


PHARAOH’S SUCCESSORS AND A REVIVED JOSEPH: PTOLEMAIC MEMORY IN THE FIRST AND SECOND BOOKS OF MACCABEES

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Abstract

References to Ptolemy VI and Ptolemy VIII of Egypt in the First and Second Books of *Maccabees* are relatively sparse. However, Philometor and his brother were definitely involved in the events portrayed in these Hasmonean reflections on a recent past. Although Mattathias’ descendants may appear less central in a literary analysis focused on the Ptolemies in 1 and 2 *Maccabees*, they remain significant as they embody the “authorial present” of both books.

Keywords: Maccabees, Ptolemy VI, Ptolemy VIII, Antiochus IV, Sixth Syrian War, *protoklisia*.

For M.P.

Introduction

This paper explores the references to Ptolemy VI Philometor and Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II of Egypt in the First and Second Books of Maccabees. The reigns of these two Lagid brothers, spanning from 180 to 116 BC in total, align with the events depicted in these Hasmonean texts. Although the dynasty of Mattathias’ descendants might appear to recede into the background in a literary analysis centered on a few Ptolemaic references in 1 and 2 Maccabees, they are, in fact, essential, as they represent the “authorial present” of both works.

In 1 Maccabees—“a dynastic history of the Hasmoneans”¹—the striking opening and premise embed the specific history within a broader narrative that is teleologically ordered. This early glimpse into the post-Alexander age provides a coherence that justifies the scope of this study, where the grand history of the Ptolemies, carefully selected, intersects with the sacred history of the Jews, offering a literary reframing of the Hasmonean period. The examination of Ptolemaic memory in 2 Maccabees—whose differences from 1 Maccabees warrant careful consideration—further aids in contextualizing this memory.

1 Maccabees

The Gentile model of kingship from which this research begins appears intrinsically—and grandiloquently—negative. The stark and unforgiving incipit of 1 Maccabees offers a negative characterization of Alexander the Great and the historical phase that perceptively began with him. As a religious, factual, and local history, 1 Maccabees opens with a literarily accomplished sketch of Alexander’s meteoric and disquieting career and the image of his pride-swollen heart (ὕψωθη καὶ ἐπήρθη ἡ καρδία αὐτοῦ)² and ends with the pride-swollen heart (ὕψωθη ἡ καρδία αὐτοῦ)³ of the man who orchestrated Simon Maccabee’s murder in 135 BC.⁴ In particular, it is noted that, after several battles, seizures, and the submission of χῶραι, ἔθνη, and local powers, the earth fell silent before Alexander and his pride-swollen heart (ἠσύχασεν ἡ γῆ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ, καὶ ὑψώθη, καὶ ἐπήρθη ἡ καρδία αὐτοῦ)—a striking synecdoche. Upon realizing he was nearing death, he divided the kingdom among his most honored officers, who had been raised with him from youth. They donned the diadems, as did their sons for many years (καὶ οἱ υἱοὶ αὐτῶν ὀπίσω αὐτῶν ἔτη πολλὰ), resulting in a proliferation, like a “plethora,” of evils on earth (καὶ ἐπλήθυναν κακὰ ἐν τῇ γῆ).⁵

From the book’s final lines, one infers that the anonymous⁶ author of the lost original Hebrew, which survives in Greek,⁷ composed his history of the Hasmonean uprising⁸

¹ Momigliano 1975a, 105–106.

² 1 Macc 1:3.

³ 1 Macc 16:13.

⁴ The incipit also says that “the earth fell silent before” Alexander (ἠσύχασεν ἡ γῆ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ). Notably, the same synecdoche describes Demetrius I of Syria’s intimidating power at 11:38 and 52. For the figures of speech in 1 Maccabees see, in general, Tilly 2015.

⁵ 1 Macc 1:9. See Troiani 2008, 348–349; Klęczar 2017; Darshan 2017; Klęczar 2018, 379, 381–383, 385: “Alexander as a starting point of a period of time which would end with the ascension of Antiochus and finally, in the long term, lead to the triumph of God and the end of days;” Nawotka 2018; Schwartz 2022, 151–154 and Amitay 2022, 116 *pace* Klęczar. See also *Cosm. Indicopl.* II 68, commenting on this passage.

⁶ For his anonymity, see Troiani 2008, 347–348.

⁷ See Schwartz 2022, 39–43.

⁸ See, notably, Bickermann 1937 (English translation with Addenda: Bickerman 2007, vol. 2, 1025–1146); Niese 1900; Fischer 1980; Goldstein 1989; Derfler 1989; Bar-Kochva 2002; Zsengellér – Xeravits 2007 and Avemarie *et al.* 2017; Trampedach 2012; Bernhardt 2017 and Schwartz 2022, 51–64. See also, notably, Schenk von Stauffenberg 1972; Signori 2012.

around the end of the life of Simon's successor, John Hyrcanus (104 BC).⁹ Thus, 50 to 60 years elapsed between Antiochus IV's death and this anonymous imitation of the ancient chronicles of Israel (*Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles*).¹⁰ This accomplished historian and occasional poet,¹¹ who already quoted *Daniel* as a sacred text,¹² could only witness the latest events he exposed—if he witnessed them at all. It is noteworthy that he refers readers to other works (ἰδοὺ ταῦτα γέγραπται ἐπὶ βιβλίῳ ἡμερῶν ἀρχιερωσύνης)¹³ or indirectly hypothesizes them¹⁴ in addition to quoting official (original?) documents.¹⁵ It is known that this nationalist and “ardent partisan”¹⁶ or even court chronicler¹⁷ of the Hasmoneans¹⁸ had access to the Temple archives¹⁹ and (not necessarily accurate²⁰) rumors about the kings. Although the author believed he lived in an age devoid of prophets,²¹ there is no evidence of his hypothesized membership in groups such as the Sadducees or the Hasideans. Nonetheless, it is evident that his book's “rhetoric and conceptual world are essentially those of *Deuteronomy* and the Deuteronomic authors or redactors of these biblical histories.”²²

Origen, quoted by Eusebius, rendered the original Hebrew title of Μακκαβαίων Α' as Σαρβηθσαβαναιελ.²³ A hypothetical yet insightful interpretation of this ghost word is “Book of the Dynasty of Those Who Rebelled on God's Behalf.”²⁴ Furthermore, it has been noted that both 1 and 2 Maccabees reflect, through scriptural models, “the later atmosphere” of an “independent and expansionist” Judea.²⁵ However, the two works should

⁹ Niese 1900, 276–293; Momigliano 1931, 35–36; Penna 1953, 15–16; Momigliano 1975a, 103; Goldstein 1976, 62–64; Schunck 1980, 292; Mazzarino 1990, vol. 2, 348–349; vol. 3, 57, assuming allusions to C. Marius (1 Macc 8:16) and the Roman victory over the Cimbri (8:4), and Baronowski 2011, 54 (103–90 BC). Schwartz 1991, 33–38 argued for 130 BC on the basis that “even an arch-conservative writing around 100 B.C.E. could not have ignored John Hyrcanus' greatest achievements, his annexation of Idumaea and Samaritis.” But see now Schwartz 2022, 7–8 (ca. 110 BC). See also Attridge 1984, 171–176.

¹⁰ On imitation and sources, see Niese 1900, 461–465, 506–509; Penna 1953, 9–11; Goldstein 1976, 4–9, 37–54, 90–103; Schwartz 1991, 30–31; Troiani 2008, 352; Borchardt 2009; Tilly 2015, 388–389; Choi 2020.

¹¹ 1 Macc 1:26–28; 11:37–40; 2:8–13; 3:3–9; 3:45; 14:4–15, echoing the *Psalms* and *Lamentations*. See Penna 1953, 9; Goldstein 1976, 21; Goldstein 1983, 30–32.

¹² 1 Macc 2:59–60.

¹³ 1 Macc 16:23–24.

¹⁴ 1 Macc 9:22.

¹⁵ 1 Macc 5:10–13; 8:23–32; 10:3–6, 18–20, 25–45; 11:30–37; 2:6–18, 20–23; 13:36–40; 14:20–23, 27–45; 15:2–9, 16–21. See Niese 1900, 453–454; Bickermann 1930; Momigliano 1931, 141–170; Penna 1953, 10; Gauger 1977, 153–328; Ehling 2008, 57; Troiani 2008, 358.

¹⁶ Goldstein 1976, 21. See also Troiani 2008, 355–356. For Jewish nationalism in the Greco-Roman period see, in general, Farmer 1956.

¹⁷ Schunck 1980, 292.

¹⁸ See, in general, Dąbrowa 2010.

¹⁹ 1 Macc 8:22; 11:37; 14:49; 15:24. See Penna 1953, 10; Schunck 1980, 291.

²⁰ *Contra*, see Schwartz 2022, 8: “A provincial Judean origin is also suggested [...] by the author's evident lack of familiarity with the Hellenistic world.”

²¹ 1 Macc 4:46; 11:27; 14:41. See Troiani 2008, 356.

²² Schwartz 1991, 30–31.

²³ Eus. *Hist eccl.* 6.2.

²⁴ See Goldstein 1975; Schwartz 2022, 3–4. For the title, see also Niese 1900, 269; Penna 1953, 5–7; Goldstein 1976, 14–15; Schunck 1980, 289.

²⁵ Momigliano 1975a, 105. See also Schwartz 1991; Berthelot 2014; Eckhardt 2016.

not be considered unitary and consequential. A significant difference in their historical perspectives lies precisely their authors' attitude towards Divine Providence and Scripture. As noted by Schwartz,

2 *Maccabees* is affected only minimally by biblical language and style, but it is permeated by belief in divine providence and double causality; its story is one of sin and atonement; and it is full of references to God, heaven, prayers, miracles, angels, efficient divine providence, and resurrection. In contrast, 1 *Maccabees*, although full of biblical language and style, has, as noted, only a few references to "heaven" and prayers.²⁶

As independent emplotments of the "enigma of Antiochus' persecution"²⁷ and its "Hellenistic model,"²⁸ 1 and 2 *Maccabees* should not be viewed as formal counterparts to 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles. Instead, they are two continuous and ethno-poetical professions of faith, filled with military events and political intrigues that serve as a *litany* of God's intervention and the power of orthodoxy²⁹ in history. This is exemplified in the semantic architecture of the battles at the Ascent of Lebonah, Beth Horon, Emmaus, and Beth Zur, which were preparatory to the 164 BC purification of the Temple, as well as the war against Bacchides and interactions³⁰ with Alexander I Balas, Demetrius II, Diodotus Tryphon, and finally, Antiochus VII.

The non-Greek and non-Hellenized author of 1 *Maccabees* posited that God had chastised His people³¹ for succumbing (εὐδόκησαν) to foreign customs³² while also assisting the champions of orthodoxy. Among the various profanations and as their cause, the author was particularly indignant at Antiochus IV's desire to dilute the Chosen People into a single nation (ἔγραψεν ὁ βασιλεὺς πάση τῇ βασιλείᾳ αὐτοῦ εἶναι πάντας εἰς λαὸν ἓνα).³³

The sinful root (ρίζα ἁμαρτωλός)³⁴ known as Antiochus Epiphanes is introduced as the son of King Antiochus and a former hostage of the Romans (ὃς ἦν ὄμηρα ἐν Ῥώμῃ),³⁵ who

²⁶ Schwartz 2022, 35 (see, in general, 24–36). See also Niese 1900, 270–273, 460, 465; Momigliano 1931, 47–48; Goldstein 1976, 33; Mazarino 1990, vol. 2, 230–232. Nevertheless, the characters in 1 *Maccabees* pray to God (3:18–19; 4:10–11, 33; 9:48; 11:71; 16:3) and trust in him (3:20–22, 46–53; 4:30–33; 12:15). See also Schunck 1980, 293; Goldstein 1983, 37–41, 48 on the hypothesis of a common source Troiani 2008.

²⁷ So Weitzman 2004. See also Momigliano 1975a, 105–106 ("The *First Book of Maccabees* is a dynastic history of the Hasmoneans and presents an incoherent and contradictory view of the policy of Antiochus IV"). See already Niese 1900, 453: chapters 1–7 run parallel to 2 *Maccabees* and give a reasonably detailed history of the first eight/nine years of the uprising, while Chapters 8–16 cover the following 25 years in a much more sparse presentation. For the persecution see, in general, Motzo 1924, 101–128; van 't Hof 1955, 82–96; Mørkholm 1966, 135–165; Bringmann 1983; Goldstein 1983, 84–112; Will – Orrieux 1986, 113–175; Schwartz 2001; Mittag 2006, 225–281; Honigman 2014, 229–258; Bernhardt 2017.

²⁸ See, notably, Troiani 2003, esp. 225–226. See, in general, Goldstein 2020, 3–32 (§ "Jewish Acceptance and Rejection of Hellenism").

²⁹ 1 Macc 2:59–60; 4:9–10, 30, 55; 12:15.

³⁰ Penna 1965, 151–161.

³¹ 1 Macc 1:64.

³² 1 Macc 1:11–15, 43–53. See Williams 2001.

³³ 1 Macc 1:41.

³⁴ Tilly 2015, 395–396.

³⁵ 1 Macc 1:10. All translations are from Schwartz 2022.

are notably praised in Chapter 8.³⁶ In my opinion, these two notations combined suggest an unflattering allusion to Magnesia. Furthermore, the narrative of 1 Maccabees is “dynastically” paced,³⁷ detailing the exploits of Mattathias and his three sons, who led the resistance in succession: Judas (167–160 BC), Jonathan (160–143), and Simon (143–135). What, then, is the place of the Lagids in this 40-year epic of the Hasmonean dynasty?³⁸

The lords of Egypt enter the history of the Maccabees as victims of Antiochus IV’s expansionism in Chapter 1. From a dramatic perspective, they primarily serve to consolidate his kingdom and encircle of Israel.³⁹ In my view, this serves as a rhetorical counterpart to what Weitzman realistically observed about the “enigma” of the persecution narrative:

The sacrilegious king who robs temples and interferes in tradition—the opposite of what a good king was supposed to do—was a stereotypical role imposed literarily on kings by those who would supplant them. The real Antiochus almost certainly acted in ways that justified his reputation, and to the extent that he did so, he made it easier for his memory to be framed within plot line. But that Antiochus remains inaccessible, his behavior impossible to understand within the political and cultural norms of the Hellenistic world. Far less inexplicable than the real king’s sacrileges is the recounting of those sacrileges in texts such as 1 *Maccabees*, an act of emplotment with many precedents in earlier literary history and with clear political benefits for those framed in story as the restorers of tradition.⁴⁰

The account of the invasion in 170/69 BC follows somewhat abruptly after the indignant portrayal of Antiochus IV’s⁴¹ rise and the active collaboration of certain renegades.⁴² These individuals are characterized as unorthodox and xenophilic.⁴³ They are often referred to with an expression that translates the Hebrew “sons of Belial” (בְּנֵי בְעִיַל), or the “transgressors of the Law” (υἱοὶ παράνομοι).⁴⁴ Here, the Law is understood as the exclusive⁴⁵ prerogative of the Jews. The covenant (διαθήκη) sought with the polytheists represents an unholy reversal of the ancient covenant with God, using the same term.⁴⁶ Antiochus is labeled a “sinful root” because his rise, amidst the “plethora” of evils initiated by Alexander and his successors (ἐπλήθυναν κακὰ ἐν τῇ γῆ), direct leads to the apostasy of those

³⁶ Niese 1900, 501–502; Bickermann 1930, 358–359; Sordi 1975; Gruen 1984, 745–751; Mandell 1991; Troiani 2008, 356–357; Baronowski 2011, 54–55; MacRae 2016; Coşkun 2018. For the historical context see, in general, Shatzman 2001, 25–38.

³⁷ For the structure of 1 Maccabees, see Williams 1999; Schwartz 2022, 6–7. For a synopsis, see Penna 1953, 8–9; Goldstein 1976, 4–12; Honigman 2014, 405–408.

³⁸ For possible “Egyptian” traits in the depiction of the Hasmoneans, see van Henten 2001; van Henten 2007.

³⁹ 1 Macc 1:16–20. For the Sixth Syrian War in the books of the Maccabees see, in general, Parker 2020, 45–49.

⁴⁰ Weitzman 2004, 234. See also Honigman 2014, 229–258.

⁴¹ See, in general, Niese 1900, 466–468; Penna 1953, 12; Goldstein 1976, 104–160; Lorein 2001; Weitzman 2004.

⁴² See, in general, Goldstein 1976, 64–89; Troiani 2008, 352–354; Eckhardt 2016, 58–62.

⁴³ I do not call them here with the specific term Ἑλληνισταί, as it does not belong to 1 Macc and does not convey the meaning desired by the author. See 2 Macc 4:13 instead. For the absence of Ἑλληνισμός from 1 Maccabees, see Troiani 2008, 352–354 speaking of “conformism” and “globalization” instead.

⁴⁴ E.g., Deut. XIII,14. See Penna 1953, 13; Schwartz 2022, 155–156.

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Ps. CXLVII 20: “He has done this for no other nation; they do not know his laws.”

⁴⁶ See Penna 1965.

who “abandoned the holy covenant” (ἀπέστησαν ἀπὸ διαθήκης ἁγίας).⁴⁷ The term “sinful root” likely echoes a passage in *Daniel*, where Antiochus is described as vile (πίπτω).⁴⁸ In contrast, the Egyptian dynasts are notably absent from the narrative of apostasy.

Interestingly, the renegades set out to bridge the separation from the polytheists (μετὰ τῶν ἐθνῶν),⁴⁹ viewing this separation as a source of evil (ὅτι ἀφ’ ἧς ἐχωρίσθημεν ἀπ’ αὐτῶν εὗρεν ἡμᾶς κακὰ πολλά), perhaps reflecting a perception of material backwardness.⁵⁰ This represents a reversal of the nature of the κακά mentioned at the beginning and revives the motif found in Jer. XLIV, particularly verses 15–19, regarding the Jews of Egypt who were willing to worship the Queen of Heaven.⁵¹ In that context, the belief was that the foreign goddess granted material favors to the Jews.⁵² Similarly, the traitors around 170 BC petitioned Antiochus IV to repeal ethnic privileges,⁵³ built a gymnasium in Jerusalem,⁵⁴ and managed to conceal their circumcision.⁵⁵ They may have aspired to attend the gymnasium without clothing.⁵⁶ Chapter 1 thoroughly details the Seleucid violence against the people and the desecration of the Temple, culminating in the 167 BC erection of the idol, referred to as the “abomination of desolation” (βδέλυγμα ἐρημώσεως).⁵⁷ This phrase is again a quotation from Daniel.⁵⁸

The only interlude in this crucial Chapter 1 is a brief reference to the first invasion of Egypt. While it may seem like a juxtaposed digression, it adds Ptolemy VI to the list of Antiochus IV’s victims. The text indicates that the Seleucid aimed to conquer Egypt⁵⁹ to establish a dual monarchy. This represents a “maximalist” interpretation of his ambitions regarding the legacy of the Lagids—which is consistent from a literary standpoint. Likewise, the hyperbolic⁶⁰ means deployed—including elephants⁶¹—and battle against Philometor, along with the extent of the Egyptian defeat, seem to have impressed the author without diverting him from the main narrative.

Καὶ ἡτοιμάσθη ἡ βασιλεία ἐνώπιον Ἀντιόχου καὶ ὑπέλαβεν βασιλεῦσαι γῆς Αἰγύπτου, ὅπως βασιλεύσῃ ἐπὶ τὰς δύο βασιλείας. ¹⁷ καὶ εἰσῆλθεν εἰς Αἴγυπτον ἐν ὄχλῳ βαρεῖ, ἐν ἄρμασιν καὶ ἐλέφασιν καὶ ἐν ἵππευσιν καὶ ἐν στόλῳ μεγάλῳ ¹⁸ καὶ συνεστήσατο πόλεμον πρὸς Πτολεμαῖον βασιλέα Αἰγύπτου· καὶ ἐνετράπη Πτολεμαῖος ἀπὸ προσώπου αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐφυγεν καὶ ἔπεσον τραυματαῖα πολλοί. ¹⁹ καὶ κατελάβοντο τὰς πόλεις τὰς ὄχρῳ ἐν γῆ Αἰγύπτῳ καὶ ἔλαβεν τὰ σκῦλα

⁴⁷ 1 Macc 1:15.

⁴⁸ Dan. XI 21. See above. For Daniel and 1 Maccabees, see Goldstein 1976, 42–54.

⁴⁹ Klawans 1995; Rosen-Zvi 2016.

⁵⁰ So Penna 1965, 162.

⁵¹ See Penna 1965, 162. For Jeremiah in 1 Macc, see Lange 2017, 210–216.

⁵² For the Queen of Heaven, see Lemonnyer 1910.

⁵³ So Penna 1953, 48 on the basis of Antiochus III’s concessions in Josephus, *AJ* 12.142. See also Goldstein 1976, 200.

⁵⁴ Laemmer 1972; Mazzucchi 2009.

⁵⁵ Beek 2021.

⁵⁶ So Penna 1953, 49. See also Goldstein 1976, 200; Schwartz 2022, 157–159.

⁵⁷ 1 Macc 1:54.

⁵⁸ Dan. VIII.13; IX.27; XI.31; XII.11. For a notable quotation, see anche Matt. 24.15 and Mark 13.14.

⁵⁹ Otto 1934, 34 fn. 2.

⁶⁰ Otto 1934, 46 fn. 3.

⁶¹ However, the description of their use is postponed to 1 Macc 6:34–37 (the Battle of Beth Zechariah between Judas Maccabaeus and Lysias).

γῆς Αἰγύπτου.⁶² καὶ ἐπέστρεψεν Ἀντίοχος μετὰ τὸ πατάξει Αἴγυπτον ἐν τῷ ἑκατοστῷ καὶ τεσσαρακοστῷ καὶ τρίτῳ ἔτει καὶ ἀνέβη ἐπὶ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ἀνέβη εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα ἐν ὄχλῳ βαρεῖ.⁶²

The portrayal of events aligns closely with that of Daniel, reflecting an overall “Judean point of view, according to which only two Hellenistic kingdoms were relevant.”⁶³ More precisely, the extent of Philometor’s defeat is conveyed by the expression, taken from the ancient chronicles,⁶⁴ that “Ptolemy was defeated from his face,” meaning before Antiochus (ἐνετράπη Πτολεμαῖος ἀπὸ προσώπου αὐτοῦ).⁶⁵ The anonymous historian either ignored or chose to overlook the tradition regarding the catastrophic reconquista attempted by Philometor’s regents as the fuse that ignited the conflict. However, the brief interlude on the Sixth Syrian War is motivated by the historian’s general meticulousness⁶⁶ regarding chronology. Precise dates expressed in the Seleucid era⁶⁷ punctuate the entire narrative.⁶⁸ On the other hand, accuracy does not take precedence over functionality. While the continuation and conclusion of the war are present in Daniel, they are notably absent from 1 Maccabees. Similarly, 2 Maccabees does not provide a complete account of the war, in our eyes. The author likely chose to remain silent about the second invasion to avoid disrupting the narrative of crucial contemporary events in Judea. Fueled by zeal for the Law (ἐζήλωσεν τῷ νόμῳ), Mattathias was inaugurating a dialectical reversal of the book’s fundamental antithesis: “Let everyone who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!” (πᾶς ὁ ζηλῶν τῷ νόμῳ καὶ ἰσθῶν διαθήκην ἐξελεύσεται ὀπίσω μου).⁶⁹ This may involve factual knowledge that differs significantly from our own.

The king of Egypt reappears in Chapters 10 and 11, nearly 20 years later.⁷⁰ These chapters contain two lengthy and closely related sections—vv. 51–66 and 1–19—addressing the last five years of the king’s life. The narrative is filtered through the lens of Alexander I Balas’ parable, which, in my opinion, derives its character from the consequences of his sudden emergence and the capture of Ptolemais: “In the 160th year, Alexander, the son of Antiochus Epiphanes, came up and captured Ptolemais; they accepted

⁶² 1 Macc 1:16–20: “When Antiochus’ kingdom was securely established, he undertook to rule as king of Egypt too, so as to be king of both kingdoms. ¹⁷ So he invaded Egypt with a strong army, including chariots and elephants, and with a great fleet. ¹⁸ He went to war against King Ptolemy of Egypt, and Ptolemy was defeated by him and fled; many fell, mortally wounded. ¹⁹ And he took the fortified cities of the land of Egypt, and despoiled the land of Egypt. ²⁰ Then Antiochus turned back after smiting Egypt, in the 143rd year, and came up against Israel and Jerusalem with a strong army.” See Droysen 1893–1894, vol. 2, 408; Goldstein 1976, 202–204; Schunck 1980, 300; Bernhardt 2017, 195, 199, 203–204, 525; Schwartz 2022, 163–164.

⁶³ Schwartz 2022, 163.

⁶⁴ Jdc. XI.33; 2 Rg. XXII.19; 2 Chr. XXXIV.27; XXXVI.12.

⁶⁵ Schwartz 2022, 163. See also 1 Macc 6:6 about Lysias.

⁶⁶ Troiani 2008, 356 speaking of a “notarial accuracy.” But see, e.g., the city left unnamed in 1 Macc 7:1 and the unspecified Parthian king at 14:2 (Mithridates I). For other examples, see Schwartz 2022, 405 fn. 3.

⁶⁷ Niese 1900, 269; Penna 1953, 27–28; Goldstein 1976, 540–543; Goldstein 1983, 32–35; Grabbe 1991. See also Parker 2020.

⁶⁸ Although this time reckoning was reminiscent of Antiochus’ impiety, the Council of Chalcedon and Syrian Christians continued adopting the Seleucid era as “canonized” by 1 Maccabees. See Mazzarino 1990, vol. 3, 425.

⁶⁹ 1 Macc 2:27 (see also 2:50–54).

⁷⁰ Furthermore, the book has a relative gap of seven years between the death of the High Priest Alcimus (160/59 BCE) and Jonathan’s high priesthood (153/2).

him, and he reigned there as king” (ἐν ἔτει ἑξήκοστῶ καὶ ἑκατοστῶ ἀνέβη Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ τοῦ Ἀντίοχου ὁ Ἐπιφανῆς καὶ κατελάβετο Πτολεμαίδα καὶ ἐπεδέξαντο αὐτόν καὶ ἔβασίλευσεν ἐκεῖ).⁷¹

The specification of Alexander’s paternity does not align with the tradition of his illegitimacy.⁷² Instead, it emphasizes Alexander’s original contrast with the reigning Demetrius I, son of Seleucus IV. This bipolarity is evident in their long, explicit⁷³ race to win favor with Jonathan and the Jews.⁷⁴ It is noted that Alexander admired Jonathan⁷⁵ at least as much as Jonathan despised Demetrius and placed his trust in the newcomer.⁷⁶ The attachment of three letters to Jonathan⁷⁷ corroborates this diplomatic endeavor. The narrative reaches a turning point with Demetrius I’s slaying in an unspecified battle and seemingly concludes with Alexander’s successful request for the hand of Ptolemy VI’s daughter, the future Cleopatra Thea.⁷⁸ The appeal to the king of Egypt carries the solemn tone characteristic of the *res gestae* genre, as well as that of much older documents associated with the royal ἐγώ:

Ἐπεὶ ἀνέστρεψα εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν μου καὶ ἐνεκάθισα ἐπὶ θρόνου πατέρων μου καὶ ἐκράτησα τῆς ἀρχῆς καὶ συνέτριψα τὸν Δημήτριον καὶ ἐπεκράτησα τῆς χώρας ἡμῶν ⁵³ καὶ συνῆψα πρὸς αὐτὸν μάχην, καὶ συνετριβήν αὐτὸς καὶ ἡ παρεμβολὴ αὐτοῦ ὑφ’ ἡμῶν, καὶ ἐκαθίσταμεν ἐπὶ θρόνου βασιλείας αὐτοῦ· ⁵⁴ καὶ νῦν στήσωμεν πρὸς αὐτοὺς φιλίαν, καὶ νῦν δός μοι τὴν θυγατέρα σου εἰς γυναῖκα, καὶ ἐπιγαμβρεῖσσω σοὶ καὶ δώσω σοὶ δόματα καὶ αὐτῇ ἄξιά σου.⁷⁹

Since the direction of this request (Balas to Philometor) appears less than credible,⁸⁰ there is reason to view the exchange as a well-crafted imitation. “In good chancellery style,

⁷¹ 1 Macc 10:1.

⁷² Schwartz 2022, 329: “It is interesting to wonder whether ancient readers of a book that opens with a general condemnation of Hellenistic kings and then goes on to focus on one particular villain, Antiochus Epiphanes, reflected on the book’s contrasting attitude toward Alexander I Balas and on what that might indicate about the nature of Hellenistic kings, or of *Realpolitik*. Or should we suppose that readers were expected to know that Alexander was really not an exception, for he was really an imposter [...]?”

⁷³ 1 Macc 10:22–24.

⁷⁴ 1 Macc 10:3–45, 59–66. See Momigliano 1931, 162–163. For Jonathan, see also Gorre 2023, Index s.v. “Jonathan.”

⁷⁵ 1 Macc 10:15–16.

⁷⁶ 1 Macc 10:46–47.

⁷⁷ 1 Macc 10:3–6, 18–20, 25–45.

⁷⁸ Champollion-Figeac 1819, 155–156, 159; Macurdy 1932, 94–95, 154–155; Otto 1934, 118, 123; Seibert 1967, 87; Llewellyn-Jones – McAuley 2023, 90–98.

⁷⁹ 1 Macc 10:52–54: “Since I returned to my kingdom and sat upon my fathers’ throne, and took control of the government, defeated Demetrius, and took control of our country—⁵³ for I engaged him in battle, and he and his army were defeated by us, and we have sat on the throne of his kingdom—⁵⁴ therefore let us now establish friendship with one another. So now give me your daughter as wife, and I will be your son-in-law and give you and her gifts worthy of you.” See Goldstein 1976, 415–416 (“the flavor [...] so Hebraic that the text is probably his [*scil.* the author] own composition. There is, indeed, no reason why the original correspondence of Alexander and Ptolemy VI should have been preserved”); Schunck 1980, 341–342; Bernhardt 2017, 351; Llewellyn-Jones – McAuley 2023, 90.

⁸⁰ See Gruen 1984, 709 fn. 180 and Schwartz 2022, 323: “it is unlikely that the marriage came at the initiative of Alexander. The book’s assertion conforms to the fact that it seems to be unaware of, or unwilling to acknowledge, the important role Ptolemy VI had played in Alexander’s success.” *Contra*, see Goldstein 1976, 416.

Ptolemy's response" with an invitation to meet at Ptolemais in Phoenicia⁸¹ "pedantically echoes Alexander's words."⁸²

The historians notes that the wedding was conducted lavishly, in the fashion of royalty (καθώς οἱ βασιλεῖς ἐν δόξῃ μεγάλῃ). This displays suggests that Alexander's eagerness to curry favor may have been driven by a desire to leverage the Jews as a means to outmaneuver Demetrius I—while simultaneously strengthening his own dynastic and material position through a politically advantageous Egyptian marriage. Alexander granted Jonathan one final, swift favor⁸³ only after the emergence of his new rival, Demetrius II, son of Demetrius I.⁸⁴

Here, Ptolemy VI and his daughter appear to function as sources of a different kind of legitimacy. However, this dynamic is complicated by Ptolemy and Alexander's meeting with Jonathan at Ptolemais. Was this a full-fledged diplomatic conference? Officially invited to meet with the kings, Jonathan arrived bearing valuable gifts and won their favor (εὖρεν χάριν ἐνώπιον αὐτῶν). In a providential display of royal favor, Alexander also dismissed a group of unorthodox and xenophile Jews (ἄνδρες λοιμοὶ ἐξ Ἰσραὴλ, ἄνδρες παράνομοι)⁸⁵ who had come to Ptolemais to slander the Maccabean leader by presenting a formal petition against him (ἐντυχεῖν κατ' αὐτοῦ).⁸⁶ This incident serves as a narrative pretext for Jonathan's exaltation⁸⁷ as a kind of *revived Joseph* in the presence of the Egyptian king—an episode strongly evocative of Joseph's elevation by Pharaoh.⁸⁸ This many episodes of this type, it concludes with a clear resolution: "Then Jonathan went back to Jerusalem safely and joyfully."⁸⁹ Ptolemy VI's silent presence since verse 60 onward—where he receives Jonathan's precious gifts—may reflect how some Jews in Jerusalem perceived him at the time.

The conclusion of Chapter 10 and the beginning of Chapter 11 detail the disruption of harmony brought about by Demetrius II's return from Crete. This event leads to a new, semi-stable polarity and the issuance of a new document favorable to the Jews.⁹⁰ In essence, "the main function of this brief section is to explain how, after an interlude of loyalty to a Hellenistic king, Balas, Jonathan could become free of his bond to him without actually having to violate their alliance."⁹¹ Consequently, the narrative surrounding the wars between Jonathan and Apollonius,⁹² as well as between Ptolemy VI and

⁸¹ Huß 2001, 584 fn. 372: did Philometor want to highlight the Ptolemaic past of those lands?

⁸² Schwartz 2022, 323. For a proposed piece of numismatic evidence, see Kiang 1962, 76. See also Otto 1934, 121 fn. 2; Dąbrowa 2010, 49 fn. 27.

⁸³ 1 Macc 10:88–89: the golden fibula of the king's kinsmen.

⁸⁴ It is very revealing of this historian's style to compare the entrances on the scene of Antiochus IV (1:10), Demetrius I (7:1–4), Alexander (10:1), and Demetrius II (10: 67–68).

⁸⁵ Again, see Schwartz 2022, 323–324.

⁸⁶ Eckhardt 2016, 61–62; Schwartz 2022, 324.

⁸⁷ 1 Macc 10:61–66.

⁸⁸ Gn. XLI.41–44. But see also Est. VI.10–11; Is. LXI.10 and Zac. III.4. See Penna 1953, 130–131; Dąbrowa 2010, 49. I also regard the jewel that Alexander bestowed on Jonathan in 1 Macc 10:88–89 as a reminiscence of Gn. XLI. 42. For this episode's Egyptian background, see Schipper 2011.

⁸⁹ See, in general, Bernhardt 2017, 351–352.

⁹⁰ 1 Macc 11:20–37. See, in general, Bernhardt 2017, 354–355, 433.

⁹¹ Schwartz 2022, 333.

⁹² 1 Macc 10:69–87.

Alexander⁹³—known as the Seventh Syrian War—must be understood in the context of the *constant and morally connoted instability* of post-Alexander kings. This instability is the reason behind Ptolemy VI's sudden portrayal as a dishonest ruler, which I interpret as an echo of Dan. XI.27.

As is often the case, the narrative is rich with references. After Demetrius II's return, Philometor gathered a vast army, described as “the sand by the shore of the sea” (ὡς ἡ ἄμμος ἢ παρὰ τὸ χεῖλος τῆς θαλάσσης), and “sought to seize Alexander's kingdom through deceit, aiming to annex it to his own” (ἐζήτησε κατακρατῆσαι τῆς βασιλείας Ἀλεξάνδρου δόλῳ καὶ προσθεῖναι αὐτὴν τῇ βασιλείᾳ αὐτοῦ).⁹⁴ The motif of comparing an army to sand is a classic element in ancient chronicles.⁹⁵ Unsurprisingly, the king's intentions mirror those of Antiochus IV against Egypt in 170/69 BC. Disguising his true motives, he addressed the cities with peaceful words (λόγοις εἰρηνικοῖς), much like the Seleucid official Apollonius, the xenophile High Priest Alcimus, General Nicanor, Demetrius II, and Antiochus VII.⁹⁶ Previously, Jonathan had set fire to the Temple of Dagon at Azotus, with 8000 of Apollonius' infantry trapped inside.⁹⁷ It is worth noting that the same zeal for the Law (ζῆλος τῷ νόμῳ) exhibited by Mattathias in Chapter 2 is echoed here.

When it was Philometor's turn to enter the city, the inhabitants showed him the charred bodies in an attempt to incite him against Jonathan, but to no avail. “The king remained silent” (ἔσίγησεν ὁ βασιλεύς) offering no satisfaction to the dissenters,⁹⁸ just as Alexander had done in Ptolemais (οὐ προσέσχεν αὐτοῖς ὁ βασιλεύς). This silence highlights the author's distinction between the fickleness of foreign kings and the enduring majesty of the just cause of orthodoxy—which is destined to preserve itself. Both Ptolemy and Jonathan emerged unscathed from their brief encounter in Jaffa.⁹⁹

Leading up to the Battle at the Oenoparus River, the subsequent events effectively illustrate the fickleness the author presupposed, *i.e.*, assumed *a priori*. Verses 8–13 catalog Ptolemy VI's duplicity in a striking yet somewhat irrational manner. The king arrived in Seleucia by the Sea, plotting *wicked plans* against Alexander (διελογίζετο περὶ Ἀλεξάνδρου λογισμοὺς πονηροῦς). He then sought Demetrius II's allegiance (διαθήκη)¹⁰⁰ by inviting him to reclaim his ancestral kingdom (βασιλεύσεις τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ πατρός σου), only to enter Antioch and don the “diadem of Asia” alongside that of Egypt (περιέθετο τὸ διάδημα τῆς Ἀσίας καὶ περιέθετο δύο διαδήματα περὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ τὸ τῆς Αἰγύπτου καὶ Ἀσίας).¹⁰¹ Furthermore, Philometor promised Demetrius the hand of his

⁹³ 1 Macc 11:1–19.

⁹⁴ Otto 1934, 124, considering this claim accurate, and Penna 1965, 151 fn. 2.

⁹⁵ Jos. XI.4; Jdc. VII.12; 1 Sam. XIII.5; 2 Sam. XVII.11; 1 Reg. V.9. For scriptural references in the accounts of the battles of the Hasmoneans, see Niese 1900, 461.

⁹⁶ 1 Macc 1:30; 7:10, 15; 7:27; 11:53; 15:27.

⁹⁷ 1 Macc 10:83–85.

⁹⁸ Gaggero 1979, 95.

⁹⁹ See, in general, Gaggero 1979, 63–65, 68, 75.

¹⁰⁰ Penna 1965, 151–152.

¹⁰¹ Otto 1934, 126; Manni 1950, 242–243; Ritter 1965, 110 fn. 2, 138–139; Santi Amantini 1972, 48–51; Santi Amantini 1974; Huß 2001, 586–587. See also Poole 1865, 330–334, proposing a piece of numismatic evidence and Piejko 1982, 130 after OGIS 246. For the title of King of Asia, see Muccioli 2004, esp. 150–151 on Ptolemy VI.

daughter Cleopatra,¹⁰² who was already married to Alexander. Ultimately, he publicly slandered (ἐψόγισεν [...] καὶ ἐφάνη ἡ ἔχθρα αὐτῶν) his former son-in-law by accusing him of attempting to kill him.

The historian emphasizes that Ptolemy aspired (χάριν τοῦ ἐπιθυμῆσαι) to the kingdom of Syria, but succinctly illustrates¹⁰³ how this ambition led to both ruin and an inglorious, and dramatically simultaneous, death shortly after the battle. The defeated Alexander was beheaded by an Arab with whom he had sought refuge. The victor, Ptolemy, died three days later—though the historian does not specify that it was from the wounds he sustained (ὁ βασιλεὺς Πτολεμαῖος ἀπέθανεν ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ)—and his men were overwhelmed (ἀπώλοντο).

The plot of 1 Maccabees overlaps with the reign of Ptolemy VIII for about a decade—from the death of Philometor to the treacherous assassination of Simon Maccabee. Despite this temporal alignment, the king himself appears only once in the text, and even then, indirectly—as the recipient, in 138/7 BC, of a pro-Jewish letter sent by “Lucius, consul of the Romans” (Λεύκιος ὕπατος Ῥωμαίων),¹⁰⁴ which was entrusted to Simon’s envoy, Numenius.¹⁰⁵ This letter is quoted in a way that abruptly and oddly interrupts the account of Simon’s struggle against Diodotus Tryphon, who had previously captured and executed Jonathan. The document serves merely to highlight Simon’s growing international stature—an emphasis that aligns with the theme of Chapter 15.¹⁰⁶ The “caption” in verses 22–23 introduce a lengthy list of four additional sovereigns and nineteen other states that received the same message. The historian uses this enumeration to underscore Simon’s prestige in the eyes of the international community. Ptolemy VIII, or better, Egypt is its coryphaeus:

Λεύκιος ὕπατος Ῥωμαίων Πτολεμαίῳ βασιλεῖ χαίρειν. ¹⁷ οἱ πρεσβευταὶ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἦλθον πρὸς ἡμᾶς, φίλοι ἡμῶν καὶ σύμμαχοι, ἀνανεούμενοι τὴν ἐξ ἀρχῆς φιλίαν καὶ συμμαχίαν, ἀπεσταλμένοι ἀπὸ Σίμωνος τοῦ ἀρχιερέως καὶ τοῦ δήμου τῶν Ἰουδαίων. ¹⁸ ἤνεγκαν δὲ ἀσπίδα χρυσοῦν ἀπὸ μῶν χιλίων. ¹⁹ ἤρρεσεν οὖν ἡμῖν γράψαι τοῖς βασιλεῦσι καὶ ταῖς χώραις ὅπως μὴ ἐκζητήσωσιν αὐτοῖς κακὰ καὶ μὴ πολεμήσωσιν αὐτούς καὶ τὰς πόλεις αὐτῶν καὶ τὴν χώραν αὐτῶν καὶ ἵνα μὴ συμμαχήσωσι τοῖς πολεμοῦσιν αὐτούς. ²⁰ ἔδοξε δὲ ἡμῖν δεξασθαι τὴν ἀσπίδα παρ’ αὐτῶν. ²¹ εἴ τινες οὖν λοίμοι διαπεφεύγασιν ἐκ τῆς χώρας αὐτῶν πρὸς ἡμᾶς, παράδοτε αὐτούς Σίμωνι τῷ ἀρχιερεῖ, ὅπως ἐκδικήσῃ ἐν αὐτοῖς κατὰ τὸν νόμον αὐτῶν.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Macurdy 1932, 95, 155; Otto 1934, 125, 130; Seibert 1967, 87–89; Llewellyn-Jones – McAuley 2023, 97–98, 118–120.

¹⁰³ For this author’s brevity, see Niese 1900, 461.

¹⁰⁴ Probably L. Caecilius Metellus Calvus, consul in 142 BC with Q. Fabius Maximus Servilianus. See Bickermann 1930, 358–359; Momigliano 1931, 153–154, 157; Cavaignac 1951, 36; Penna 1953, 167–168 (Gn. Calpurnius Piso); Stern 1973, 187–188; Goldstein 1976, 492–494; Bernhardt 2017, 372 fn. 227; Schwartz 2022, 392. However, “consul” is not beyond doubt, for ὕπατος is the translation of a Hebrew word.

¹⁰⁵ 1 Macc 15:15–21. For the embassy, see 14:22.

¹⁰⁶ Schwartz 2022, 398.

¹⁰⁷ 1 Macc 15:16–21: “Lucius, consul of the Romans, to King Ptolemy: greetings. ¹⁷ The envoys of the Judeans, our friends and allies, came to us, having been sent by Simon the high priest and the citizenry of the Judeans to renew the original friendship and alliance. ¹⁸ And they brought a golden shield weighing a thousand minas. ¹⁹ So now it pleased us to write the kings and the countries (and admonish them) not to seek to do wicked deeds to them, nor to make war against them or their cities or their country, nor to be allies of any who make war against them. ²⁰ And we decided to accept the shield from them. ²¹ So if any villains have escaped from their land to you, hand them over to Simon the high priest, so that he will punish them according to their laws.” See Momigliano 1931, 32–33, 151–157; Goldstein 1976, 496; Schunck 1980,

Here, we encounter a literary phenomenon characteristic—one might say—of diplomatic history, which become increasingly prevalent in later sources on Hellenistic monarchs: a form of metonymy of the State marked by the “death of the royal character.” 1 Maccabees is also richly interwoven with scriptural, *i.e.*, intertextual references, designed to create a dense network of internal allusions.

Once again, the text opens with a strong declarative statement, intended to edify the audience on themes of fidelity to the Mosaic Law and religious orthodoxy—an element that is both deliberate and narratively structured. In this context, the metonymy expands to encompass the political contingencies surrounding the Hasmonaean dynasty around 104 BC¹⁰⁸—either on the eve of, or during, the War of the Scepters (103–181 BC)¹⁰⁹—when Cleopatra III and Ptolemy X exerted their influence from Egypt, and Antiochus IX, son of Antiochus VII, from Syria.

2 Maccabees

Shortly (?) after Judas Maccabee’s victory against Nicanor at the Battle of Adasa in 161 BC,¹¹⁰ a certain Jason of Cyrene¹¹¹ composed a five-book¹¹² history

of Judas Maccabaeae and his brothers, of the purification of the greatest of temples and the dedication of the altar,²⁰ and also of the wars against Antiochus Epiphanes and his son Eupator,²¹ and of the manifest interventions from heaven in favor of those who vied with one another in fighting manfully for Judaism: few though they were, they took the spoils of the entire country and drove out the barbarian hordes²² and recovered the world-renowned temple and freed the city and reestablished the laws which were on the point of being abolished.¹¹³

361–362; Schwartz 1993, with a comparison with Scipio Aemilianus’ famous legation; Canali De Rossi 1997, no. 600; Bernhardt 2017, 44, 239, 371–372, 393, 474.

¹⁰⁸ Schwentzel 2009; Dąbrowa 2010, 67–102.

¹⁰⁹ van ’t Dack in: van ’t Dack *et al.* 1989. See also Lévy 1950–1951; Dumitru 2016, 256–259; Abakumov 2018. Wilamowitz (1901 = 1971, 121–127) dated it to the reigns of Ptolemy VIII and Alexander II. See Ehling 2008, 16. After Cleopatra II left the scene, Cleopatra III and Ptolemy IX ruled together. Cleopatra III consistently held precedence, particularly over the king’s shady sister-wives, Cleopatra IV and Cleopatra Selene. In 107 BC, Cleopatra III seemingly strengthened her control—merely a tightening of the reins—by replacing Ptolemy IX with her youngest son. True to form, Ptolemy IX fled to Cyprus, where he continued to reign. The double counting of regnal years is telling. Cleopatra III’s count began with the death of Ptolemy VIII, while Ptolemy X’s count started with his royal proclamation in Cyprus in 114/3 BC (Hölbl 2001, 207–208; Huß 2001, 644; Bennett 2001–2012, s.v. “Ptolemy X” and fn. 8). The 103–101 BC conflict did not aid Ptolemy IX’s position, and it is said to have concluded with Ptolemy X orchestrating the death of Cleopatra III (see Bennett 2001–2012, s.v. “Cleopatra III.” “we can estimate her death around late September 101;” see also Gauthier 1916, 363 fn. 3; Huß 2001, 652).

¹¹⁰ 2 Macc 15:1–36.

¹¹¹ 2 Macc 2:19–32. See Schlatter 1891 (but see Niese 1900, 275 fn. 3); Niese 1900, 299–307; Willrich 1900, 131–176; Penna 1953, 17–20; Nelis 1975, 17–23; Habicht 1976a, 170–171; Hengel 1981, 95–99; Goldstein 1983, 55–83; Herr 2009, 16–18.

¹¹² Perhaps, the original division still shines through in five concluding sentences: 2 Macc 3:40; 7:42; 10:9; 13:26; 15:37. See Habicht 1976a, 174.

¹¹³ 2 Macc 2:19–22. All translations are from Goldstein 1983. For a synopsis, see Goldstein 1976, 28–33; Goldstein 1983, 7–12; Honigman 2014, 409–411. See also Attridge 1984, 176–183.

Jason's reframing of the events coincided with the coining of the words Ἑλληνισμός¹¹⁴ and Ἰουδαϊσμός.¹¹⁵ Their contrast¹¹⁶ permeates and shapes the entire narrative, culminating in until triumph of Ἰουδαϊσμός. However, this fateful dichotomy does not imply a complete removal of Greek elements from the poetics of Jason's history.¹¹⁷

At first glance, Jason's anonymous epitomator¹¹⁸ (ὑπὸ Ἰάσωνος τοῦ Κυρηναίου δεδηλωμένα διὰ πέντε βιβλίων πειρασόμεθα δι' ἐνὸς συντάγματος ἐπιτεμεῖν),¹¹⁹ known as 2 *Maccabees* (Μακκαβαίων Β'), does not seem to focus on the Lagids as the more¹²⁰ strictly historical 1 Maccabees. While 2 Maccabees possesses a more theological-religious¹²¹ and soteriological¹²² character, it only covers 15 years of the *spatium historicum* of 1 Maccabees. Its narrative spans the period between the end of Seleucus IV's reign to Nicanor's death at Adasa. The most significant reference to the Egyptian monarchy is found in the explicit purpose of its composition. The aim was to edify,¹²³ strengthen,¹²⁴ and console¹²⁵ the Egyptian Jews during a challenging time by presenting historical examples of God's mercy.

The first of the two parenetic letters¹²⁶ that precede the epitomator's Preface dates from 188 = 125/124 BC and is addressed to the Jewish brothers in Egypt (τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς τοῖς κατ' Αἴγυπτον Ἰουδαίοις).¹²⁷ This message recalls God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, expressing the hope that God will "listen to your prayers and forgive you and not abandon you in an evil time" (ἐπακούσαι ὑμῶν τῶν δεήσεων καὶ καταλλαγείη ὑμῖν καὶ μὴ ὑμᾶς ἐγκαταλίποι ἐν καιρῷ πονηρῷ).¹²⁸ As noted by Goldstein, this language is derived from Solomon's prayer for the people during the Temple's dedication in 1 *Reg.* VIII.¹²⁹

¹¹⁴ 2 Macc 4:13.

¹¹⁵ 2 Macc 2:21; 8:1; 14:38. See Habicht 1976b, 1; Achilli 2017, 6, 9. See, in general, Hengel 1981; Will – Orrieux 1986; Collins – Sterling 2001; Honigman 2014.

¹¹⁶ Sterling 2001, 263: "What is striking about these neologisms is that the epitomizer has used them in opposition: Judaism represents the ancestral ways of the Jews; Hellenism represents the unlawful lifestyle of the Hellenes."

¹¹⁷ See, in short, Himmelfarb 1998; Simkovich 2011, 303–305; Mendels 2019 on 2 Maccabees as "the most important Jewish Hellenistic politico-theological treatise before the Letters of Paul." See also Momigliano 1975b, 86 (Italian: Momigliano 1982, 317 = 1987, 48); Morrison 2009, 565.

¹¹⁸ Momigliano 1931, 97–106; Penna 1953, 23; Nelis 1975, 28–30; Herr 2009; Borchardt 2016; Legh Allen 2021.

¹¹⁹ 2 Macc 2:23.

¹²⁰ But see Niese 1900, 273–275; Penna 1953, 21–23; Habicht 1976a, 177–185; Habicht 1976b on royal documents quoted as original; Schwartz 2008, 38–56; Parker 2013; Parker 2020.

¹²¹ Penna 1953, 28–37; Nelis 1975, 34–38; Habicht 1976a, 185–189.

¹²² Herr 2009.

¹²³ Troiani 2008, 360.

¹²⁴ Simkovich 2011; Doran 2012, 13–14.

¹²⁵ 2 Macc 2:25; 15:39. See, in general, Nelis 1975, 31–34; Trotter 2023, 55–91.

¹²⁶ First letter: 2 Macc 1:1–9. Second letter: 2 Macc 1:10–2:18. See, in general, Niese 1900, 277–279, 282–285, 291; Motzo 1924, 66–101; Momigliano 1931, 81–94; Bickermann 1933 (English translation: 1976–1986, vol. 2, 136–154 = 2007, vol. 1, 408–431 on Letter 1); Penna 1953, 187–190; Nelis 1975, 45–46; Momigliano 1975a, 104; Momigliano 1975b (Italian: Momigliano 1982, 308–321 = 1987, 41–51); Goldstein 1976, 34–36; Habicht 1976a, 199–201; Wacholder 1978 on Letter 2; Goldstein 1983, 24–26, 138–153, 157–167; Gruen 1997a, 62–66 = 2016, 375–378; Parker 2007; Schwartz 2008, 131–134; Doran 2012, 1–3, 23–64; Trotter 2017.

¹²⁷ For the Alexandrian Jews, in general, Baltrusch 2005.

¹²⁸ 2 Macc 1:5.

¹²⁹ Goldstein 1983, 143.

Notably, this is commonly interpreted as a reference to the challenging situation of the Jews under Ptolemy VIII,¹³⁰ who is never named or directly criticized. Instead, Letter 1 presents a historical parallel by citing another letter¹³¹ written to the Egyptian Jews in 142 BC, which addressed the High Priest Jason's submission to Hellenism.¹³² Lastly, the Egyptian Jews are invited "to celebrate the Days of Tabernacles in the Month of Kislev," *i.e.*, the Feast of Dedication, with hope¹³³ and in unity with the community of Jerusalem.

The second and more complex letter, regarded as a literary invention, is addressed to Aristobulus, "tutor of King Ptolemy and member of the lineage of the anointed priests, and to the Jews in Egypt" (Ἀριστοβούλω διδασκάλω Πτολεμαίου τοῦ βασιλέως ὄντι δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦ τῶν χριστῶν ἱερέων γένους καὶ τοῖς ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ Ἰουδαίοις).¹³⁴ Philometor's tutor was one of the most renowned Jewish scholars of his day for his allegorical exegesis of the Pentateuch.¹³⁵ The emphasis placed on his priestly role likely serves to contrast his dignity and integrity with that of the deviant High Priest Jason. Additionally, I believe that highlighting his connection to Ptolemy VI, who supported "Onias IV, the son of our writer's hero, Onias III,"¹³⁶ serves as a reminder of a sovereign who stands in contrast to the individual responsible for the difficult times mentioned in verse 5, namely Ptolemy VIII. As in the previous (authentic?¹³⁷) letter, the purpose of the second letter is specified at the end: "We write to you as we are about to celebrate the Purification. Please celebrate the days."¹³⁸ Goldstein, for instance, interpreted Letter 1 as a critique of the Egyptian Judaism favored by Philometor, suggesting that such criticism became plausible only after 145 BC.¹³⁹

On the other hand, the mention of this king at the beginning of Letter 2 is far from unflattering. The core of the letter is the joyful announcement of Antiochus IV's death,¹⁴⁰ sealed by a brief doxology and followed by *exempla* of the continuity of orthodoxy. Citing Nehemiah's writings and memoirs (ἐν ταῖς ἀναγραφαῖς καὶ ἐν τοῖς ὑπομνηματισμοῖς τοῖς κατὰ τὸν Νεεμιαν), Letter 2 references the miracle of the fire during Nehemiah's time, Jeremiah's concealment of sacred objects—an analepsis within an analepsis—and the care that Nehemiah and Judas Maccabee took for a library (βιβλιοθήκην) of sacred books.¹⁴¹

¹³⁰ Penna 1953, 178; Nelis 1975, 44–49; Goldstein 1983, 143. *Contra* Doran 2012, 27, 35–38.

¹³¹ 2 Macc 1:7–8.

¹³² 2 Macc 4:7–20.

¹³³ Goldstein 1983, 13.

¹³⁴ Wacholder 1978, 93–95; Gruen 1997b, 85–86 = 2016, 92–93; Schwartz 2008, 144–145.

¹³⁵ One tradition adds that he dedicated a book to him (Clem. Alex. *Strom.* I.22, 150.1; Euseb. *Praep.* VII.13; *Jord. Rom.* 78 [MGH AA 5/1]). See Collins 1974, 9; Momigliano 1975a, 93, 116; Gruen 1997b, 85–86 = 2016, 92–93 ("Eusebius and Clement simply inferred from the forged letter in II Maccabees that their Aristobulus was tutor of Philometor. Or the reverse can be postulated: the forger of the letter knew of Aristobulus' dedication of his book to a Ptolemy and conjectured that he was Philometor's tutor"); Gruen 1998, 247; Taylor 1998, 313; Cook 2008, 200–203; Gruen 2008, 150–151 = 2016, 430 and Capponi 2010, 209–212. For Aristobulus, see Hengel 1981, 163–169; Holladay 1995 (esp. pp. 114–126 with the *testimonia*); Mülke 2018.

¹³⁶ Goldstein 1983, 15. For a recent interpretation of the link between 2 Maccabees and the Oniads, see Piotrkowski 2019, 108–123.

¹³⁷ Goldstein 1983, 145–151.

¹³⁸ 2 Macc 2:16.

¹³⁹ Goldstein 1976, 35–36.

¹⁴⁰ 2 Macc 1:11–16.

¹⁴¹ 2 Macc 1:19–2:15.

This final reference to books,¹⁴² as the culmination of a long story, is particularly fitting for a letter addressed to Aristobulus, an esteemed exegete and tutor of Ptolemy VI, who had, in turn, been Antiochus IV's antagonist and a protector of the continuity of the faith.

2 Maccabees is ideally divided into two parts: before and after the purification of the Temple.¹⁴³ The first section covers the final years of Seleucus IV's reign and the persecution by Antiochus IV, viewed as a punishment not for destruction but for the correction of the Chosen People before sin could reach its fullest (τὰς τιμωρίας μὴ πρὸς ὄλεθρον ἀλλὰ πρὸς παιδείαν τοῦ γένους ἡμῶν).¹⁴⁴ The second section describes Judas Maccabee's struggle against neighboring peoples, Antiochus V, and Demetrius I. Philometor is mentioned and alluded to in three passages—4:21; 5:1–4; and 9:29—but never as an active character.

One might find it seemingly contradictory that the Egyptian monarchy occupied the thoughts of the epitomator—particularly the two introductory letters—more than those of the Cyrenian historian. As previously mentioned, this king's silent yet benevolent presence may reflect how some Jews in Jerusalem perceived him.

The first of these references appears immediately after the well-known account of Jason's attempt to introduce Hellenism—the fateful word—and to transform his compatriots according to Greek customs (πρὸς τὸν Ἑλληνικὸν χαρακτήρα τοὺς ὁμοφύλους μετέστησε).¹⁴⁵

ἀσμένως γὰρ ὑπ' αὐτὴν τὴν ἀκρόπολιν γυμνάσιον καθίδρυσεν καὶ τοὺς κρατίστους τῶν ἐφήβων ὑποτάσσων ὑπὸ πέτασον ἤγαγεν.¹³ ἢν δ' οὕτως ἀκμὴ τις Ἑλληνισμοῦ καὶ πρόσβασις ἀλλοφυλισμοῦ διὰ τὴν τοῦ ἀσεβοῦς καὶ οὐκ ἀρχιερέως Ἰάσωνος ὑπερβάλλουσιν ἀναγκείαν¹⁴ ὥστε μηκέτι περὶ τὰς τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου λειτουργίας προθύμους εἶναι τοὺς ἱερεῖς ἀλλὰ τοῦ μὲν νεῶ καταφρονοῦντες καὶ τῶν θυσιῶν ἀμελοῦντες ἔσπευδον μετέχειν τῆς ἐν παλαιστῆρι παρανόμου χορηγίας μετὰ τὴν τοῦ δίσκου πρόσκλησιν,¹⁵ καὶ τὰς μὲν πατρώους τιμὰς ἐν οὐδενὶ τιθέμενοι, τὰς δὲ Ἑλληνικὰς δόξας καλλίστας ἠγούμενοι.¹⁴⁶

In this fertile ground for deviance, persecution, and apostasy, an alternative explanation for the remote causes of the Sixth Syrian War serves as a means to bring Antiochus IV to Jerusalem for a “friendly visit.”¹⁴⁷ During Jason's high priesthood (circa 175–171 BC),

¹⁴² Lange 2007; Schorch 2007.

¹⁴³ 2 Macc 10:1–9.

¹⁴⁴ 2 Macc 6:12–17. See Niese 1900, 272; Penna 1953, 211; Nelis 1975, 158–159; Goldstein 1983, 280; Schwartz 2008, 283–285; Doran 2012, 150.

¹⁴⁵ 2 Macc 4:7–20.

¹⁴⁶ 2 Macc 4:12–15: “indeed, he took pleasure in founding a gymnasium beneath the very citadel and in making the education of the noblest adolescent boys consist of submission to the broad-brimmed Greek hat. ¹³ The enormous wickedness of the impious Jason—no true High Priest he!—brought it about that the aping of Greek manners reached a peak and the adoption of gentile ways a height, ¹⁴ such that the priests were no longer eager to perform their duties at the altar but made light of the temple and neglected the sacrifices, in their haste after the gong sounded calling them to participate in the illicit entertainment in the wrestling yard. ¹⁵ Setting at nought their hereditary distinctions, they put the highest value on Greek honors.” See Mørkholm 1966, 138–140; Nelis 1975, 119–121; Habicht 1976a, 217; Hengel 1981, 75–76; Goldstein 1983, 229–231; Himmelfarb 1998, 24–25; Mittag 2006, 244–245; Bolyki 2007; Troiani 2008, 367–369; Schwartz 2008, 223–226; Doran 2012, 105–107. See also Beek 2021, 44–48 on this passage and the “rhetoric of Hellenism.”

¹⁴⁷ Goldstein 1976, 29.

Antiochus IV sent¹⁴⁸ Apollonius, son of Menestheus,¹⁴⁹ to participate in Philometor's πρωτοκλισία—literally “first seat at table,”¹⁵⁰ or “place of honor”¹⁵¹—as his representative (διὰ τὰ πρωτοκλισία τοῦ Φιλομήτορος βασιλέως).¹⁵²

The nature of this *hapax*¹⁵³ and the ceremony—if it were such—has always been subject to debate.¹⁵⁴ Droysen posited that τὰ πρωτοκλισία were distinct from both τὰ ἀνακλητήρια and τὸ ἐνθρονίζεσθαι.¹⁵⁵ Chronologically, Wilcken suggested that the πρωτοκλισία were a ceremony linked to the royal ἀνακλητήρια, possibly related to the child king's wedding.¹⁵⁶ The feminine singular κλισία can be translated as “place at the table” but also as “wedding bed.” However, Ptolemy VI and Cleopatra II were married before the spring of 175 BC.¹⁵⁷ Based on the variant reading πρωτοκλήσια,¹⁵⁸ Wilcken also entertained the possibility of a misreading of ἀνακλήσια.¹⁵⁹ Otto largely agreed¹⁶⁰ but proposed comparing the term's usage in the Synoptic Gospels, where, with identical wording, ἡ πρωτοκλισία at banquets and ἡ πρωτοκαθεδρία in synagogues are what the scribes and Pharisees most desire.¹⁶¹ Conversely, Christ advised against rushing to the πρωτοκλισία at weddings to avoid being relegated to the last places when a more important guest arrives.¹⁶² This discussion arguably pertains to the place of honor next to the host, rather than the host's own seat.¹⁶³ Additionally, the grammatical gender differs (neuter vs. feminine). Jouguet and Bunge speculated that τὰ πρωτο-κλήσια respectively celebrated or commemorated the first proclamation of the five pharaonic names, akin to the ancient pharaonic Sed Festival.¹⁶⁴

¹⁴⁸ Schwartz 1982: the genitive absolute ἀποσταλέντος δὲ εἰς Αἴγυπτον Ἀπολλωνίου τοῦ Μενεσθέως, next to Antiochus IV's realization (μεταλαβὼν) that the Egyptian court was hostile to him, does not necessarily imply that Antiochus himself sent by Apollonius. Instead, Schwartz suggested “that it was on behalf of Demetrius [*scil.* the future Demetrius I] that Apollonius attended Philometor's festivities; when Antiochus heard of this, he perceived the threatening specter of Ptolemaic exploitation of legitimist opposition to his crown such as that which is clearly in evidence for the succeeding decades. Acting on the perceived threat, Antiochus ‘took care for his own safety.’” Schwartz had to admit, however, that this fascinating conclusion is not immediately obvious in light of the text.

¹⁴⁹ Otto 1934, 15 fn. 2; Walbank 1957–1979, vol. 3, 481; Schwartz 1982; Goldstein 1983, 222; Mittag 2006, 63; Schwartz 2008, 228–229; Scolnic 2013. See already Vaillant 1701, 89–90; Keil 1846, 302–303.

¹⁵⁰ See LSJ⁹, *s.v.* πρωτοκλισία; Otto 1934, 16.

¹⁵¹ So Dalby 2003, 92. Also “seat in the first row:” Tod 1934, 151 and fn. 53.

¹⁵² Hofmann 1835, 12; Hoffmann 1873, 27; Droysen 1893–1894, vol. 2, 405–406; Niese 1900, 294; Zeitlin 1932–1933, 192; Penna 1953, 200; van 't Hof 1955, 89; Mørkholm 1966, 47, 68; Nelis 1975, 124–126; Habicht 1976a, 219; Goldstein 1983, 234–235; Mittag 2006, 46; Schwartz 2008, 228–229; Doran 2012, 110.

¹⁵³ Bunge 1974, 70; Goldstein 1983, 234.

¹⁵⁴ In short, Will 1979–1982², 315; Bielman Sánchez – Lenzo 2015, 22–23.

¹⁵⁵ Droysen 1893–1894, vol. 2, 405–406. See also Bunge 1974, 70–71.

¹⁵⁶ *Contra* Bell – Skeat 1935, 263. See also Mørkholm 1966, 68 fn. 18: a state banquet.

¹⁵⁷ *P. dem. BM*, no. 10589. See Shore – Smith 1959. See also Walbank 1957–1979, vol. 3, 323–324; Bunge 1974, 71; Huß 2001, 542 fn. 33.

¹⁵⁸ Accepted, *e.g.*, by Oliverio 1932, 19 (the “consecration” of the royal couple); Jouguet 1937, 207–211; Bunge 1974, 70–72; Schwartz 1982, 45; Huß 2001, 542.

¹⁵⁹ Wilcken in: Droysen 1893–1894, vol. 2, 440–441.

¹⁶⁰ Otto 1934, 15–19, 27 fn. 1, 31. See also Jouguet 1937, 207–211.

¹⁶¹ Otto 1934, 16; Matt. 23.6; Mark 12.39; Luke 20.46.

¹⁶² Luke 14.7–8.

¹⁶³ See also Vannini 2020, 68.

¹⁶⁴ Jouguet 1937, 208; Bunge 1974, 71. See, in general, Zelinsky 2022.

Contrary to the views of Otto, Jouguet, and Bunge,¹⁶⁵ I suspect that Jason of Cyrene and/or the epitomator did not intend to use a technical term here, but rather a highly evocative, if not ironic, portmanteau referring to royal feasts or courtly ceremonies. Indeed, both the author of 1 Maccabees and Jason's epitomator interpreted precision, as one might understand it, as a means to serve their religious narrative.

Antiochus IV's death serves as a key example. Although it is treated very differently in 1 Macc 6:1–16 and 2 Macc 9, it is presented in a contrasting manner in 2 Macc 1:13–16, the second prefatory letter, where it is joyfully announced.¹⁶⁶ The stark dryness of one account and the rhetorical vividness of the other¹⁶⁷—interpreted by some as “pathetic” or “tragic history”¹⁶⁸—are rhetorical devices that reflect a preordained interpretation of the events.

Immediately following the king's death, there is a significant reference to Ptolemy VI. It is noted that Antiochus, a murderer and blasphemer, died, amidst the same cruel torments he had made others, in a mountainous area of a foreign land. At the height of this morally charged reframing, his σύντροφος Philip took care of the transport of his body—or attempted to do so¹⁶⁹—but ultimately sought refuge with Philometor out of distrust of his late master's family (διευλαβηθεὶς τὸν υἱὸν Ἀντιόχου πρὸς Πτολεμαῖον τὸν Φιλομήτορα εἰς Αἴγυπτον διεκομίσθη).¹⁷⁰ Here, too, Ptolemy VI serves as a counterpart. In contrast, 1 Macc 6:55–56 and 63 records that Philip was entrusted with the care of Antiochus V. Consequently, Philip sought to seize control of the government, and—as 2 Macc 13:23 also attests—he eventually took over Antioch.

While in Egypt, the ambassador Apollonius sensed the hostile atmosphere at court and informed¹⁷¹ his king of it (μεταλαβὼν Ἀντίοχος ἀλλότριον αὐτὸν τῶν αὐτοῦ γεγονέναι πραγμάτων). As a result, Antiochus IV became concerned for his safety. This represents the “defensivist” version of Antiochus' actions against his nephews. Therefore, the king decided to undertake a show of strength¹⁷² by marching southward through Jaffa, Jerusalem—where he was acclaimed—and Phoenicia.¹⁷³ From this point, the discussion abruptly shifts to Menelaus' seizure of the high priesthood, Onias III's assassination, and other tragic events.

A new reference to the war—specifically, the second invasion of Egypt, which Jason and the epitomator recognized as the second¹⁷⁴—does not appear until shortly afterward,

¹⁶⁵ Otto 1934, 16; Jouguet 1937, 208; Bunge 1974, 70.

¹⁶⁶ Indeed, the letter is neither about Antiochus III or Antiochus VII. See Niese 1900, 286; Motzo 1924, 128–150; Momigliano 1931, 84; Penna 1953, 180, 188; Dagut 1953; Girbau 1962 (1 Macc); Mørkholm 1966, 170; Habicht 1976a, 172–173; Wacholder 1978, 91–92, 98–102; Lorein 2001, 167–168; Weitzman 2004, 229–230.

¹⁶⁷ Niese 1900, 273, 298; Penna 1953, 20–21; Habicht 1976a, 189–191; Schwartz 2008, 67–84; Doran 2012, 4–5.

¹⁶⁸ Niese 1900, 300–301; Bickermann 1937, 147; Habicht 1976a, 189; Goldstein 1976, 34; Goldstein 1983, 20–22. *Contra*, see Doran 1979.

¹⁶⁹ Goldstein 1983, 372.

¹⁷⁰ 2 Macc 9:28–29. See Mørkholm 1966, 172; Nelis 1975, 204; Habicht 1976a, 248–249; Goldstein 1983, 371–373; Mittag 2006, 61, 64, 331; Ehling 2008, 119; Schwartz 2008, 366–368; Doran 2012, 196–197.

¹⁷¹ Schwartz 1982, 47: this passage “does not say that Antiochus sent Apollonius to Egypt; it merely states that Apollonius was sent. Similarly, it does not say that Apollonius returned to Antiochus and reported to him regarding Philometor's hostility; it states only that Antiochus learned of it.”

¹⁷² So Bunge 1974, 72.

¹⁷³ Mittag 2006, 245.

¹⁷⁴ See 2 Macc 5:1 and 11. See Otto 1934, 40–41 fn. 2; Goldstein 1983, 246–247; Will – Orrieux 1986, 141–143; Parker 2020, 46.

when it is represented in its original terms. Unsurprisingly, 2 Maccabees focuses primarily on the remote causes of the war and a miracle that occurred in Jerusalem during and because of Antiochus' second descent into Egypt:

Περὶ δὲ τὸν καιρὸν τοῦτον τὴν δευτέραν ἔφοδον ὁ Ἀντίοχος εἰς Αἴγυπτον ἐστείλατο. ² συνέβη δὲ καθ' ὅλην τὴν πόλιν σχεδὸν ἐφ' ἡμέρας τεσσαράκοντα φαίνεσθαι διὰ τῶν ἀέρων τρέχοντας ἰππεῖς διαχρῆσους στολὰς ἔχοντας καὶ λόγχας σπειρηδὸν ἐξωπλισμένους καὶ μαχαιρῶν σπασμοὺς ³ καὶ ἴλας ἵππων διατεταγμένας καὶ προσβολὰς γινομένας καὶ καταδρομὰς ἑκατέρων καὶ ἀσπίδων κινήσεις καὶ καμάκων πλήθη καὶ βελῶν βολὰς καὶ χρυσέων κόσμων ἐκλάμψεις καὶ παντοίους θωρακισμοὺς. ⁴ διὸ πάντες ἤξιουν ἐπ' ἀγαθῶ τὴν ἐπιφάνειαν γεγενῆσθαι.¹⁷⁵

This miracle is described as a celestial apparition—a motif favored by this author,¹⁷⁶ perhaps reminiscent of Joel¹⁷⁷—as well as the classic theme of a sky battle¹⁷⁸ and other phenomena “associated [...] with worldly disorders.”¹⁷⁹ The placement of this passage within the book is significant. In the context of the relationship between the rulers and the author's perspective on them,¹⁸⁰ this semantic intensification of a shattered harmony could refer not only to the attack on Egypt itself but also to the earlier observation that

τῆς ἀγίας πόλεως κατοικουμένης μετὰ πάσης εἰρήνης καὶ τῶν νόμων ὅτι κάλλιστα συντηρουμένων διὰ τὴν Ὀνίου τοῦ ἀρχιερέως εὐσεβειάν τε καὶ μισοπονηριαν ² συνέβαιναν καὶ αὐτοὺς τοὺς βασιλεῖς τιμᾶν τὸν τόπον καὶ τὸ ἱερὸν ἀποστολαῖς ταῖς κρατίσταις δοξάζειν ³ ὥστε καὶ Σέλευκον τὸν τῆς Ἀσίας βασιλέα χορηγεῖν ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων προσόδων πάντα τὰ πρὸς τὰς λειτουργίας τῶν θυσιῶν ἐπιβάλλοντα δαπανήματα.¹⁸¹

This historicizing remark about kings such as Seleucus IV¹⁸² respecting the Temple during Onias III's high priesthood subtly anchors the narrative in the present. Indeed, the epitome was directed toward the Jewish subjects of the dynasty of Onias IV's late supporter. As noted by Morrison,

¹⁷⁵ 2 Macc 5:1–4: “At about this time, Antiochus prepared for his second assault against Egypt. ² Simultaneously throughout the city for almost forty days, apparitions were sighted in the air: there were cavalry at a gallop, dressed in garments of cloth of gold, and troops of armed spearmen formed into regiments; ³ sabres were drawn; squadrons of cavalry formed for battle; there were charges and countercharges from both sides; shields were moved, spears were massed, missiles flew, gold trimmings flashed, and there was all manner of armor. ⁴ In consequence, everyone prayed that the supernatural manifestation might portend good.” See Nelis 1975, 135–137; Habicht 1976a, 223–224; Goldstein 1983, 247–248; Schwartz 2008, 251–253; Doran 2012, 125–127.

¹⁷⁶ 2 Macc 3:25; 10:29–30; 11:8; 15:13–16. See Penna 1953, 21; Habicht 1976a, 187–188.

¹⁷⁷ Goldstein 1983, 247. In general, Schwartz 2008, 61–66 and Lemelin 2019 focusing on Deuteronomic reminiscences.

¹⁷⁸ Stothers 2007.

¹⁷⁹ Wittmann 1968, 226.

¹⁸⁰ In general, van Henten 2007.

¹⁸¹ 2 Macc 3:1–3: “Under the high priest Onias, the inhabitants of the holy city enjoyed undisturbed peace, and there was the strictest observance of the laws, because of his piety and hatred of wickedness. ² It also frequently happened that even the kings honored the Place and contributed to the glory of the temple with the most sumptuous gifts. ³ In fact, Seleucus, king of Asia, provided for all the expenses of the sacrificial cult out of his own revenues.”

¹⁸² Nelis 1975, 89–90; Habicht 1976a, 209–210; Goldstein 1983, 199–201; Schwartz 2008, 188–189; Doran 2012, 78–79.

this passage praises Onias, not because he fostered a positive relationship with the Seleucids, but because even the Seleucid kings respected the Temple. The distinction is subtle but informative: everyone knew what the Seleucid kings were really like—a point reinforced by our author in the following lines when Seleucus IV instructs Heliodorus to remove funds from the Temple.¹⁸³

Therefore, the omen of the sky battle on the eve of the second attack on Ptolemy VI and the persecution of the Jews is likely to be interpreted as a semantic intensification of the historical disorder that followed the apostasy. This apostasy was perceived as a painful yet revealing discrepancy, marked, among other events, by the assassination of Onias III,¹⁸⁴ whom the contemporary¹⁸⁵ Daniel referred to as the “anointed prince” and “prince of the Covenant.”¹⁸⁶ According to Daniel’s Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks, Onias’ death was to usher in the 70th and final week of years, the midpoint of which coincided precisely with the aforementioned “abomination of desolation.”¹⁸⁷

On the other hand, Jason and the epitomator praised “the judgment of the Lord, the righteous Judge, Who exposes what has been concealed” (τὰ τοῦ δικαιοκρίτου κυρίου τὰ κεκρυμμένα φανερά ποιῶντος) by narrating it¹⁸⁸ in a manner that the Greeks would have understood well, namely through supernatural manifestations and epiphanic deliverances. In Doran’s words,

2 Maccabees [...] is the history of a city and its territory and its defence by its patron deity. As such, it is similar to [...] the Lindian Chronicle, *etc.*] in its motif cluster of temple-territory threatened/epiphanic deliverance/ rejoicing-praising of devotees. One should not speak in terms of a genre, but rather of a *topos*, as these roughly contemporaneous works share a traditional, expected pattern of epiphanic deliverance, a pattern which is a major contributing thread to the work of 2 Maccabees as a whole.¹⁸⁹

By doing so, Jason and the epitomator engaged in the act of ἱστορέειν. The profession of faith by the seven brothers stands out decisively, as they, in their mother tongue (τῆ πατριῷ φωνῇ, *i.e.*, Aramaic or Hebrew),¹⁹⁰ contrasted the king of a part of the world and mankind with the King of the universe.¹⁹¹ This could also serve as a call to the epitome’s Egyptian audience to look up at Jerusalem and, thus, endure “their” king’s rule.

¹⁸³ Morrison 2009, 569.

¹⁸⁴ Parente 1994.

¹⁸⁵ For Daniel and 2 Maccabees, see Momigliano 1975b (Italian: Momigliano 1982, 308–321 = 1987, 41–51).

¹⁸⁶ Dan. IX.25 and XI.22.

¹⁸⁷ Dan. IX.27.

¹⁸⁸ See van Henten 2023.

¹⁸⁹ Doran 1979, 112–113. See also Momigliano 1975b, 86–87 (Italian: Momigliano 1982, 317–318 = 1987, 48–49); Himmelfarb 1998, 30; Troiani 2008, 364; Doran 2012, 6–7.

¹⁹⁰ 2 Macc 7:8; 21 and 27. See Himmelfarb 1998, 37–38.

¹⁹¹ 2 Macc 7:9 and 16.

Conclusion

Even more detailed than Daniel, as they are emplotted as accounts of past events, yet amidst numerous differences, 1 and 2 *Maccabees* incorporate the events of the two Lagids—especially Philometor—into the history Chosen People. In short, their history became the story of the permeability between the Egyptians and Seleucid spheres from the perspective of the Jews themselves. Noteworthy echoes from books such as *Genesis*, *Deuteronomy*, *Jeremy*, and *Joel*—also present in the pages featuring Philometor—merge, in the rare mention of Ptolemy VIII, with a literary phenomenon already observed in diplomatic history: a form of metonymy of the State involving the “death of the royal character.” Regarding the introductory letters of 2 *Maccabees*, I suspect that the Egyptian monarchy occupied the thoughts of the epitomator more than those of Jason of Cyrene. As for the *vexata quaestio* of identifying Philometor’s πρωτοκλισία, I suspect that Jason and/or the epitomator did not intend to use a technical term here but rather a highly evocative, if not ironic, portmanteau of the courtly ceremonies. Indeed, both the author of 1 *Maccabees* and Jason’s epitomator viewed precision as a means to serve their religious narrative.

ABBREVIATIONS

- LSJ⁹ – *A Greek-English Lexicon. With a Revised Supplement*, ed. H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, H. Stuart Jones, Oxford.
- MGH AA 5/1 – *Monumenta Germaniae historica. Auctores antiquissimi*, vol. 5/1: *Jordanis Romana et Getica*, ed. T. Mommsen, Berolini.

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