


JOHN HYRCANUS' CONQUESTS: A FORGOTTEN PAGE OF THE SELEUCID FRATERNAL WAR¹

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Abstract

It is generally assumed that the beginning of the conquests was a clear sign of the political independence of the Hasmonean rulers. In this paper, I consider together literary, numismatic and archaeological data to demonstrate that neither John Hyrcanus, nor Alexander Jannaeus, led their fights for their own purposes only. Their conquests must be evaluated in both their local and regional contexts. In the end, it appears that they acted as loyal vassals to their Seleucid and Lagid masters, taking their part in the civil war against the usurper Antiochos IX and his ally Ptolemy IX.

Keywords: John Hyrcanus, Judea, Hellenistic history, Seleucid kingdom, Hasmonean conquests, Gerizim, Shechem, Maresha, Scythopolis, Beer-Sheba, War of Brothers, War of Sceptres.

Did the Hasmoneans succeed in leading the Jewish people to independence? In the current state of research, the answer seems to be “yes.” Of course, the famous abolition of “the yoke of the heathen” (ὁ ζυγὸς τῶν ἔθνῶν) by Simon Maccabees (1 Macc 13:41) is not a “declaration of independence” and a great number of scholars have shown that, by the time of the Seleucid king Antiochos VII, Judea was not yet definitively free from his power. Ample evidence exists to support the view that Simon was, in fact, a “vassal” of the Seleucids,² involved in some regional interplay between local agents of the

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² See especially Fischer 1983, 18, 22–23; Dąbrowa 2004, 72–77; Boffo 2015, 57–62; Grabbe 2020, 409; Kosmin 2020, 541; Lichtenberger 2021, 54; Avneri Meir 2023; Sartre, in this volume.

kingdom.³ For instance, he was ready to submit to tribute (1 Macc 15:35) and then to acknowledge Antiochos VII's suzerainty.⁴ It is thus generally agreed that his son, John Hyrcanus (135 or 134 to 105 or 104 BCE), during the last years of his rule, was the first independent ruler of the Hasmonean house.⁵ The best argument for this idea is the fact that "he conducted [his military campaigns] according to his own will, without waiting for approval or permission from a higher authority."⁶ But did he? Were the conquests a real proof of Jewish independence in the days of Hyrcanus?

The conquests: a proof of Jewish independence?

Admittedly, John Hyrcanus surrendered Jerusalem to the king after a long siege, probably in the year 132. But after Antiochos VII met his death on the battlefield against the Parthians, during the spring⁷ or autumn⁸ of 129, he began to expand his territory at the expense of his neighbours and, after many years, he even opposed Antiochos IX, the son of Antiochos VII, and his own sons defeated him (Josephus, *AJ* 13.276–281). In the meantime, he founded the first Hasmonean palace at Jericho and another one in Jerusalem, probably built a few fortresses and a city wall around the holy city, maybe erected an aqueduct for Jerusalem and effected some building work in the city and on the temple mount, issued the first autonomous coinage in Jewish history, sent an embassy to Rome to ask for the recovery of the territories lost during the king's assault on Judea (Josephus, *AJ* 13.259–266), wrote to the Egyptian diaspora to invite them to celebrate the festival of Hanukkah (2 Macc 1:1–9) and engaged some foreign mercenaries in his army.⁹ Some

³ Eckhardt 2013, 183, note 129; Eckhardt 2016, 62–66; Bernhardt 2017, 473.

⁴ For this interpretation of Simon's response to the representative of the king, see Aperghis 2011, 31; Girardin 2022, 203–204.

⁵ For instance, Willrich 1924, 49; Bickerman 1947, 78; Fischer 1970, 63, 72; Schürer 1973, 207–209; Sievers 1990, 143; Sartre 2001, 391; Dąbrowa 2004, 78; Dąbrowa 2010a, 71–72; Hoover 2010, lviii; Eckhardt 2013, 61; Boffo 2015, 67; Grainger 2016, 126; Kosmin 2018, 220; Eckhardt 2021, 355; Açıllı 2024.

⁶ Açıllı 2024, 27.

⁷ Fischer 1970, 47; Ehling 2008, 204.

⁸ Assar 2006, 105; Monerie 2019, 182.

⁹ Each of these affirmations could be the core of an entire article, because of the complex debates. For now, it suffices to refer readers to a few works. For the palace of Jericho between 125 and 115, see Netzer 2001a; Netzer 2001b and, as a response to the critics, Regev 2019, 169–172, 182–183. The *Baris*, Hasmonean palace in Jerusalem: Cabaret 2020, 140–141; Magness 2024, 165–166. The fortresses: besides the debates on whether the forts of Qumran and Hyrcania were founded by Hyrcanus, see Raviv – Zissu 2019; for the Arumah fortress in Samaria and, possibly, the fort of Khirbet el-Quleh: Zertal 2008, 93, 193–195. The city wall of Jerusalem (either the "First Wall" or the "Second Wall"): Geva 2018; Ariel 2019; Zelinger 2019; Cabaret 2020, 61–63; Vieweger – Zimni – Soennecken 2021. That he built one of the aqueducts of Jerusalem has sometimes been considered a possibility, see for example Patrich 1982; Mazar 2002, 237. The extension of the city: Cabaret 2020, 144. The works on the temple mount: Patrich – Edelcopp 2013, 338–343; Cabaret 2020, 153–155. The first Jewish coin around 125 BCE: Ariel 2021a. The date of the *senatus consultum* between 128 and 125: Shatzman 2012, 61–68; Seeman 2013, 184–188, 200; Dąbrowa 2019, 392. The date of the first letter of 2 Maccabees in 124 BCE, despite Schwartz 2008, 11–14, 519–525; is assumed by Doran 2012, 33; Bernhardt 2017, 515–519; Rhyder 2024, 99–100.

clues may indicate that he encouraged literary production at court.¹⁰ At first glance, there is therefore sufficient data to demonstrate that, sometime after the death of Antiochos VII, John Hyrcanus was truly independent from the Seleucids.

Due to the large amount of archaeological evidence, considerable research attention has been paid in the last three decades to the Jewish conquests and to the military encounters between John Hyrcanus and the Seleucid kings.¹¹ I will skip the huge discussions concerning the role of circumcision in the construction of the Jewish identity, and whether these circumcisions were forced or not, to concentrate on the motivation behind the wars. One of the major questions has been whether Hyrcanus began his conquests immediately after the death of Antiochos VII, as Josephus tells us (*AJ* 13.254), or whether he only embarked on military operations after the year 112, since the traces of destructions are late, but this is of little concern here. Many have focused on the siege of Jerusalem¹² and a few archaeological sites are by now particularly well known, such as the temple on Mount Gerizim, Samaria, tell Iztabba, Maresha, Beer-Sheba, and so on. We are privileged to have detailed knowledge about many wars, conquests and destructions that took place at that time.

On the other hand, despite the fact that the conquests of John Hyrcanus have been so intensively investigated, only a few scholars have interpreted them in their proper geopolitical context, that of the “War of Brothers” (113–96 BCE) opposing Antiochos IX, son of Antiochos VII, to his half-brother Antiochos VIII, son of Demetrios II, both sons of the Ptolemaic princess Cleopatra Thea. Coins, in particular, have been studied in order to localise the conquests and to assess the date of the destructions, or to determine the fate of the non-Jewish populations, but there is more information to extract from them, given that they are a medium of power and bear the marks of the minting authority.

According to Josephus, Hyrcanus despised both of the kings, especially considering the fact that Antiochos IX received no support from Egypt (*AJ* 13.274) and he was neither ὑπήκοος (subject), nor φίλος (ally) to any Macedonian anymore (*AJ* 13.273). Following Josephus, most of the research suggests that he took the situation into his own hands and became independent during their war. But, while there were many troops and battles in the Southern Levant in these years, the movements of Hyrcanus’ army cannot have remained unnoticed. He could not conquer the surrounding nations without interfering with the other competitors in this conflict. Judea was too small and too near to the fights for an army to move, fight, besiege cities and destroy them discreetly. In the same years, the brother kings paid close attention to the loyalties of the local communities, granting many of them some privileges, like the status of “sacred and inviolable” (Antiochos VIII to Ascalon in 112/1 and to Berytos in 110/09) or the privilege of “autonomy” (Antiochos VIII to Seleucia Pieria in 109 and Ascalon in 104/3; Antiochos IX to Sidon in 111/0, Akko-Ptolemais in 107/9 and Tripoli some years after 105/4; one of them to Gaza in 108/7). The numismatic evidence shows that their armies were

¹⁰ Pending a more thorough examination, see Girardin 2024.

¹¹ This is not the place to provide an exhaustive bibliography, I refer here only to previous surveys: Barag 1992–1993; Berlin 1997, 30–32; Finkielsztein 1998; Dąbrowa 2007; Faust – Erlich 2011, 247–256; Grainger 2012, 85–91; Shatzman 2012; Bourgel 2016; Atkinson 2016, 67–78; Berthelot 2018, 249–254; Van Maaren 2022, 109–117.

¹² Coşkun 2021; Ariel 2021b; Finkielsztein 2021; Girardin 2021.

very active from 113 to 107 BCE. The idea that they did not notice a third player in their game is simply not credible.

My aim in this paper is then to explore the link between the Jewish conquests and the evolution of the War of Brothers. I will argue that the situation was far from binary (Hyrchanus against the Seleucid kings¹³), that by looking at the same time at the Seleucid and the Lagid history of this short period, one can clarify the role of John Hyrchanus, not as a “free agent” taking advantage of the *power vacuum*, but as a full participant in this highly complex fraternal war.¹⁴ Then it will be possible to conclude that, far from demonstrating he was “independent,” his conquests should be understood as the activities of a subject loyal to one side in the civil wars of the Seleucid kingdom.

A confused context: the War of Brothers (113–96 BCE)

At the end of the second century BCE, after numerous intermarriages sealed between the Seleucid and the Lagid dynasties at the conclusion of each period of open conflict, there were no longer two families, but, following the words of Paul J. Kosmin, “a single, if internally fractious, Ptolemaic-Seleucid complex.”¹⁵ To study them apart one from another is useful, of course, but can be misleading. This is especially the case with the War of Brothers. In order to produce the following summary, I used some important works on Seleucid history,¹⁶ together with some books about Lagid history¹⁷ and, taking advantage of this new trend in ancient history, I was able to glean much useful information from the history of women.¹⁸ These works abundantly relied on numismatic data that is by now easily accessible.¹⁹

In 121 BCE, Antiochos VIII killed his bothersome mother Cleopatra Thea and began his personal reign of a recently reunited Seleucid kingdom. Married to the Lagid princess Cleopatra Tryphaina, he was probably allied to the mighty king Ptolemy VIII. During all of his reign (125–96 BCE), like Alexander Zabinas when he was favoured by the Lagid king (128–124 BCE),²⁰ he never tried to challenge John Hyrchanus. It was during this time, while this political constellation ruled over all of the eastern Mediterranean, with

¹³ Pace Barag 1992–1993, 11, note 42.

¹⁴ Despite the general opinion: Werner 1877, 37; Schürer 1973, 207, 209; Sievers 1990, 141, 143; Barag 1992–1993, 9; Thoma 1994, 132; Finkielsztein 1998, 46; VanderKam 2004, 291; Dąbrowa 2010a, 71–72; Shatzman 2012, 52, 54; Grainger 2016, 152; Grabbe 2020, 413; Berlin – Kosmin 2021b, 405; Açıllı 2024, 28; Desilva 2024, 56.

¹⁵ Kosmin 2021, 252.

¹⁶ Will 1982, 440–448; Sartre 2001, 377–378; Ehling 2008, 217–239; Grainger 2016, 136–165; Graslin-Thomé – Veïsse 2021. See also Berlin – Kosmin 2021a.

¹⁷ Hölbl 1994, 182–189; Hu 2001, 615–638; Pfeiffer 2017, 168–196; Rodriguez 2024, 252–279.

¹⁸ Ogden 1999, 153–156; Bartlett 2016; Dumitru 2016; Ager 2020; Llewellyn-Jones – McAuley 2023, 160–170.

¹⁹ Together with the publication of studies about each archaeological site, one can mention the most important corpora: Hoover 2007, 126–137; Houghton – Lorber – Hoover 2008, 469–522; Hoover 2010, *passim*.

²⁰ Zabinas’ relations with Hyrchanus were peaceful according to Josephus (*AJ* 13.269). The word *φιλία* may mean that Hyrchanus was one of his officials.

the approval of the Roman Republic, that Hyrcanus wrote his festal letter to the Egyptian diaspora and renewed his Roman alliance. If one remembers that Zabinas claimed to be a son of Antiochos VII and that Hyrcanus had surrendered to this late king, one can wonder whether Hyrcanus was indeed “forgotten” in a marginal zone of the Seleucid kingdom, or whether he was an active part of this alliance, ruling one of the most sensitive areas of the Orient, one that had been the object of eight wars up to this time.²¹ When Ptolemy VIII transferred his support to Antiochos VIII, every dynast loyal to him probably paid their homage to their new king. This could explain why Hyrcanus was not disturbed during the years 124–114. If Hyrcanus had really taken advantage of the Seleucid wars, during this decade, Antiochos VIII would have had the time to take revenge, but he did not.²² This could explain why some hoards recently published attest continuous financial support to the Maccabees from the rulers of Egypt, up to and including Hyrcanus.²³ The Hasmoneans may have been, in fact, subject to the kings of Egypt and to the Seleucid kings approved by them.²⁴

But the Lagid house was no more united than the Seleucid. In the days of Ptolemy VIII, a rival clan was active in his own court. His sister Cleopatra II, widow of Ptolemy VI, had to marry him in 145 after the death of his brother (her brother and husband). At the same time, he killed her son Ptolemy VII and, after a while, he married her daughter Cleopatra III, his niece. In this way, he reunited both dynastic lines in his own offspring. But this bloody project did not prove to be successful. Brother and sister, while married, did not get along, and their hate degenerated into a civil war (131–124). They reconciled for a few years and died in the same year (116). The second wife of the king, Cleopatra III, had two sons: Ptolemy IX and Ptolemy X. One knows that she preferred the latter, but the mob forced her to give the throne to the former. It may be that Ptolemy IX was actually a son of the late king by her mother.²⁵ In any case, she finally drove him out of Egypt in the year 107, maybe during the autumn, and called back Ptolemy X. This same year (107), Ptolemy IX was to be found in Samaria, helping Antiochos IX in his fight against Hyrcanus (Josephus, *AJ* 13.278).²⁶

During the War of Brothers, each of these divided sub-families was involved in the fights. One could even suggest that the “War of Sceptres” opposing Cleopatra III (and Jannaeus, son of Hyrcanus) to Ptolemy IX in Coele Syria (103–101 BCE), was not disconnected from the War of Brothers that continued until 96, since the queen gave her daughter Selene in 102 to Antiochos VIII. This tenuous link is important for understanding the context of Hyrcanus' conquests. Antiochos IX received support from the Lagid princess Cleopatra IV, who married him and gave him the army of Cyprus as a dowry. There is some discussion as to whether she acted on her own initiative or whether she was part of a cynical plan at the Lagid court. One does not really know whether Antiochos IX

²¹ Grainger 2010.

²² This has already been noticed by Barag 1992–1993, 10.

²³ Olivier 2018; Olivier 2020; Fischer-Bovet 2021; Lorber 2021.

²⁴ For the notable link between the Hasmoneans and Egypt, brought to light these last years, see Honigman 2024.

²⁵ Van 't Dack *et al.* 1989, 18–19. But this issue remains controversial.

²⁶ Tushingham 1972 claimed that there is an inscription that could confirm the participation of Ptolemy IX, but this is not at all clear.

rebelled against his brother after having received this support or whether she joined him while he was waging his war. In any case, Cleopatra IV was the sister of Cleopatra Tryphaina, the wife of Antiochos VIII. There was then a “War of Sisters” hidden behind the “War of Brothers,” a war of sisters that Justin reported with the greatest complacency.²⁷ One can add that Cleopatra IV was just divorced from her brother Ptolemy IX by the order of Cleopatra III, the queen mother. Chased out by her, she remained in the same political party, lending her aid to the Seleucid challenger.

To summarise, one can distinguish two competing parties: the first, with Rome, Cleopatra III, Ptolemy X, Antiochos VIII, Cleopatra Tryphaina and, later, Selene; and the other, with Ptolemy IX, Antiochos IX, Cleopatra IV and later, Demetrios III. My claim is that Hyrcanus, just like his son Jannaeus after him, was a member of the first alliance.

The rebellion of Antiochos IX was at first a true success. Numismatic findings have proven that he took Akko-Ptolemais, Damascus, Antioch, Sidon, Ascalon, Tripoli, Mallus and Tarsis in the year 113. Antiochos VIII had to abandon his kingdom to flee to Aspendos in the Roman province of Asia. In these years, Hyrcanus sent an embassy to Rome to ask for justice against Antiochos IX, who had taken Joppa and some other coastal places from his country (Josephus, *AJ* 14.247–255).²⁸

The next year, Antiochos VIII regained power and, from 109 onward, his rebel brother was confined to the Southern Levant. Antiochos IX lost Ascalon by 112/1, Sidon (which became independent in 111), Tarsis and Damascus in 109/8. In Antioch, as in Damascus, the study of coinage has shown that each brother had had two or three reigns, that is, that some cities were taken many times in a short period of time. Damascus is the most interesting example for my purpose, since the city was taken back by Antiochos VIII in 109/8 and lost again in 108/7. That is, the area was the theatre of conflicts in the days when John Hyrcanus was besieging Samaria and conquering Scythopolis, when he fought against an army sent by Antiochos IX and a contingent dispatched by Ptolemy IX. The king was severely weakened when his sons were able to defeat him²⁹ and then he retired to Tripoli (Josephus, *AJ* XIII, 279), which was still in his possession in the year 105/4 and probably even later, given the numismatic evidence. One manifestation of this weakening was the fact that he could not strike any silver coin anymore after the year 107/6. This same year, he conceded autonomy to Akko-Ptolemais. In the end, Ptolemy IX left the Southern Levant to rule over Cyprus and the War of Brothers became bogged down. The Lagid king came back in 103 to fight Jannaeus, son of Hyrcanus, and his mother Cleopatra III came, defeated him and forced him to leave. In 95, he installed Demetrios III as a competitor in the Seleucid fraternal wars, a king who eventually fought against Jannaeus.

This was a part of the context of the expansionist policy of John Hyrcanus and Alexander Jannaeus.

²⁷ Bartlett 2016.

²⁸ For this interpretation of this *senatus consultum*, see especially Shatzman 2012, 65–68; Seeman 2013, 194–200; Eilers 2013; Dąbrowa 2019, 392.

²⁹ This point has already been noted by Shatzman 2012, 66: Antiochos IX did not have the same forces in 112 and in 110.

Clues about the political situation of the conquered cities

Hyrcanus expanded his territory under this shadow. In this part of the argument, I will consider some of the numismatic findings in the places taken by the Jews, on a more local level. I will not establish an exhaustive list of destructions, as it has already been done so many times.³⁰ For the sake of economy, I leave aside the majority of archaeological studies devoted to each site, to focus on the exact identification of the latest coins in each case.³¹ My aim here is to extract from this survey a picture of the political situation of these local communities under the shadow of the great Seleucid war. The basic question will be the following: since it is now possible to reconstruct the shifting loyalties of many cities during this war, thanks to the use and striking of coins in the name of one or another of the kings, is it possible to paint a similar picture at the local level and to know whether the destroyed and/or conquered towns and villages took a side in the War of Brothers?

The task is complicated by the state of the numismatic data concerning a few sites. In many cases, the publications only consider the earliest and latest coins as *termini ante* and *post quem*, giving the date of their striking but not the name of the minting authorities. The opposite also occurs, that some excavators only mention that the most recent coins bear the name of Antiochos VIII; but if they predate the rebellion of Antiochos IX, they do not give any relevant information for the side the inhabitants joined during the war. Sometimes, many findings have been published, but the coins. In some cases, the excavations are old and the data are not very certain. The picture has to be coloured with the survey of a great deal of preliminary or final reports of short-term excavations, since there are only a few publications giving all of the evidence to date from the earliest excavations about one specific archaeological site. Finally, in a great number of places in rural areas, it seems that the most recent coins at the time were all retrieved, either by the fleeing population, or by the plundering conquerors, leaving us only a few older coins, irrelevant for the present purpose.³²

So, from all of the destructions attributed to John Hyrcanus to date, here are the ones where numismatic profiles are sufficiently well known to provide an answer to the question.

The link with one of the warring factions in the War of Brothers is easy to find in both the cases of the cities of Samaria and Scythopolis. Josephus wrote that the former asked Antiochos IX for help when attacked by John Hyrcanus (*AJ* 13.276) and the royal troops, once defeated, found refuge in the latter (*AJ* 13.277).³³ This picture seems to be confirmed on the ground.

³⁰ See above, note 11.

³¹ The complete data will be published in a forthcoming book, devoted to the life and deeds of John Hyrcanus.

³² Among the best studied examples is Khirbet er-Rasm, at the border of Idumea, where the excavators noted a gap between Antiochos IV and Hyrcanus, see Faust – Erlich 2011, 154, 212–213, and Tell Zahara, see Cohen 2013, 149–150.

³³ The parallel version in the *BJ* 1.65, where Antiochos VIII is the villain, is unanimously held to be erroneous.

Indeed, the four coins discovered with the most recent date in the excavations in Samaria were struck by Antiochos IX in 112/1³⁴ or in 111/0³⁵. The presence there of 25 coins struck by the mint of Akko may be linked with the help given by Antiochos IX to the city.³⁶ But what is more, the city seems to have even struck coins in the name and with the diademed portrait of the king.³⁷ There were at least two denominations: a silver hemidrachm and a silver obol (SC 2393–2394).

In the case of Scythopolis, a distinction should be made between the two tells constituting the city. The settlement of tell Beth Shean was the oldest, having been founded by the Ptolemies in the first half of the third century BCE. The site was visibly attacked by John Hyrcanus, but it was not totally destroyed, so that some inhabitants stayed on the site after his expedition. The city is still mentioned in 102 BCE, apparently possessed by Cleopatra III, who summoned Jannaeus to make peace with him during the War of Sceptres (Josephus, *AJ* 13.355).³⁸ Two coins struck by Antiochos IX were found on the site of Beth Shean: the first is dated from 114/3 to 112/1, the second one, to his third reign (96–95 BCE). No coin of Antiochos VIII is known, but some of Jannaeus are.³⁹ At Tell Iztabba, which appears to have been settled during the second century, the destruction was total. 28 coins struck by Antiochos VIII were found there, dated from 121/0 to 114/3, maybe 111/0 for the latest but this is unsure. They probably all came from the first reign of this king in Antioch. 23 coins struck by Antiochos IX from 114/3 to 108/7 were recently published, together with one coin in the name of Ptolemy IX struck in 112/1. According to Yoav Farhi, such a considerable number of coins probably means that Scythopolis shifted its loyalty to Antiochos IX before being destroyed by John Hyrcanus. The numismatist even believes that the city struck its own coins in the name of this king.⁴⁰

The case of Shechem, which evidently fell during this campaign, is a little bit more complex to assess. Most scholars only mention that the most recent coin is dated to the year 112/1.⁴¹ G. Ernest Wright, with much hesitation, attributed it to Ascalon's mint.⁴² This year, the city of Ascalon felt from the hands of Antiochos IX to those of Antiochos VIII and struck coins to the name of both of them. However, Dan Barag and Israel Shatzman attributed this coin to the mint of Akko-Ptolemais.⁴³ Yet, we know that this mint remained into the hands of Antiochos IX from 113 onwards until at least 107, without any gap.⁴⁴

³⁴ Barag 1992–1993, 8; Finkielsztejn 1998, 41.

³⁵ Reisner – Fisher 1924, 263. For the number of 4, see Crowfoot – Crowfoot – Kenyon 1957, 47, 52.

³⁶ Crowfoot – Crowfoot – Kenyon 1957, 53.

³⁷ Houghton 2000; Houghton – Lorber – Hoover 2008, 522–523, 546–547; Hoover 2010, 111; Shatzman 2012, 54; Tal 2012, 263–264. This is supported by Lorber in this volume.

³⁸ That Scythopolis seems to belong to the queen at this time was noticed by Stern 1981, 37.

³⁹ Amitai-Preiss 2006; Mazor – Atrash 2018, 2.

⁴⁰ See Farhi 2025, 404–410 for the list and p. 433–436 for the discussion. Lichtenberger – Tal 2020, 46 and Lichtenberger et al. 2022, 1318 wrote that the last coin was struck by Antiochos IX in 111/0.

⁴¹ The most recent coin known by Sellers 1962 was issued during the reign of Zabinas. The date of the coin can be found, for instance, in Campbell 1993, 1354; Finkielsztejn 1998, 41; Campbell 2002, 311 (at page 338 he mentions a coin of Antiochos VIII, but that predates the revolt of Antiochos IX and is, therefore, irrelevant); Bourgel 2016, 511, and many others.

⁴² Wright 1957, 27.

⁴³ Barag 1992–1993, 7; Shatzman 2012, 41.

⁴⁴ Newell 1939, 31–40; Kadman 1961, 18; Houghton – Lorber – Hoover 2008, 485, 521; Syon 2010, 69.

One may add that the temple on Mount Gerizim was probably the temple of Shechem,⁴⁵ so that their profiles are likely to be comparable. Here, the situation became clearer a few years ago. In many preliminary publications, Yitzhak Magen wrote that the most recent coin was struck by Antiochos VIII in 112/1 and this information appeared in all previous surveys. But, together with Gabriela Bijovsky, he published four coins of Antiochos IX in 2021, struck from 114/3 to 110/09, clearly taking the place of the coins of Antiochos VIII, the most recent of which had been coined in 113/2. This is all the more striking, considering the fact that each year of this king since 121/0 was represented, in a great number of copies (240 in total).⁴⁶ On the site, numerous coins of Hyrcanus (68), Aristobulus (3) and Jannaeus (528) were found, but not one from the second reign of Antiochos VIII. One has to remember that Aristobulus reigned only a few months or one year,⁴⁷ yet three coins of his found their way to the Gerizim; the coins of Antiochos VIII, which had been dominant for eight years, were totally absent for the last three years. With this new *terminus post quem*, one has a totally different picture and this site, like Samaria and Shechem, may now be linked with Antiochos IX.

Looking south, one can find a comparable situation. In Idumea, the most recent two coins found in the city of Maresha were issued by the Ascalonite mint of Antiochos IX in 113/2.⁴⁸ The excavators dated the latest lead weight, the latest funerary inscription, and the latest Rhodian amphora stamp discovered on the site to the same year.⁴⁹ Until this date, Maresha depended especially on the mint of Ascalon for its coins and, except for 121/0, each year of Antiochos VIII is represented, until 113/2. In that year, and possibly in 111 again, Ascalon struck coins in the name of Antiochos IX.⁵⁰ It is possible that Maresha only received these coins by accident, of course; but the city may also have followed the general trend in the Southern Levant this year, in line with its traditional partners. In any case, no coin of Antiochos VIII after he regained Ascalon in 112/1 has been published to date, to the best of my knowledge.

One encounters the same hesitation concerning Beer-Sheba in the Negev, where the latest identified coin was struck by Antiochos IX in Ascalon in the year 111, according to Arie Kindler, in 112/1 according to others.⁵¹ Here, after two coins of John Hyrcanus, Kindler identified no fewer than twenty-one Nabatean coins of Aretas II and/or III, that is, undated between 110 and 62 BCE, he wrote. The next coins came again from Ascalon, but after a significant gap, in the time of Augustus. From the conquest of Hyrcanus until the beginning of the Empire, the city was cut off from its original mint.

⁴⁵ Gonzalez – Mendoza 2020, 214–215.

⁴⁶ Magen 2021, 45; Bijovsky 2021, 100.

⁴⁷ Indeed, Josephus spoke about one year (approximately); Shaham 2020, 65, studying his coin dies, counts eight months.

⁴⁸ Barag 1992–1993, 5; Barkay 1992–1993, 24–25.

⁴⁹ Kloner – Eshel 2010, 179, 221. The only weight dated 108/7 is not considered as relevant enough, but it is the main argument for Finkielstejn 1998, 48–49 (and other publications) to suggest the city was captured in 111/0, lost, and taken again in 108. For Kloner, “the reading is not beyond doubt” (p. 221). Shatzman 2012, 40 preferred to write that Maresha was attacked only once, in 108/7 or later.

⁵⁰ Brett 1950, 52; Spaer 1984, 231 (for the possibility of another issue in 112/1); Houghton – Lorber – Hoover 2008, 485 (for the possibility of another issue in 111); Tal 2012, 264–266, 267–268.

⁵¹ Kindler 1973; Barag 1992–1993, 6 (112/1); Kushnir-Stein – Gitler 1992–1993, 14 (112/1).

To summarise so far, one may believe that, before being attacked by Hyrcanus, Samaria, Scythopolis, Shechem, the Mount Gerizim temple, Maresha and Beer Sheba made use of coins issued by Antiochos IX and did not receive new coins from Antiochos VIII. Each of these cities seems to have followed the big Greek cities in shifting their alliances when Antiochos IX rebelled against his half-brother. When one knows that a lack of loyalty was one of the major weaknesses of the Seleucid kingdom, that many of the officials easily changed sides when a strong competitor arose, this is not incoherent. All of these places were subsequently destroyed by John Hyrcanus.

One may think that this could just be an accident. Since Antiochos IX conquered almost all of the Greek cities and since Antiochos VIII ran away, most of the mints issued coins in the name of the new king. However, some of these cities continued to receive these coins even after Antiochos VIII came back (112/1). This is the case of Samaria, Tell Iztabba, Shechem, the Mount Gerizim temple and Beer Sheba. For Samaria and Scythopolis, this is confirmed by the literary sources. Samaria, eventually, struck coins bearing the portrait of Antiochos IX. Finally, Eastern Manasseh did not suffer too much from Hyrcanus' operations, since he seems to have concentrated his efforts on opening the northern road, to Galilee and Scythopolis,⁵² that is, to regions under the control of Antiochos IX. One may guess that a great number of local communities rallied to the new power when Antiochos VIII was running away.

The situation in surrounding areas

In order to better understand the situation, one can pursue the survey in surrounding areas. Some scholars believe that John Hyrcanus conquered Galilee and, on the coast, Ashdod, Ashdod-Yam, Yavne and Yavne-Yam. It is interesting to examine the numismatic profile of these areas in these years. Three other cases, especially well documented, are useful for completing the picture: Ascalon, Akko-Ptolemais and Gaza.

The Jewish presence in Galilee before the end of the second century BCE is now solidly attested.⁵³ The problem, however, is that Galilee is never conquered in the literary sources. Following Emil Schürer,⁵⁴ numerous scholars also putatively attributed the conquest to Aristobulus, since he fought the Itureans during his very short reign. Some others have believed that Jannaeus was the conqueror. In recent years, many voices have been heard attributing the war to Hyrcanus.⁵⁵ Indeed, one can read in Josephus that Jannaeus was sent to Galilee by his father, in his younger years (*AJ* 13.322), and some archaeological data seem to indicate a date during the rule of Hyrcanus for some destructions. When Josephus reports that the sons of Hyrcanus took Scythopolis “and other places nearby” (καὶ τὰ ἄλλα πρὸς ταύτη χωρία, *AJ* 13.280), Lower Galilee may have been included. On the other hand, Danny Syon linked the coins he studied to some kind

⁵² Zertal 2008, 93.

⁵³ For this presence, see especially Syon 2015, 145–148 and Syon 2021, among other papers.

⁵⁴ Schürer 1973, 9.

⁵⁵ For instance Barag 1992–1993, 11; Aviam 2015.

of colonisation instead of a proper conquest.⁵⁶ There is, then, a debate among specialists. The greatest difficulty for us is that, at the time of the War of Brothers, the Galilean villages made more use of Tyrian coins than of the coins minted at Akko.⁵⁷ Since Tyr obtained its independence in 126/5, this monetary circulation does not help us to determine a side. However, in the parallel version of the *Jewish War* (Josephus, *BJ* 1.66), one reads that the sons of Hyrcanus ravaged the country south of the Carmel: if this information is reliable, then they entered the area still dominated by Antiochos IX.

Josephus, establishing a list of cities controlled by the Jews in the days of Jannaeus, mentions some coastal cities whose conquest he never explained (*AJ* 13.324): Apollonia, Jamnia (Yavne), Azotos (Ashdod). To assess whether they were conquered by Hyrcanus or Jannaeus was long a matter of speculation. Yet, some archaeological data seems now to point to the earlier date.

Indeed, at Ashdod, two coins minted by Antiochos VIII were found, both of them from before the rebellion of Antiochos IX: between 125 and 121, and in the year 114. This furnished the *terminus post quem* for the conquest,⁵⁸ but no relevant information since they predate the War of Brothers. At Ashdod-Yam, the excavators found a coin of Ptolemy IX dated 117/6, from the mint of Cyrene.⁵⁹ It may have arrived there by chance, or during one of the two expeditions of the army of this Lagid king in the area, in the days of Hyrcanus (to help Antiochos IX) and during the War of Sceptres. So the picture is ambiguous.

From the excavations of Yavne and Yavne Yam, the information remains unclear, but it seems that no coin was found between the reigns of Antiochos VII and John Hyrcanus.⁶⁰ However, considering the evidence of destruction by fire at Yavne at the end of the second century, Moshe Fischer has proposed—without clear evidence—that the city was taken by Hyrcanus in 122. If he is right, this means before the beginning of the personal reign of Antiochos VIII and maybe in the wave of the war of the young king against the usurper Zabinas after the latter has been betrayed by Ptolemy VIII. Fischer suggests that it was taken back by Antiochos IX and, for the second time, conquered by Hyrcanus.⁶¹

Finally, three well known cases can be developed here.

The first one is the city of Ascalon (Ashkelon). The citizens had had a fairly good relationship with the first Maccabees. Jonathan was welcome there twice (1 Macc 10:86; 11:60) as was probably Simon (1 Macc 12:33). When Antiochos IX rebelled, Ascalon issued some coins bearing his image in 113/2, 112/1 and possibly in 111,⁶² but at the type of Antiochos VIII, who gave the city the status of sacred and inviolable, from 112/1 and later. In the year 104/3, Antiochos VIII gave the city its autonomy. On the ground, the latest coin issued with the name of a Seleucid king was struck in the one of Antiochos VIII in 105/4.⁶³ The city still struck coins bearing his portrait many years after his death.⁶⁴

⁵⁶ Syon 2015, 161–165.

⁵⁷ Syon 2015, 142, 145–146.

⁵⁸ Dothan 1971, 22, 64, 207–208; Kasher 1990, 121; Finkielsztejn 1998, 52; Avi-Yonah 2002, 63; 'Ad 2021, 105; Fantalkin *et al.* 2024, 241.

⁵⁹ Fantalkin *et al.* 2024, 241.

⁶⁰ Fischer 2002, 53; Fischer 2003, 247; Kletter – Ziffer – Zwickel 2010, 3; Taxel 2022, 31–32.

⁶¹ Fischer – Taxel 2007, 220–221.

⁶² See above, note 50.

⁶³ Ariel 2022.

⁶⁴ Spaer 1984, 229–230.

Never did any Hasmonean try to attack the city. For Uzi 'Ad,⁶⁵ this is a proof that the wars were motivated by pragmatism and not by any "zealot spirit." For the late Menahem Stern, it was because the city was loyal to the side of Cleopatra III and Antiochos VIII that Jannaeus never attacked it.⁶⁶ This is highly significant. From the days of Hyrcanus, no tension is known either.

The city of Akko-Ptolemais was attacked by Simon Maccabee (1 Macc 5:21 and 55); there Jonathan was honoured as an official of the alliance between Ptolemy VI and Alexander Balas (1 Macc 10:56–66), there he met Demetrios II and found grace in his eyes (1 Macc 11:24), but there also he thought he would be acknowledged once again by the usurper Tryphon but fell into a trap and lost his life (1 Macc 12:45–48). From Ptolemais, Tryphon launched his attack on Judea (1 Macc 13:12). The city fell to the side of Antiochos IX as early as 113 and never came back to his brother. In 107/6, the rebel king gave the city its autonomy. In 104, Alexander Jannaeus besieged it with the plan to then attack Gaza (Josephus, *AJ* 13.324), which territory he plundered (Josephus, *AJ* 13.334). The inhabitants of Akko asked Ptolemy IX, ally of Antiochos IX, for help, leading him to hope that Gaza would join him too (Josephus, *AJ* 13.328–329). Jannaeus turned to Cleopatra III, mother enemy of Ptolemy IX and ally of Antiochos VIII, and she came (Josephus, *AJ* 13.348–349). They met at least twice, and each time, Jannaeus appeared more as a client than as an equal (Josephus, *AJ* 13.353 and 355). This interaction between two clearly defined sides is well known for the context of the War of Sceptres.⁶⁷ It is interesting to note that Jannaeus seems to have pursued unchanged the policy of his father.

Finally, there is the city of Gaza. There, Jonathan Maccabee was badly received and had to fight (1 Macc 11:61–62). The numismatic profile of the city is unfortunately unclear, so that there is no certainty about who, from the two antagonists of the War of Brothers, gave it its autonomy in 108/7. It is generally assumed that this was Antiochos VIII; however, Kay Ehling found this improbable, considering the fact that the entire southern area of the Levant was in the hands of Antiochos IX.⁶⁸ One can merely see that the city was attacked by Jannaeus and eventually conquered by him, after the intervention of Ptolemy IX.

During the War of Sceptres, a proper alliance between Gaza and the Nabataeans is clearly apparent (Josephus, *AJ* 13.360). There is some discussion as to whether this alliance was linked to some economic, and so structural, relations between the Nabataeans and the important maritime port, or whether it was just conjunctural. In any case, by an indirect argument, it may be possible to complete our picture. The Nabataeans seem to have felt the ambitions of Hyrcanus as a menace. The Nabataean fort of Horvat 'Uza, in the Negev, was abandoned during the reign of Aretas II, between 129/8 and 104, that is, in the days of John Hyrcanus.⁶⁹ According to the excavators, the garrison may have been displaced because of the operations of the Jewish ruler in the area. At Beer Sheva, we have seen that after two coins of John Hyrcanus, Arie Kindler identified twenty-one Nabataean coins from the years 110 to 62 BCE.⁷⁰ The city, taken by John Hyrcanus, may

⁶⁵ 'Ad 2021, 105–106.

⁶⁶ Stern 1981, 33.

⁶⁷ Stern 1981, 41–42; Van 't Dack *et al.* 1989, 24.

⁶⁸ Ehling 2008, 226.

⁶⁹ Fischer – Tal 2007.

⁷⁰ Kindler 1973.

have been conquered by the Nabateans. Alternatively, Hyrcanus may have taken it from them, according to Alla Kushnir-Stein and Haim Gitler.⁷¹ Josephus makes it clear that Jannaeus had very difficult times with the Nabateans and even lost all his battles against them (Josephus, *AJ* 13.375, 382, 392). Maybe the war began in the days of Hyrcanus.

One may suggest two possible scenarios. First, that Hyrcanus and Jannaeus had had the same enemies, namely, that Gaza was in the hands of Antiochos IX when the citizens received their autonomy, as suggested by Ehling, and that they were allied with the Nabateans and Ptolemy IX. Second, that Gaza, after Antiochos VIII had tried to purchase their loyalty, betrayed him and that this was the reason why Jannaeus attacked the city. But it seems too simple to follow Josephus and to conclude that Ptolemais and Gaza turned to Ptolemy IX only because the brother kings were too busy fighting to help them (*AJ* 13.325), especially if one believes that Ptolemais was on the side of Antiochos IX and Gaza on the other side. It is more convincing, considering the narrative, to think that both cities were on the same side, the one whose support they seek.

To summarise this part, it seems that the places in the hands of Antiochos VIII were not attacked by Hyrcanus nor by Jannaeus, but the places they besieged and conquered were all loyal to Antiochos IX.

The implications of these data

The archaeological survey shows particularly interesting patterns. In every place that we know was conquered by Hyrcanus, the latest coins in circulation were struck by Antiochos IX. This may be a clue of their political alignment. This was already suggested by Edward Dąbrowa in 2010, but Israel Shatzman believed the argument was weak, being founded only on the circulation of coins and not on coins minted in these places.⁷² In fact, one can only try to build a picture with the existing clues. Yet, since then, a consensus seems to have been arrived at that Samaria struck coins with the portrait of Antiochos IX, and the coins from the temple of Mount Gerizim seem to add another new argument. One may hope that this systematic survey, harmonised with the literary sources, can add some strength to Dąbrowa's idea.

The data provide some convincing clues of a strong association between the War of Brothers and the conquests of John Hyrcanus; but not in the way commonly admitted. If I am right, Hyrcanus did not discreetly conquer some marginal places, unseen by the kings: he took part in their fights. When he attacked Samaria, this could have been a part of the reconquest of Damascus, as Alfred R. Bellinger once thought.⁷³ When he besieged Scythopolis, he was fighting some officials of Antiochos IX. The same year he conquered Beer Sheba, a city up to this date connected to Ascalon, Antiochos VIII took back Ascalon. The changing sides of the cities in the Southern Levant seem to be an explanatory factor of the conquests. One may think that Hyrcanus was loyal to the Seleucid king placed by Ptolemy VIII and still supported by Cleopatra III, at the time when

⁷¹ Kushnir-Stein – Gitler 1992–1993, 15–17.

⁷² Dąbrowa 2010a, 72; Shatzman 2012, 54, note 101.

⁷³ Bellinger 1949, 69–70.

numerous local communities turned their backs on him. Rapidly, both Antiochos VIII and Hyrcanus gained control of certain areas at the same time, fighting against the same enemies. This interconnection looks systematic.

If I am right, there is no reason to write, as Kenneth Atkinson did, that “John Hyrcanus inadvertently thrust himself into the complicated power struggles in both the Seleucid and the Ptolemaic Empires when he invaded Samaria.”⁷⁴ On the contrary, John Hyrcanus invaded Samaria to voluntarily thrust himself into these power struggles. This is not to refute any previous study devoted to the relations between the Jews and the surrounding peoples. Maybe he used this pretext to take revenge for some ancient grievance against the Samaritans and the Idumeans;⁷⁵ maybe his wars were the beginning of the hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans.⁷⁶ But in both cases, he awaited the year 112 to begin his wars, despite the fact that this was not the most favourable year, considering that the two kings were still strong and that their armies were fighting in the Southern Levant. I argue that, whatever reason he had to conquer these places, Hyrcanus did it in those years because they joined the side of Antiochos IX, while he remained loyal to Antiochos VIII. Consequently, he can be partly credited for the success of Antiochos VIII’s reconquest of some parts of the kingdom.

This may explain why many scholars have found surprising data on the ground. Hyrcanus did not attach the same interest to every area in the conquered regions, focusing his attention on strategic places and roads and leaving other regions more or less in peace.⁷⁷ This may explain why he did not kill the Gentiles, nor force all of them to leave:⁷⁸ because his war was not led against the Gentiles. This may even explain why some places like Madaba were conquered twice, by Hyrcanus (Josephus, *BJ* 1.63; *AJ* 13.255), then by Jannaeus (*AJ* 14.18), and why Scythopolis, conquered by Hyrcanus, seems to have been in the hands of Cleopatra II in 102 (*AJ* 13.355).⁷⁹ In such cases, maybe he did not fight for himself, but to give the places to his masters.

Indeed, my interpretation of the relation between Hyrcanus and the kings differs from that of Arye Kasher and John D. Grainger.⁸⁰ Hyrcanus, and Jannaeus after him, does not appear to have been of equal status to the Seleucid kings. They did not ally just because they had the same enemies, but they had the same enemies because they were allied. Hyrcanus and Jannaeus aligned with Antiochos VIII and fought for him, just as vassal dynasts should.

⁷⁴ Atkinson 2018, 82.

⁷⁵ The ancient hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans is the common view. See, for instance, Kartveit 2009, 202; Knoppers 2013, 135–168; Hensel 2018. For the Idumaeans, Marciak 2020 argues that the conflict was motivated by the fact that the Seleucid invaded Judea many times from the south, the purpose being to secure the road to Jerusalem.

⁷⁶ Pummer 1982; Pummer 2010; Bourgel 2016.

⁷⁷ For instance, the Eastern Manasseh did not suffer, whereas he focused on the road from Samaria to Scythopolis and Galilee, according to Zertal 2008, 93.

⁷⁸ The references to the continuity of occupation by some Gentiles in the conquered areas are numerous. See a bibliography in Van Maaren 2022, 116.

⁷⁹ Another explanation could be, of course, that the city was taken back by the enemies and reconquered by the queen, but this is not attested by archaeological evidence.

⁸⁰ Kasher 1990, 124, in passing; Grainger 2016, 162, 187. The idea appears again in Fischer – Taxel 2007, 221.

The most plausible interpretation of these findings seems to be that John Hyrcanus and Alexander Jannaeus remained, like Judas, Jonathan and Simon Maccabee, two officials of the Seleucid kingdom, dependent on the will of the kings of Alexandria. This coheres with the study by Boris Chrubasik on the mutual dependence between the kings and their local representatives.⁸¹ The kings needed a partner at the local level to stabilise their authority, while the local dynasts needed the acknowledgement of the kings to stay in command before their local opponents. Hyrcanus and Jannaeus enjoyed great autonomy, but do not seem to have been independent. They struck coins, but only in bronze, so that their coins cannot be understood as declarations of independence, but as a conceded privilege, autonomy under the imperial megastructure. Their palaces remained sober, far from the exuberant display of wealth and power so common at this time,⁸² maybe a sign of prudent ostentation of simplicity, and not only, as Regev thought, on religious grounds. Even the takeover of the royal title can be explained in the background of the usual practices of the Seleucid kingdom, the king having the power to make others kings.

All in all, one has the feeling that Hyrcanus and Jannaeus fought against the party represented by Antiochos IX, Ptolemy IX and the Nabataeans, the same party from which Demetrios III soon emerged, installed on the Seleucid throne by Ptolemy IX (Josephus, *AJ* 13.370) and who invaded Judea in the days of Jannaeus (*AJ* 13.376).⁸³ One has the feeling that they allied with the party represented by Cleopatra III, Ptolemy X and Antiochos VIII, the party supported by Rome (as was Hyrcanus, explicitly against Antiochos IX⁸⁴), inheriting the policy of Ptolemy VIII. This king had supported the Seleucid usurper Alexander Zabinas and Hyrcanus did too, maybe going so far as to honour him on his coinage with the letter *alpha*.⁸⁵ Afterwards, Ptolemy VIII had changed his mind and supported Antiochos VIII, and Hyrcanus did too. My suggestion is that Hyrcanus was for Ptolemy VIII the same ally as was Jonathan for Ptolemy VI, changing his alliances to follow him, honouring him, being loyal to the Seleucid kings when they were acknowledged by the Lagid king. Jonathan submitted to Alexander Balas when he met Ptolemy VI (1 Macc 10:56–66) and abandoned him to rally to Demetrios II at the same time Ptolemy VI did (1 Macc 11:24), even if this alliance did not fit his own agenda (1 Macc 11:53). He changed his allegiance after the death of Ptolemy VI, to submit to Antiochos VI and Tryphon. One remembers that Hyrcanus despised Antiochos IX because he was not supported by Alexandria (Josephus, *AJ* 13.274), and that many hoards attest that Judas and Jonathan enjoyed Ptolemaic subsidies from Ptolemy VI, and Hyrcanus from Ptolemy VIII.⁸⁶ There, in Alexandria, lay the true power, it seems. That is, Hyrcanus was not an equal, but a true vassal in a complex political constellation.⁸⁷

⁸¹ Chrubasik 2021.

⁸² Regev 2013, 224–265.

⁸³ Dąbrowa 2010b.

⁸⁴ Hyrcanus renewed his alliance with the Republic in 113/2; see above, note 28.

⁸⁵ The *alpha* letter is understood as a mark honouring Alexander Zabinas by some numismatists, for example Lichtenberger – Tal 2020, 54, or Antiochos VIII, for example Barag 1992–1993, 10; Bijovsky 2021, 189.

⁸⁶ See above, note 23.

⁸⁷ The idea resolves the paradox created by Finkelstein 2023, who argues that Jerusalem “could prosper almost only as a vassal serving a stronger power” (p. 46), the only exception being Hyrcanus.

I have left open, until now, the question of the chronology of Hyrcanus' conquests, that is, whether or not the dynast launched a first wave of war, conquering or only plundering the territories, immediately after the death of Antiochos VII; I did this in order to concentrate on the archaeological and numismatic traces of the conquest, all coming from the end of the years 110 and following. Maybe Hyrcanus led some battles during the eighth Syrian war, between 128 and 124 BCE,⁸⁸ as Josephus seems to write, even if the archaeology does not confirm it for now. If such is the case, he may have participated by supporting Zabinas, with whom he had a *φιλία* (*AJ* 13.269), that is, whose client he was. If so, then he did not expand his territory at the expense of the Seleucid kings during their fraternal wars, as is commonly thought,⁸⁹ but he extended his territory by his participation in these wars.

If so, why did Josephus write that Hyrcanus was neither *ὑπήκοος* (subject), nor *φίλος* (ally) to any Macedonian anymore (Josephus, *AJ* 13.273)? One does not have to take at face value all of the information given by Josephus. He had his own agenda, writing after the destruction of the temple, in order to argue that the Jewish people was a great people. He particularly embellished the portrait of John Hyrcanus, because this high priest represented the political regime he advocated for. In the literary structure of his *Antiquities*, he made the life of Hyrcanus the climax of the story and his death, the comedown, with a change in the political regime—the introduction of the kingship—and all of the internal conflicts and military defeats one can read about.⁹⁰ For this purpose, anything that could contribute to the great portrait he meant to write was welcome. To portray Hyrcanus as independent both embellished the history of the Jews, and accentuated the dramatic shift of the change in regime. When we consider the text with this lens, there are a few clues in Josephus indicating that Hyrcanus took a side in the War of Brothers and did not play his own part in the military game.

Conclusion

To conclude, the data provide some evidence of a strong association between Hyrcanus and one of the two political sides in the great war tearing apart the “Ptolemaic-Seleucid complex” (to quote Kosmin). Hyrcanus seems to have conquered only some places taken by Antiochos IX and then to have helped Antiochos VIII in his fraternal war, not as an ally, but as a loyal client. He may have acted in the same way for Alexander Zabinas against Demetrios II, but this question needs further studies. This would explain that the highest point of his life appears to have been the years around 125 BCE,⁹¹ when Ptolemy VIII, after having been distant from the Seleucid political struggles for twenty years, supported Alexander Zabinas, and then Antiochos VIII. If so, then Judea seems to have never really been independent from the Seleucid kingdom, but to have remained one of its components, regardless of the degree of autonomy it enjoyed, under the shadow of the Lagid interferences.

⁸⁸ For this war, see Grainger 2010, 369–385.

⁸⁹ Grainger 2012, 77–91 and above, note 14.

⁹⁰ Piotrkowski 2015.

⁹¹ See above, note 9.

One must admit that, taken alone, each of the arguments developed here may be refuted with some new findings in the future. But, taken together in the present state of our knowledge, they seem to build a coherent picture and they have the advantage of harmonising literary, numismatic and archaeological evidence. The present conclusion is consistent with many recent studies about the nature of the Seleucid kingdom, its reliance on elements at the local level and its relations with the Lagid power at the end of the second century BCE. It seems to confirm some recent works that insist on the political and strategic, rather than religious, motivations for the Hasmonean conquests.⁹² Future studies will be needed to further investigate the situation during the reign of Jannaeus and the subsequent kings of Judea, in order to discover whether this vassalage was continuous or not until the arrival of the Romans.⁹³ But I hope to have demonstrated that Hyrcanus and Jannaeus were vassals to Zabinas and then Antiochos VIII, because they remained loyal to Ptolemy VIII and Cleopatra III his widow, and that their conquests may be understood against this background, at least until the death of Antiochos VIII in 96. After this date, most of the Seleucid fraternal wars opposed the sons of Antiochos VIII and Jannaeus tried to oppose to one of them, Antiochos XII, in vain (Josephus, *AJ* 13.390–391).

Considering all of these arguments, one can deny that the beginning of the conquests was a proof of independence for the Hasmonean rulers. On the contrary, they may have been one of the clearest signs of their subordination.

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⁹² See particularly Berthelot 2018.

⁹³ One remembers that Shelamzion Alexandra submitted rapidly to Tigranes: Girardin 2022, 215.

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