the municipal polytheistic cult in Jerusalem.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, one cannot dismiss the possibility that this decision constituted a tactic delay and might have been reversed had the Seleukid army succeeded in suppressing the uprising.¹¹⁸

Although the adherents of Judaism regained control over the Jerusalem temple, the appointment of Alkimus as the subsequent high priest suggests that the Seleukid side viewed the return of the Temple to Jewish control as a token gesture of goodwill intended to weaken the insurgents' position. This act by no means diminished the willingness of Seleukid rulers, whether Antiochus V or his successor Demetrius I, to maintain

¹¹⁰ 1 Macc 2:29–48.

¹¹¹ Cf. 1 Macc 3:1–4:35; 2 Macc 8:1–7. For the detailed survey and analysis of Judah Maccabee's campaigns, see Bar-Kochva 1989.

¹¹² 1 Macc 4:36–59; 6:7; 2 Macc 10:1–3.

¹¹³ 2 Macc 11:27–33; Habicht 1976, 14 = Habicht 2006, 119–120.

¹¹⁴ 2 Macc 11:32; VanderKam 2004, 223–224. One should note that the author of 1 Macc does not mention this initiative of Antiochus IV.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Habicht 1976, 15 = Habicht 2006, 120.

¹¹⁶ 1 Macc 6:58–60; 2 Macc 11:16–21; 13:23; Josephus, *AJ* 12.381–383. See also Bringmann 1983, 40–47, 50–51; Ma 2020.

¹¹⁷ Habicht 1976, 15–17 = Habicht 2006, 121–122.

¹¹⁸ Cf. 2 Macc 14:33. Should this scenario have occurred, Alkimus would have certainly played a key role in restoring the polytheistic cult, see 1 Macc 7:8–25; 2 Macc 14:8.

cooperation with the Judean Hellenizers. They needed them as partners, as the political situation in Judea remained far from stable.

Alkimus (162–159), who descended from one of the traditional priestly families,¹¹⁹ proved to be an ideal candidate to potentially continue Menelaus' policies. A fervent Hellenist,¹²⁰ loyal partner to the Seleucids, and bitter foe of Judah Maccabeus, he likely assumed the position of high priest from Demetrius I.¹²¹ Shortly after securing this confirmation, Alkimus demonstrated his political commitment to the Hellenizers' cause. The Hasidim, a group fighting alongside Judah Maccabeus, recognized Alkimus' appointment in obeisance to Jewish religious law, consequently withdrawing from further combat.¹²² To prevent any future reversal in their position, Alkimus invited their leaders to a meeting, where he treacherously had them murdered.¹²³ He also encouraged Demetrius I to take decisive action against the insurgents and attempted to prevent any potential agreement between the Syrian authorities and Judah Maccabeus.¹²⁴ Only Judah's death in 159 made such an agreement possible.¹²⁵

Based on the preceding analysis, E. Bickerman was correct in identifying Hellenist circles as both the architects and driving force behind the Hellenistic reform in Jerusalem. Consequently, holding Antiochus IV responsible for its consequences appears unwarranted. His role, or more precisely, the role of his civil and military administration, was limited to supporting Menelaus, who could not ensure the reform's success independently.¹²⁶ In collaborating with the Hellenizers and providing his support, Antiochus IV was guided not by emotions but by political pragmatism: a successful reform could have secured the Seleukids a loyal ally among the Jewish elites in governing Judea, potentially allowing them greater freedom of action in other regions of their vast empire. Therefore, the Syrian administration's support for polytheistic reform should not be interpreted as evidence of hostility toward Judaism and its adherents. The support given to the Hellenizers resulted in Antiochus IV bearing the odium of antagonism toward the Jews and their religion, along with being held personally responsible for the actions of his subordinate officials. However, the genuine cause of Jewish hostility toward the king may undoubtedly have been his plundering of the Jerusalem temple, particularly of its ritual objects—and as the perceived agent of the curtailment of the Judaic Temple cult.¹²⁷

¹¹⁹ 1 Macc 7:14; 2 Macc 14:3, 7; Josephus, *AJ* 20.237.

¹²⁰ 1 Macc 7:5–25; 2 Macc 14:3–10; Honigman 2014a, 220–221. The account on Alkimus in 2 Macc indicates that he had been compromised by his part in the events surrounding the implementation of the polytheistic reform.

¹²¹ 2 Macc 14:13; Habicht 1976, 17 = Habicht 2006, 122. The circumstances of his nomination remain uncertain. VanderKam (2004, 227–228, 231–232) argues there is evidence to believe that Alkimus might have first received his nomination for high priesthood from Antiochus V after Menelaus' death. Since Antiochus V was deposed by Demetrius I, Alkimus possibly sought to reconfirm his appointment with the new monarch.

¹²² 1 Macc 2:42; 2 Macc 14:6.

¹²³ 1 Macc 7:13–16. Cf. Honigman 2014a, 222–225.

¹²⁴ 2 Macc 14:3–10, 26–27.

¹²⁵ 1 Macc 9:34–37.

¹²⁶ The king's support need not have been at his own initiative but rather in response to petitions from Jason and Menelaus: a typical royal response in such circumstances; cf. Strootman 2011, 149–150. See also Honigman – Veisse 2021, 314.

¹²⁷ Cf. 2 Macc 5:16; 9:12; see also Honigman 2014a, 217–220.

The Judean Hellenizers had very specific expectations for the Hellenistic reform. It was intended to secure a favorable relationship with the Antiochene court, provide access to imperial careers, and buttress their political positions in the local context. They aimed to achieve this through a process of Hellenisation, spearheaded among the elites through the establishment of a gymnasium and the creation of a Jerusalem *polis*, to be followed by accelerating the cultural Hellenisation of other Jerusalem residents through administrative measures. However, their calculations failed to account for the powerful resistance of Judaism's adherents, which ultimately foiled their plans. Despite this failure, the Hellenizers maintained their loyalty to the Seleukid rulers. As the Maccabean revolt grew hotter and more successful, only the protection afforded by Seleukid authorities, interested in maintaining their control over Judea, provided the Hellenizers with a semblance of security. They remained loyal to the throne even when Jonathan and Simon became sought-after allies by all pretenders to the Syrian throne. For the Seleukid kings, the high priests and Hellenizers were useful partners on whom they could base their rule in Judea,¹²⁸ and unwitting assistants in realizing their political objectives regarding the Jerusalem temple.¹²⁹ The Syrian kings did not view their appointed high priests as religious dignitaries (it was of little significance to them whether these appointees possessed appropriate qualifications and experience for conducting Temple worship), but as political partners and leaders of local social elites willing to cooperate with Syrian authorities. Once the Hasmoneans became Seleukid agents, the Hellenizers were dispensable. This was particularly true as their activity began to cause problems for the kings, especially when they attempted to establish relations with Judea's new rulers.¹³⁰ According to the author of 1 Maccabees, the Hellenizers ultimately disappeared from Judea's political scene during Simon's reign.¹³¹

ABBREVIATIONS

CIIP IV,1: Iudaea/Idumaea – W. Ameling *et al.* (eds.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae*, vol. IV: *Iudaea / Idumaea*, part 1, no. 2649–3324, Berlin–Boston 2018.

¹²⁸ Cf. 1 Macc 7:5–10, 20–25. This is unequivocally corroborated by the literary depictions of Jason, Menelaus, and Alkimus by the authors of both Books of Maccabees (cf. Honigman 2014a, 197–198).

¹²⁹ Antiochus IV's approach to the Jerusalem temple reflected a broader program aimed at subordinating major temple centers throughout the Seleukid realm to royal authority. This initiative sought to establish strict royal administrative oversight over their finances (Capdetrey 2007, 327–328; Ma 2012, 82–84).

¹³⁰ Cf. 1 Macc 10:61–64; 11:25–26.

¹³¹ While 1 Maccabees 14:14 suggests a decline in Hellenistic influence, this should not be taken to indicate the complete disappearance of Hellenistic sympathizers or those of similar ideological inclinations. As long as the Seleukid state persisted, these groups could maintain hope for their faction's resurgence. Indeed, individuals holding such views could be found even within the inner circle of the Hasmoneans, as exemplified by the behavior of Ptolemy son of Abubus following Simon's assassination (1 Macc 16:18).

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