


ANTIGONUS MATTATHIAS: BETWEEN PARTHIA, ROME, AND HEROD THE GREAT

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Abstract

The portrayal of Antigonus Mattathias's reign, the last king of the Hasmonean dynasty (40–37 BCE) we owe exclusively to Josephus, who devoted him a considerable place in both of his works. Despite family ties with the Hasmoneans and favorable inclinations towards them, Josephus depicted the last king as a warmonger who would not hesitate to seek help from the Parthians and corrupt Roman commanders. The battles fought by Antigonus with Herod caused unrest and chaos affecting the people of Jerusalem, Judea and their neighboring territories.

The explanation for this unfavorable assessment of Antigonus should be sought in the fact that Josephus was inspired by the works of Nicolaus of Damascus on Herod, who would be inclined to put Herod's rival Antigonus in a bad light.

It seems that Josephus's assessment is a justified one. On other hand other available sources such as coinage of Antigonus, even the works of Josephus himself as well as those of other authors presenting the political reality in Judaea and the Middle East in Antigonus's time allow us to evaluate the last Hasmonean ruler differently and much more favorably. This evidence proves that his actions had a strictly defined political agenda. He also skillfully used external circumstances to consolidate his power, and most importantly, enjoyed considerable support among the people of Judea.

Keywords: Antigonus II Mattathias, Aristobulus II, Herod the Great, Judea, Rome.

Of Antigonus II Mattathias, the last king of the Hasmoneans (40–37 BCE), we learn only thanks to Josephus' detailed (and mostly matching) accounts about his life, found in *Bellum Judaicum* and *Antiquitates Judaicae* (with the latter work's account on Antigonus being somewhat longer and more detailed). Otherwise, little information on Antigonus survives. Plutarch and Cassius Dio mention him only in context of events related to Roman activity in the Near East. Some scholars claim to have detected allusions

to Antigonus in the Dead Sea Scrolls and pseudepigraphic texts,¹ but their oblique and symbolic language hinders attempts at identifying the characters involved. Authors of these texts focus on religious matters, such as the legality of the Hasmonean hold on the Jewish priesthood, the quality of the dynasty's worship or the decline of the religious life, with history becoming the mere background to their accounts.² Such documents have little value to those researching Antigonus, holding no significant information on his life and work.

A somewhat biased source on Antigonus' life, Josephus focuses solely on his fight with Herod the Great over Judea, depicting Antigonus very unfavourably and appearing to misunderstand his motivations. For Josephus, Antigonus is a troublemaker—not a legitimate ruler who defends his position and fights for the independence of his state but a contemptible political adventurer, a bringer of political and social unrest in Judea and an enemy of Rome.³ Undoubtedly, Josephus' negative opinion on Antigonus stems from Josephus' sources on the last Hasmonean king. By and large, scholars agree that Josephus drew from a *Universal History* by Nicolaus of Damascus, a counsellor of Herod the Great who meticulously and favourably depicted Herod's ascension and rule in his work. Undoubtedly, Nicolaus' sympathies and opinions coloured Josephus' view on Antigonus.⁴ Notably, Josephus never changed his opinion on Antigonus: Josephus' *Antiquitates*, written several years later, in a very different milieu and for a different audience, repeats almost verbatim his condemnatory account on Antigonus in *Bellum Judaicum*.⁵

Coins struck by Antigonus (the only source related directly to his political activity) indicate that, following the custom of his royal ancestors, he was the High Priest of the Temple.⁶ Moreover, legends on his coinage specify that he used the Greek name of Antigonus as a king and adopted the Jewish name, Mattathias, when acting as the High Priest.⁷

Despite the limited data we have on Antigonus' reign, we still can consider it from another, more objective perspective.⁸ Josephus' obvious bias notwithstanding, his account preserves enough detail on the last Hasmonean king of Judea to appraise his reign

¹ See, e.g., Atkinson 1996; Doudna 2011; Erho 2011; Eckhardt 2015; Sharon 2017, 19–20, 435–451. I would like to thank David Jacobson and Catharine Lorber for their comments and assistance with improving English style of this paper, and Michael Girardin for his observations. All conclusions and errors are the sole responsibility of the author.

² Cf. Regev 2013, 93–102.

³ Cf. Josephus, *BJ* 1.357.

⁴ Josephus positively depicts Herod and his struggle for the throne, stressing the legitimacy of Herod's right to power and unruliness of the opposing faction of Antigonus. The scholarly community frequently noted Josephus' bias against Antigonus, but no sustained analysis has been written on how much the work of Nicholas of Damascus influenced not only the style and language of Josephus' account of Antigonus but also the manner in which he presented the events described. In general, Josephus appears to follow Nicolaus without reservations, highlighting Herod's aims and victories. Adopting such a point of view by necessity meant vilifying Antigonus' actions, with no attempts made to understand his motives. See also Wacholder 1962, 5–62; Wacholder 1989, 155–156, 161–164; Sharon 2017, 25–27.

⁵ More on this issue, cf. Sharon 2017, 35–42.

⁶ See Josephus glosses over Antigonus' high priesthood in both of his historical works: *AJ* 20.245.

⁷ Meshorer 2001, 218–220, no. 36–38, 41; Meshorer – Bijovsky – Fischer-Bossert 2013, 256–257, no. 418, 426, 434, 437, 446.

⁸ Notably, scholars tend to follow Josephus and mention Antigonus solely in context of his competition with Herod for the throne of Judea, see Abel 1952, 329–346; Schalit 1969, 74–97; Schalit 1975, 55–70.

in a more detached manner. Accordingly, we begin our analysis with a brief survey of the socio-political milieu of Antigonus' reign.

Antigonus II Mattathias was the second son of Aristobulus II (67–63 BCE) and grandson of Alexander Jannaeus. After Alexander's widow, queen Salome, succeeded to the rule of Judea (76–67 BCE), Aristobulus sought to limit the political influence of the Pharisees, which set him at odds with his mother; after her death, Aristobulus entertained designs upon the throne and fought with his brother, king Hyrcanus II.⁹ Aristobulus' conflicts with Salome and Hyrcanus positioned him as the leader of the internal opposition against the excessive influence of religious circles on state politics, and, after Judea's loss of independence, also the leader of the anti-Roman resistance.¹⁰ Aristobulus' hostility toward Pompey and his struggle against the Romans led to him and his entire family being taken into Roman captivity in 63 BC, after the fall of Jerusalem.¹¹ The imprisonment did not break the fighting spirit in either Aristobulus or his older son Alexander, who managed to escape during the journey to Rome and return to Judea.¹² His father's popularity among his subjects made it easier for Alexander to gather a considerable number of followers,¹³ with whose help he captured a number of fortresses and Jerusalem.¹⁴ Alexander's little success in combat resulted in him yielding to Roman legions and surrendering to the then governor of Syria, Aulus Gabinius (57–55 BCE).¹⁵ Aristobulus himself, having managed to escape from Rome, soon appeared in Judea.¹⁶ Even though Alexander's recent failure lingered in the living memory, Aristobulus soon attracted a considerable number of supporters to his cause.¹⁷ However, faced with the superiority of Roman forces, he was quite quickly forced to give up resisting. Having surrendered to Gabinius, Aristobulus returned to Rome,¹⁸ while his children, with the Senate's permission, returned to Judea.¹⁹ Alexander's rapid return to Judea provoked another period of political upheaval.²⁰ According to Josephus, Alexander rallied several thousand supporters to fight the Romans, but the rag-tag army had little combat value and dispersed after yielding to the Romans at Mount Tabor.²¹ It is unclear whether

⁹ Name of Aristobulus is mentioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls probably in connexion with his fighting against Hyrcanus II, cf. Tigchelaar 2023, 1–4.

¹⁰ See Dąbrowa 2010, 97–102; Atkinson 2016, 144–157; Sharon 2017, 53–106, 212–220.

¹¹ Josephus, *BJ* 1.157–158; *AJ* 14.79; Plut. *Pom.* 39.2; 45.4; App. *Mithr.* 117; Dio 37.16.4.

¹² Josephus, *BJ* 1.160; *AJ* 14.79.

¹³ It is not known who gave refuge to Alexander in the period between his return to Judea and his taking up arms against the Roman-backed Hyrcanus II, or where Alexander was staying at that time. Undoubtedly, he found support and shelter, since several years passed between his return and his military campaign (assuming one can rely on Josephus' chronology).

¹⁴ Josephus, *BJ* 1.160–161.

¹⁵ Josephus, *BJ* 1.167.

¹⁶ Josephus, *BJ* 1.171; *AJ* 14.92. He escaped from Rome together with Antigonus (Josephus, *BJ* 1.173; *AJ* 14.96).

¹⁷ Josephus, *BJ* 1.171–173; *AJ* 14.92–96.

¹⁸ Josephus, *BJ* 1.173–174; *AJ* 14.96–97. During his journey to Rome he was accompanied by Antigonus (*BJ* 1.173).

¹⁹ Josephus, *BJ* 1.174; *AJ* 14.97.

²⁰ Josephus, *BJ* 1.176; *AJ* 14.99.

²¹ Josephus, *BJ* 1.177; *AJ* 14.99–100.102. Each work depicts Alexander's military struggles in a slightly different manner.

Antigonus also took part in these battles, but his father and brother's anti-Roman attitude certainly determined his own.

The civil war between Pompey and Julius Caesar gave Aristobulus a chance to vie once again for his lost influence over Judea. Released by Caesar and entrusted with the command over two legions, Aristobulus meant to turn Judea and Syria against Pompey and oust his supporters.²² Most likely, Alexander was released as well, because he came to Syria at the same time as his father. Their efforts were in vain: Pompey's followers poisoned Aristobulus and imprisoned Alexander, subsequently beheading him at Antioch.²³ At the time, Antigonus was staying in Ashkelon with his sisters and mother, but he was soon taken into the care of Ptolemy, tetrarch of Iturea and Chalcis.²⁴ After Aristobulus' death, by Pompey's decree, power over Judea returned to Hyrcanus II, who collaborated with the Romans.

Unfortunately, we cannot determine exactly Antigonus' age at the time of his father's death, but he must have been still in his teens.²⁵ The question of Antigonus' age is of some importance when appraising his mental capability to make political decisions, either independently or under the influence of third parties. According to Josephus' account, when Caesar was deliberating in 47 BCE whom to entrust with power over Judea, Antigonus made a claim on his own initiative, citing his right to inherit his father's positions and the favour shown to Aristobulus by Caesar. At the same time, Antigonus contested Hyrcanus II's right to rule;²⁶ his claims, however, were ignored. Hyrcanus II gave Caesar substantial military assistance while the latter was fighting in Alexandria (48–47 BCE) against the army of Ptolemy XIII, while Hyrcanus' chief minister, Antipater the Idumean, advocated cooperation with Rome and helped to organise support for Caesar. In return, Caesar not only confirmed Hyrcanus' authority but also bestowed numerous honours on Antipater. In the context of Antigonus' failed claims to the throne, one should note his political stance. When all claimant parties presented their arguments before Caesar, Antipater put forward a compelling argument against entrusting the rule of Judea to Antigonus: he, like his father and brother,²⁷ openly fought against the Romans and Roman-backed agents and thus, as a subversive party, could not be trusted with sovereignty over Judea.²⁸

Even though we cannot assess the seriousness of these accusations, we can surmise that Antigonus not only followed his father's ideas but also sought to actively put them into practice. Since Caesar appears to have ignored Antipater's accusations and did not restrict Antigonus' freedom, he most likely did not consider Antigonus' alleged subversive activities a serious threat. Antigonus was left at liberty and eventually returned

²² Josephus, *BJ* 1.183–184; *AJ* 14.123–124.

²³ Josephus, *BJ* 1.185, cf. 195; *AJ* 14.125, 140–142. Alexander was sentenced to death for brigandry, that is, his military activity against the Romans (*BJ* 1.185).

²⁴ Josephus, *BJ* 1.185; *AJ* 14.126; cf. Sharon 2017, 114–115.

²⁵ Antigonus first appears in the text as one of Aristobulus II's next of kin who travelled with him to Rome in 63 BCE under Pompey's orders. The decision to send Aristobulus to Syria must have been made after the battle of Pharsalus (48 BCE), which made Caesar the ruler of Rome. Accordingly, at the time of his father's death, Antigonus could not have been older than fifteen; cf. Sharon 2017, 459, note 15.

²⁶ Josephus, *BJ* 1.195–196; *AJ* 14.140–142.

²⁷ Josephus, *BJ* 1.198.

²⁸ Josephus, *AJ* 14.141–142.

to Judea. After Caesar's death in 44 BCE, the civil war broke out in Rome and turned Asia Minor and the Near East into a scene of fierce battles between supporters of rival political factions. Antigonus exploited the growing turmoil to bribe and gain favour of Roman officials; furthermore, he received support from Ptolemy of Chalcis, who gave him refuge and supported him financially, and from Marion, the tyrant of Tyre.²⁹ The latter supported Antigonus out of hatred for Herod, hoping that a son of Aristobulus II would be able to defeat him. However, these efforts were all in vain, as Antigonus' assembled troops were defeated by Herod upon their entry to Judea.³⁰ It was not until the spring of 40 BCE when Antigonus faced a real opportunity of gaining power.

At that time, Parthia's army exploited the political upheaval caused by the Roman civil war and the concomitant weakening of the Roman military potential in the eastern provinces to attack Anatolia and Syria.³¹ The Parthian incursion in Syria gave Antigonus' faction a chance to seize power in Judea, since the Parthians, as Rome's enemies, could help him against the current pro-Roman administration, headed by Hyrcanus II and Antipater's sons, Herod and Phasael. The idea to secure the military support of the Parthians came, according to Josephus, from Lysanias, son of Ptolemy, who had claimed the tetrarchy of Chalcis after his father's death.³² According to Josephus, Lysanias acted in the interests of Antigonus rather than for his own.³³ Lysanias' contacts abroad made him a more effective negotiator than Antigonus, who exercised no authority and had few associates outside Judea: in contrast, Lysanias' position as the ruler of an admittedly small but independent state made him more credible to Parthia. For their help to install Antigonus on the Judean throne, the Parthians were to receive a thousand talents and five hundred women.³⁴

Their plans came to fruition: Pacorus, son of the Parthian king and the commander of the Parthian contingent in Syria, entered Galilee and marched towards Jerusalem. As a result, a sizeable portion of the Jewish populace living on Parthian-conquered lands began to support Antigonus.³⁵ Antigonus, with the Parthian help, seized Jerusalem and was proclaimed king and High Priest,³⁶ whereas the Parthians deported Hyrcanus II to Babylon following his abusive treatment by Antigonus, who mutilated his ears, thereby rendering him unfit for the High priesthood.³⁷ Nonetheless, Antigonus failed to pay the Parthians for their help; consequently, their marauding soldiers plundered Judea to extract payment and so increased turmoil in the country.³⁸ Having dispersed the Parthian

²⁹ Josephus, *BJ* 1.239; *AJ* 14.297. Ptolemy supported Antigonus as his brother-in-law: Josephus, *BJ* 1.186; *AJ* 14.126.

³⁰ Josephus, *BJ* 1.240; *AJ* 14.299.

³¹ Livy, *per.* 127; Frontinus, *Strat.* 1.1.6; Josephus, *BJ* 1.248; *AJ* 14.330; Plut. *Ant.* 28.1; Dio Cassius 48.24.4–26.5; Just. 42.4.6–7.

³² Josephus, *BJ* 1.248; *AJ* 14.330.

³³ Josephus, *BJ* 1.248; *AJ* 14.330.

³⁴ Josephus, *BJ* 1.248; *AJ* 14.331. Josephus relays that the women were to come from the stock of Herod and Phasael, cf. Josephus, *BJ* 1.257; *AJ* 14.343.365.379.

³⁵ Cf. Josephus, *BJ* 1.250–252; *AJ* 14.333–334.

³⁶ Vell. Pater. 2.78.1; Josephus, *BJ* 1.269; *AJ* 14.379. Dio Cassius (48.26.2) wrongly claims that the Parthians appointed Aristobulus king of Judea.

³⁷ Josephus, *BJ* 1.270, 273; *AJ* 14.365–366, 379; 15.11–15, 17, 21.

³⁸ Josephus, *BJ* 1.268–269; *AJ* 14.362.364.

marauders, Antigonus marched to Masada, then held by Herod's brother Joseph, but he was unable to capture it.³⁹ Meanwhile, Herod fled to Rome to plead with Octavian and Mark Antony for help and, thanks to their intercession, was appointed king of the Jews by the Roman Senate in late 40 BCE.⁴⁰

Having installed Antigonus as king of Judea, the Parthians left him to his own devices, while the Romans rallied after the lightning invasion and sent Publius Ventidius Bassus to Syria to engage the Parthian contingents. Bassus was also meant to support Joseph against Antigonus; however, Bassus' arrival in the vicinity of Jerusalem did little to help Herod's faction, since the Roman commander, bribed by Antigonus (or so Josephus claims), showed little desire to act⁴¹—not unlike his fellow Roman commander, Q. Pompeidius Silo, left by Bassus outside Jerusalem's fortifications. Both commanders probably realised that they could not attack and capture the fortified city with the meagre forces they had. For Antigonus, on the other hand, it was more important to contain the Roman threat for as long as possible rather than to fight them openly: most likely, Antigonus wanted to buy time in the hope that the Parthians would come to his aid again.⁴²

In the autumn of 40 BCE, Herod returned to Palestine and began to muster forces in Ptolemais. At the behest of Mark Antony, Roman commanders operating in Syria and Judea were to support Herod in his fight for the throne.⁴³ Having assembled a sizeable army, Herod won some battles while marching on Jerusalem, with Antigonus being unable to hinder him.⁴⁴ Although Herod intended to lay siege to Jerusalem, it soon became apparent that Pompeidius Silo, the Roman commander who was meant to support him, encumbered him instead, forcing Herod to concern himself with obtaining supplies for the mutinous Roman troops.⁴⁵ Herod's men, however, encountered difficulties with their supply acquisition due to the guerrilla warfare by Antigonus' supporters.⁴⁶ The approaching winter season enforced a lull in operations in Judea. Roman troops under Silo's command also withdrew from outside Jerusalem, bribed by Antigonus' promise that he would supply them during the winter season. However, it soon became apparent that this was a ploy on Antigonus' part to remove the Roman forces from the walls of Jerusalem.⁴⁷

Concurrently, Herod was preoccupied with subduing Galilee, eventually succeeding after the winter season.⁴⁸ Subsequently, he marched to Samaria to engage with Antigonus' supporters, but an uprising against him in recently pacified Galilee compelled him

³⁹ Josephus, *BJ* 1.286–287; *AJ* 14.390–391.

⁴⁰ Cf. Josephus, *BJ* 1.281–284; *AJ* 14.379–385; Sharon 2017, 154–155 and notes 133–134.

⁴¹ Josephus, *BJ* 1.288–289; *AJ* 14.392; Girardin 2022, 249. According to Dio (48.41.4), Bassus' entrance to Judea effectively put a stop to Antigonus' military activities.

⁴² Josephus, *BJ* 1.289; *AJ* 14.393.

⁴³ Josephus, *BJ* 1.290–291; *AJ* 14.394.

⁴⁴ Cf. Josephus, *BJ* 1.290–294; *AJ* 14.395–405.

⁴⁵ Josephus, *BJ* 1.294–299; *AJ* 14.406–408.

⁴⁶ Josephus, *BJ* 1.300; *AJ* 14.409.

⁴⁷ Josephus, *BJ* 1.302; *AJ* 14.412.418.

⁴⁸ Cf. Josephus, *BJ* 1.303–314; *AJ* 14.413–417, 421–430. Although Josephus claims that Herod fought with bandits, it is certain that he battled the rebelling local populace of Galilee: Sharon 2017, 157–158, 361–377.

to return.⁴⁹ Although Josephus' account suggests that Herod dealt swiftly with the insurgents, the chronology of events in Judea and Syria given by the historian indicates that the military support achieved by Antigonus greatly restricted Herod's freedom of action until mid-38 BCE. The uneasy stalemate in Judea broke with the Roman victory over the Parthians at the Battle of Mount Gindarus (June 9, 38 BCE), during which the Parthian commander Pacorus was killed.⁵⁰ Only then was Mark Antony able to send more support to Herod, placing a large part of his forces at Herod's disposal⁵¹ and appointing an otherwise unknown Roman commander, Machaeras, to lead them.⁵² A somewhat unreliable ally, Machaeras initially appeared unwilling to aid Herod, conducting maverick military operations and holding secret talks with Antigonus.⁵³ Machaeras' fickleness led to continuing conflicts with Herod.⁵⁴

Having learned about Herod's approach to Judea, his brother Joseph travelled to Jericho (in company of Roman soldiers) to replenish supplies: ambushed by Antigonus' forces, Joseph perished in the battle.⁵⁵ When news of the defeat reached Galilee, its Antigonus-leaning inhabitants stirred up another revolt against Herod's rule, with unrest spreading to other parts of Judea.⁵⁶ The scale of the revolt induced Mark Antony to assist Herod in the summer of 38 BCE with two legions under the command of C. Sosius, then governor of Syria, who also commanded additional troops.⁵⁷ Herod independently gathered a large military force and launched a campaign in Galilee; afterward, he proceeded to Jericho, where his troops defeated those of Antigonus and opened the way to Jerusalem.⁵⁸ Josephus' account in *Bellum* surprisingly indicates that these events took place in 38 BCE,⁵⁹ whereas in *Antiquitates* Josephus follows the established chronology and claims that Herod arrived near Jerusalem only in 37 BCE,⁶⁰ which implies that, despite the military support provided by Mark Antony, Herod found it much more difficult to subdue Jerusalem than Josephus' account would otherwise suggest.

⁴⁹ Josephus, *BJ* 1.300; *AJ* 14.409.

⁵⁰ Livy, *per.* 127; Vell. Pat. 2.78.1; Frontinus, *Strat.*, 1.1.6; Josephus, *BJ* 1.317; Just. 42.4.8–10.

⁵¹ Allegedly, it comprised a thousand horsemen and 2 legions: Josephus, *BJ* 1.317.

⁵² Machaeras' rank indicates that he was a senator. However, no testimony survives on him except for Josephus' account (cf. *BJ* 1.317–320, 323, 326; *AJ* 14.434–435, 438, 448, 450, 457).

⁵³ Cf. Josephus, *BJ* 1.317–319; *AJ* 14.435–436.

⁵⁴ Josephus, *BJ* 1.319–320; *AJ* 14.437–438.

⁵⁵ Josephus, *BJ* 1.323–325; *AJ* 14.448–450.

⁵⁶ Josephus, *BJ* 1.326; *AJ* 14.450. Josephus in *Bellum* mentions that the unrest spread to Idumea, linking it to Machaeras' actions. In turn, his account in *Antiquitates* cursorily states that the rebellion spread across a large part of Judea, not specifying its background and against whom it erupted. Most likely, *Antiquitates* "Judea" denotes Idumea (as in *Bellum*), since the text mentions Machaeras fortifying the stronghold in Gitta; however, the author does not connect these works with the unrest mentioned in *Bellum*. Cf. Sharon 2017, 160, note 155.

⁵⁷ Josephus, *BJ* 1.327; *AJ* 14.447.

⁵⁸ In Judea, the fighting spilled beyond the Jericho area and, according to the available data, it appears to have taken place in the area stretching from Masada (Josephus, *BJ* 1.286; *AJ* 14.390) up to Jericho. This region was important for the supply of Jerusalem and of Antigonus' army. Throughout Antigonus' reign, the area remained under his control, as evidenced by the finds of coins issued by him (Bijovsky 2004, 75–76; Ariel 2017, 352–353, 355) and the mass burials of victims of battles fought near 'En Gedi: Fahri 2022, 6–12.

⁵⁹ Josephus, *BJ* 1.343.

⁶⁰ Josephus, *AJ* 14.465. For dating this event, see Sharon 2017, 391–396.

In addition to tens of thousands of Herod's own troops, the siege of the Holy City also involved tens of thousands of Roman soldiers under Sosius' command.⁶¹ The siege warfare at Jerusalem lasted several months before the besiegers were able to breach the walls and, with a great effort, capture the entire city.⁶² Just before the fall of Jerusalem, Antigonus surrendered to Sosius, who took him to Syria.⁶³ Herod successfully pressured Sosius to put Antigonus to death in Antioch for fear that the Roman Senate might recognise Antigonus' hereditary claim to Judea or he feared if Antigonus were set at liberty, he would again rally support in Judaea.⁶⁴

The survey of events between Antigonus' capture of the Judean throne (40 BCE) and his death (37 BCE) presented above projects an image of Antigonus that appears very different from that promoted by Josephus. Although the idea to use the Parthian military might to gain power did not come from Antigonus himself, their direct support ensured Antigonus' political triumph and secured his control over Jerusalem. The Holy City's immense political and religious importance enabled Antigonus to follow in the footsteps of his predecessors in the Hasmonean dynasty and appoint himself High Priest of the Temple—a distinction unavailable to Herod due to his Idumean background.⁶⁵ Antigonus' political and religious clout was such that it endured after he had lost the military support of the Parthians (after their defeat by the Romans) and gave him a chance to compete against a number of Roman generals in Judea. Antigonus undoubtedly realised that his army could not face Roman legionaries in the open field and win. By bribing their commanders, however, Antigonus successfully contained their threat for a time and secured their neutrality.⁶⁶ Even if corrupting the commanders had cost Antigonus a great deal, from his point of view these attempts produced short-lived yet tangible results. His deftness in the use of bribery appears even more astounding when one remembers that the bribed commanders were directly ordered to support Herod against Antigonus in Herod's

⁶¹ According to Josephus (*AJ* 14.468), Herod had 30,000 troops at his disposal, while Sosius commanded eleven legions, six thousand horsemen and an unspecified number of soldiers enlisted in Syria (*BJ* 1.346; *AJ* 14.469).

⁶² Cf. Josephus, *BJ* 1.343–353; *AJ* 14.487–488. Josephus' chronological data, however, do not allow one to establish the date of the capture of Jerusalem with any certainty. The same problem arises for the duration of the siege. In *Bellum* (1.350), Josephus claims that Jerusalem fell after five months, whereas *Antiquitates* narrates that the first wall was breached after forty days of siege and the second one, after fifteen (*AJ* 14.476), with the fights continuing until Herod's forces subdued the lower part of city and the temple precinct (cf. Dio Cassius 49.22.4–5), subsequently seizing the upper part of the city. How long this took remains unspecified in the text.

⁶³ Josephus, *BJ* 1.353; *AJ* 14.481; Dio Cassius 49.22.3.

⁶⁴ Josephus, *BJ* 1.357.655; *AJ* 14.488–490; 15.8–10; 17.191; 20.246. Even Roman authors took note of Antigonus' humiliating death: Strabo, *FGrHist* 91, frg. 18 (= Josephus, *AJ* 15.9); Plut. *Ant.* 36.2; Dio Cassius 49.22.6. The discovery in Jerusalem of a tomb named the Abba Cave sparked a lively debate among researchers. This tomb contained the remains of two people. An inscription found within the tomb indicates it held the remains of one Mattathias, son of Judah: *CIIP* I, 55. Some scholars believe that this is the body of Antigonus Mattathias, but the majority have refuted these claims; see commentary of Yardeni and Price to the *CIIP* I, pp. 99–101; Elitzur 2013 (both works reference previously published studies related to the Abba Cave and question of identity of Mattathias, son of Judah); Atkinson 2016, 164 and note 31; Sharon 2017, 163, 453–459.

⁶⁵ Cf. Josephus, *AJ* 14.403.

⁶⁶ See Josephus, *BJ* 1.288–289, 291, 297–298, 302, 317–319; *AJ* 14.392–393, 395, 406, 412, 435.

quest to win power over Judea. What helped Antigonus was the commanders' reluctance to fight on behalf of Herod, their corruptibility and appetite for personal gain—an attitude shared by many of their peers in the Roman Republic: surviving sources speak of a number of Roman military leaders operating in Syria and Judea that had no qualms about putting their own interests above that of Rome.⁶⁷

Antigonus' diplomatic talents notwithstanding, the king maintained his power by adroitly employing populace-tailored propaganda, partially recoverable from references in Josephus' works and the iconography of Antigonus' coinage, discussed below. In his dispute with Herod over power in Judea, Antigonus highlighted his Hasmonean descent and the concomitant right of succession to the throne, first arguing his case in this regard to Caesar in 47 BCE, after the death of Antigonus' father and brother. He substantiated his claim by not only stressing that he was the last legitimate descendant of Aristobulus II (and thus, the most entitled claimant to the throne) but also underscoring favours once rendered to Caesar by Aristobulus and Alexander, which had cost them both their lives.⁶⁸ According to Josephus, Antigonus reasserted his right to the Judean throne to Gaius Silo, the commander of the Roman troops near Jerusalem. A Jew of a royal and priestly lineage, Antigonus believed he surpassed the Roman-backed Herod on all counts.⁶⁹ In turn, the Romans cared little about Antigonus' claims and much more about the services provided by Herod to Rome.⁷⁰ Herod recognised the enduring popularity of the Hasmonean dynasty among his subjects and married Mariamne, the daughter of Alexander and a granddaughter of Aristobulus II and Hyrcanus II.⁷¹ The marriage mattered so much to Herod that he interrupted his campaign against Antigonus to finalise the nuptials.⁷² Indeed, Herod's marriage to the Hasmonean princess provided him with the support among Hasmonean-leaning members of the population.⁷³

Coins struck by Antigonus all came from a Jerusalem-based mint, the remains of which were discovered during the archaeological excavations in many sites of Jerusalem.⁷⁴ Antigonus' coinage, of a variety of denominations, is typified by its iconography⁷⁵ and the presence of legends that proclaimed his dual position of high priest and king.

⁶⁷ As allies, the Romans were equally valuable and troublesome for Herod: for example, after the capture of Jerusalem, Roman soldiers proceeded to plunder the city according to their age-old war customs: Josephus, *BJ* 1.355–356.

⁶⁸ Josephus, *BJ* 1.195–196; *AJ* 14.140.

⁶⁹ Josephus, *AJ* 14.386–387.489–491. According to Josephus, Herod was fully aware that his background disqualified him in the eyes of the Jews as a claimant for the throne, which is one of the reasons why, when he went to Rome to plead for Mark Antony's help, Herod intended to have the Romans appoint another king of Judea—not Herod, but a descendant of the Hasmoneans, Aristobulus (III), son of Aristobulus II: Josephus, *AJ* 14.386–387.

⁷⁰ Josephus, *AJ* 14.403–404; cf. Eckhardt 2012.

⁷¹ Josephus, *BJ* 1.241; *AJ* 14.300.353.

⁷² Josephus, *AJ* 14.467.

⁷³ Cf. Josephus, *BJ* 1.240. Josephus does not specify whether Herod's marriage to Mariamne won him support from Antigonus' supporters or from the Hasmonean sympathizers *sensu largo*.

⁷⁴ Meshorer 2001, 51; Ariel 2017, 357; Raviv 2026.

⁷⁵ Meshorer 2001, 51–57; Ariel 2017, 359.

Antigonus' coin iconography by and large resembles coins struck by other Hasmoneans,⁷⁶ with one significant type standing out and deserving a brief discussion.⁷⁷ The reverse of one prutah coins, most often used in quotidian transactions, featured a four-legged Showbread Table with a flat board (*shulchan*), labelled with a Hebrew inscription "Mattityah the High Priest" in paleo-Hebrew.⁷⁸ In turn, its obverse bore a representation of the Temple Menorah and a Greek legend ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΝΤΙ(ΓΟΥΟΥ).⁷⁹ There is no doubt over the religious nature of these images.⁸⁰ What is still debated, however, is their ideological meaning, with scholars offering divergent interpretations.⁸¹

On other coins issued by Antigonus, a legend in paleo-Hebrew proclaimed either Antigonus' high priesthood and leadership of the Council of the Jews (Hever ha-Yehudim),⁸² or his priesthood alone,⁸³ whereas the Greek legend asserted his kingship. Antigonus' tailored use of coin legends across all denominations distinguishes him among his Hasmonean predecessors,⁸⁴ whose coins customarily only proclaimed their high priesthood (and their key position on Hever ha-Yehudim).⁸⁵ Within the dynasty, it was Alexander Jannaeus who first introduced legends proclaiming the royal status of the coin issuer,⁸⁶ thus gaining political leverage against his opponents, the Pharisees. Antigonus' use of a similar-sounding legend should also be regarded as a clear message in that regard—not to a single political opponent but rather to all his subjects. Antigonus' coin legends broadcast his formal status as a king and the restoration of the political system characteristic of the Hasmonean era, with the ruler combining political and religious power in his hands.⁸⁷

⁷⁶ Cf. Meshorer 2001, 33–34; Lykke 2015, 42–44. The iconography indicates that Antigonus included only some Hasmonean symbols—which also appear on rings almost certainly produced during his reign: we know of two very similar rings of that type (Fahri 2022, 6–9). It is difficult to ascertain whether the said rings were private jewellery pieces or maybe markers of official distinction bestowed by Antigonus on selected followers.

⁷⁷ Fahri 2022, 9: "The ear of corn and double cornucopia pattern is exclusively associated with Mattathias Antigonus and is unknown elsewhere in Jewish numismatics or any other media of Jewish art."

⁷⁸ Cf. Amar 2009/2010, 48–58.

⁷⁹ Meshorer 2001, 220, Type 41; Meshorer – Bijovsky – Fischer-Bossert 2013, 257, no. 446. See also Meshorer 2001, 54–57.

⁸⁰ Lykke 2015, 50–51.

⁸¹ According to Meshorer (2001, 56–57): "The menorah and the shewbread table on the coins were a sort of proclamation or call to people to protect, at great risk to their lives, the nation's sacred objects lest they fall into the hands of man of Idumean origin who was supported by the Romans." See VanderKam 2004, 392–393; Regev 2013, 220–221; Lykke 2015, 51.

⁸² Meshorer 2001, 218, Type 36; Meshorer – Bijovsky – Fischer-Bossert 2013, 256, no. 418. Not enough data survives to ascertain the character and functions of the Council, with scholars proposing a plethora of interpretations, cf. Regev 2013, 186–189; Regev 2011/2014, 54 and note 17. Since sources always mention the Council in connection to the high priesthood, it seems that the Council had a religious character: Dąbrowa 2010, 110; Regev 2013, 189–191, cf. 282–283.

⁸³ Meshorer 2001, 219, Type 37; Meshorer – Bijovsky – Fischer-Bossert 2013, 256, no. 426.

⁸⁴ Regev 2011/2014, 52–53.

⁸⁵ Regev 2011/2014, 52–58.

⁸⁶ Cf. Meshorer 2001, 27; 209, Group K; 210, Group L; 211, Group M-O; Meshorer – Bijovsky – Fischer-Bossert 2013, 249, no. 214, 220–221; 250, no. 234, 238; 251, no. 270.

⁸⁷ Lykke 2015, 50, 52. Antigonus directly alluded to his predecessors' coinage by including paleo-Hebrew legends on his coins: Lykke 2015, 47–50.

Undoubtedly, the most characteristic feature of Antigonus' political activity was his hostility to Rome, shared with his father and brother. Relevantly, Antipater exploited Antigonus' family history to convince Caesar of Antigonus' hostility towards Rome,⁸⁸ allegedly inherited from his father and made manifest from Antigonus' youth as a desire to provoke political upheaval and rebellion. Although Antipater did not describe how exactly Antigonus fomented rebellion in Judea, one may suppose that Antipater most likely directly referred to Antigonus' activity against Hyrcanus II, who closely collaborated with and was supported by the Romans. Indeed, Antigonus loathed Hyrcanus II to such a degree that he drastically mutilated Hyrcanus after his capture by the Parthians to bar Hyrcanus permanently from the high priesthood. Antigonus' hostile attitude towards Rome and the Romans endured until the end of his life. In turn, Mark Antony consistently sought to hinder Antigonus and aid Herod in his bid for power in Judea, offering Herod political support in Rome⁸⁹ and military support in Judea.⁹⁰ To the point, Antigonus was also recognised as an enemy of Rome by the Senate.⁹¹

The available evidence indicates that Antigonus' two-pronged ideological agenda relied chiefly on stressing his Hasmonean descent (and thus, legitimacy) and his enduring hatred for Rome. Antigonus' Hasmonean descent gave him a natural right to sit on the throne and hold the position of the high priest of the Temple. The combined political and religious authority of the ruler, a tradition in the Hasmonean family, underscored the independence of the state they ruled. Antigonus himself believed that he inherited his right to the throne from his father and not from Hyrcanus II, who had been compromised by his collaboration with the Romans. The second component of Antigonus' programme was his hostility to Rome and its agents in Judea. Since both his father and brother had previously fought against Rome, Antigonus was able to present his anti-Romanism as honouring Aristobulus II's political legacy.

Antigonus' successful ascent to power and its maintenance certainly depended on the army. All we know about his military forces comes from Josephus' account. Even though the writer frequently mentions skirmishes and battles fought by Antigonus' troops, he usually writes in vague terms, giving no detail about the size of Antigonus' army. Only when describing the battle of Jericho does Josephus mention the number of soldiers fighting on Antigonus' side (reportedly, six thousand lightly-armed soldiers who showed great bravery).⁹² The only commander of Antigonus we know by name was Pappus: according to Josephus, Antigonus sent Pappus to Samaria to command a large contingent against Machaeras. However, the contingent was destroyed by Herod in a battle near Isana, with Pappus himself slain.⁹³ Josephus' account suggests that Antigonus on occasion may have personally commanded military operations.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Cf. Josephus, *BJ* 1.197–198; *AJ* 14.141–142.

⁸⁹ Josephus, *BJ* 1.282–284; *AJ* 14.382–385. Mark Antony and Octavian believed that Antigonus betrayed Rome by accepting his kingship from the Parthians, with whom Rome fought bitterly while Herod's appointment was being decided.

⁹⁰ See Josephus, *BJ* 1.290.298.317.327.345–346; *AJ* 14.394.407.420.434.447.468–469.

⁹¹ Josephus, *BJ* 1.284; *AJ* 14.384.469.

⁹² Josephus, *AJ* 14.456. Herod was wounded at Jericho.

⁹³ Josephus, *AJ* 14.457–458.464.

⁹⁴ Antigonus supposedly led the siege of Masada, then held by Herod's troops, cf. Josephus, *BJ* 1.286; *AJ* 14.390.

Although his troops did not avoid clashes with Herod's larger forces⁹⁵ (and even with the Romans⁹⁶), they generally engaged in guerrilla warfare against the enemy's smaller contingents and supply routes. Favourable terrain conditions contributed to the effectiveness of these tactics.⁹⁷

No information survives on either the formations that made up Antigonus' army or its organisational structure. cursory mentions suggest that the army, which included a certain number of heavily-armed soldiers,⁹⁸ most likely consisted chiefly of light-armed troops,⁹⁹ constituting the core of Antigonus' army and being controlled by him more or less directly.

In the struggle for power in Judea, Antigonus received significant support from troops not under his direct authority, especially those active in Galilee.¹⁰⁰ Even so, a certain group of the Galileans—most likely, a militia contingent of an indeterminate size—fought alongside Antigonus in the initial phase of his fight for Jerusalem.¹⁰¹ Perhaps numerous but generally poorly trained and armed, the Galilean militia were incapable of subduing the better-trained and armed soldiers of Herod's army and the Roman troops. However, the bitter resentment against Herod harboured by the general population in the territories he occupied meant that any militia contingents defeated by Herod would quickly re-assemble under favourable circumstances, such as when Herod and the core of his forces moved away to other areas of Palestine. Certainly, the repeated revolts of the people of Galilee tied up a large part of Herod's forces, effectively limiting his freedom of action.

The Galileans unquestionably put up the most resistance to Herod. Despite numerous bloody pacifications of Galilee's population, Herod's efforts to subjugate this land for a long time were in vain.¹⁰² Josephus mentions in passing that some battles between Antigonus' followers and Herod's troops took place in Samaria.¹⁰³ Since Herod launched a major punitive expedition to Samaria, the land's populace must have fiercely resisted him.¹⁰⁴ Another reference to Pappus' expedition to Samaria¹⁰⁵ makes it manifest that An-

⁹⁵ Josephus, *BJ* 1.335–336.

⁹⁶ Josephus, *BJ* 1.292.323–324.

⁹⁷ Cf. Josephus, *BJ* 1.294.300.324; *AJ* 14.399.409.

⁹⁸ Cf. Josephus, *BJ* 1.300.

⁹⁹ Cf. Josephus, *AJ* 14.456.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Raviv 2026.

¹⁰¹ Josephus (*BJ* 1.303) mentions that Herod intended to forcibly remove Antigonus' forces from strongholds they occupied in Galilee, but that may be an overstatement. Herod most likely wished to eject not Antigonus' troops but merely his own personnel manning strongholds there, who had switched allegiance to Antigonus, since no evidence indicates that Antigonus' forces entered Galilee. The Galileans, however, did serve under Antigonus when he was marching towards Jerusalem with the Parthians: the local populace joined Antigonus' forces when he was passing by Mount Carmel and fought with him on Jerusalem's streets against supporters of Herod and Phasaël (Josephus, *BJ* 1.250; *AJ* 14.334).

¹⁰² Cf. Josephus, *BJ* 1.315–316, 326, 329–330; *AJ* 14.432–433, 450, 453; Freyne 2000, 65–68; Jensen 2014, 60.

¹⁰³ When Josephus mentions Samaria, he does not always indicate whether he means the city or the land: the meaning can only be gleaned from the context.

¹⁰⁴ Josephus, *BJ* 1.314–315; *AJ* 14.431. Herod's expeditionary corps to Samaria numbered 600 cavalrymen and three thousand foot-soldiers.

¹⁰⁵ Given the considerable distance between the borders of Judea and the city of Samaria, that is, Herod's headquarters (cf. *BJ* 1.299, 303, 344; *AJ* 14.413, 437, 467), the obvious destination of this expedition and its target area must have been the land of that name.

tigonus' sympathisers were active in that area, a supposition corroborated by Herod's actions against the five Samaritan cities not mentioned by name.¹⁰⁶

The actual geographical extent of the territory controlled by Antigonus shifted over the course of his reign, with the finds of his coins delimiting the area under his actual power.¹⁰⁷ Since Antigonus' coins finds come mostly from the area of Jerusalem and Judea,¹⁰⁸ he effectively controlled the central part of Judea, from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea. The coastal area, including Joppa, remained directly in Herod's hands,¹⁰⁹ whereas other areas were held by pro-Herodian partisans fighting against Antigonus' forces.¹¹⁰ One of them was Joseph, Herod's brother.¹¹¹ Josephus relays that Joseph's camp lay in a mountainous part of Judea,¹¹² from where Joseph set off towards Jericho.¹¹³ He was assisted by Roman soldiers placed at his disposal by Machaeras, who was then camping somewhere on the border of Judea and Samaria.¹¹⁴ Building on this piece of information, one can assume that Joseph may have operated in the mountainous, regions of northern Judea bordering Samaria. As long as Herod's supporters held these strategically important borderlands, they could prevent the movement of Antigonus' troops between Judea and Samaria. This blockade was temporarily lifted after Joseph's death at Jericho, when the inhabitants of the part of Judea formerly controlled by Joseph revolted and sided with Antigonus.¹¹⁵ However, Herod's retaliatory actions led to Antigonus losing control of Jericho, and possibly also the areas along the northern shore of the Dead Sea.¹¹⁶

The above-mentioned expedition of Pappus to Samaria most likely was intended to give support to Antigonus' followers there and to open a permanent travel/supply corridor between the two lands, enabling Antigonus to expand the area of his control. The defeat of Pappus by Machaeras' forces, however, nipped this plan in the bud. If this interpretation of Antigonus' motives is correct, then one should assume that Antigonus sought to expand his power beyond the borders of Judea proper and conduct operations beyond it. The success of this plan would have significantly influenced the subsequent course of Antigonus' confrontation with Herod, since Antigonus would be able to use the human and material resources of Samaria to further his ends.

In addition to the direct threat from Herod, Antigonus also had to deal with an internal enemy—Herod's supporters living in Jerusalem and across Judea.¹¹⁷ Their activity increased especially whenever the course of events became unfavourable for Antigonus.¹¹⁸

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Josephus, *AJ* 14.334.457–458. See also Raviv 2026.

¹⁰⁷ See Raviv 2026, maps 1–2.

¹⁰⁸ Ariel 2017, 352–354; 355, Tab. 26.1; 356; 360–361, notes 4 and 5.

¹⁰⁹ Josephus, *BJ* 1.292–294; *AJ* 14.396–397.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Josephus, *AJ* 14.391, 400, 410–411.

¹¹¹ Josephus, *BJ* 1.320; *AJ* 14.438.

¹¹² Josephus, *BJ* 1.324; *AJ* 14.448.

¹¹³ Cf. Josephus, *BJ* 1.323; *AJ* 14.448–449.

¹¹⁴ According to *Bellum* (1.326), at that time Machaeras was quelling the unrest in Idumea; however, the version given in *Antiquitates* (cf. 14.438) appears much more likely and logical.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Josephus, *BJ* 1.335; *AJ* 14.450. See also Raviv 2026.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Josephus, *BJ* 1.331–332; *AJ* 14.454–461. Probably also in the Transjordan area were some supporters of Antigonus' cause, cf. Raviv 2026.

¹¹⁷ Josephus, *BJ* 1.294, 335, 358.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Josephus, *BJ* 1.293, 335.

Despite Antigonus' ever-adverse political and military circumstances, that ruler managed to hold onto his power for more than three years. Given the clear power disparity between Antigonus and Herod—one growing increasingly unfavourable to the former as time went on—we can undoubtedly say that Antigonus succeeded in making the best of his situation. Had it not been for the considerable involvement of Rome on Herod's side and the military assistance Herod received from Mark Antony, the war for the throne of Judea might have lasted much longer. As mentioned above, the initial phase of Antigonus' reign concurred with two favourable developments at home and abroad. One was the Parthian invasion of Syria and Anatolia. The Parthians helped Antigonus to take the throne and occupy Jerusalem. Furthermore, their actions forced the Romans to by and large ignore the current events in Judea. Although the unrest in Judea contributed significantly to Herod's rise to kingship, the turmoil in Galilee and lack of support from the Romans made Herod unable to threaten Antigonus' position. The second circumstance favourable to Antigonus was that the Roman commanders sent to Herod's aid lacked enthusiasm to fight on his behalf, which made it easier for Antigonus to bribe them. Antigonus' good fortune ended with the Roman victory over the Parthian army at the Battle of Mount Gindarus (38 BCE). The victory allowed the Romans to regain control of Syria and enabled Mark Antony to provide more substantial military assistance to Herod, giving him a clear advantage over Antigonus.

However, this examination of Antigonus' military and political position does not yet explain why Antigonus repelled a much stronger rival for more than three years, whereas his father's and brother's anti-Roman uprisings were pacified by the Romans in just a few months. Tracing Herod's actions, it becomes apparent that, during Antigonus' reign, the bulk of Herod's military effort was directed against Antigonus' civilian supporters in Galilee, Samaria and Idumea.¹¹⁹ Herod's actions were necessitated by the situation in these lands. The Galileans, although not directly under Antigonus' control, remained deeply attached to Aristobulus II and his sons, as evidenced by the Galilean support of Aristobulus II in his struggle against Hyrcanus II and the Romans several years earlier. While numerous Galileans died for Aristobulus II's cause, they did not hesitate to support his son Alexander when, following in his father's footsteps, he took up arms against the Romans. Suffering from repressive measures, the Galileans did not hesitate to stand up for Antigonus when he arrived in Galilee at the very beginning of his journey to Jerusalem,¹²⁰ their unswerving support not weakening even in face of Herod's violent crackdown on any expression of support for Antigonus.

The extent of the support and sympathy shown to Antigonus, his father and brother by the people of Galilee has its origin in the much earlier period of the Hasmonean rule. While scholars still debate which of the Hasmoneans subjugated Galilee, what matters far more is the Hasmonean policy towards this newly conquered land and its outcome. The conquest of Galilee not only considerably increased the territory of the Hasmonean dominion but, above all, incorporated a region ripe for a large-scale colonisation.¹²¹ The multitudes of colonists settled in Galilee under John Hyrcanus and Alexander Jannaeus.

¹¹⁹ Josephus' account does not mention whether Antigonus' cause was popular in Idumea.

¹²⁰ Cf. Josephus, *BJ* 1.250; *AJ* 14.334. See also Sharon 2017, 214.

¹²¹ See Freyne 2000, 41–49; Leibner 2009; Jensen 2014, 52–57; Chancey 2014, 115–117; Syon 2015, 145–170; Dąbrowa 2020, 289–293; Leibner 2021, 143–144; Syon 2021.

Their descendants recognised to whom they owed the improvement of their fortunes—and their allegiance. Accordingly, Herod (after his victory over Antigonus) sought to reduce the pro-Hasmonean sentiment in Galilee through veteran settlement and estate grants.¹²² The sympathy of the people of Samaria for Antigonus may have had a similar source, since the Samaria was also an area intensively colonised by the Hasmoneans.¹²³ Nonetheless, Josephus does not describe the attitude of the Samaritans towards Antigonus and Herod in enough detail to determine the extent of their support for the former.

In Judea and Jerusalem, Antigonus enjoyed strong support from various groups of the population, although many inhabitants remained hostile to him. One may gauge the strength of the pro-Antigonus faction by considering the course of the fighting in Jerusalem. First, during Antigonus' struggle for the throne with the Parthian help, and second, during the fierce defence of Jerusalem while it was besieged by the forces of Herod and Sosius. How much the inhabitants of Jerusalem supported Antigonus was made manifest by the severity of Herod's subsequent crackdown, which affected both the social elite and ordinary citizens.¹²⁴ Josephus cites an extremely interesting testimony of support for Antigonus from the sons of Sabbas (or the Sons of Baba),¹²⁵ the members of the city's elite who, during the siege, successfully agitated among the inhabitants of Jerusalem on behalf of Antigonus (and the Hasmoneans) and against Herod.¹²⁶

Antigonus' Hasmonean descent, his evident support of the Hasmonean political and religious traditions and his anti-Roman stance won him genuine and widespread support as ruler among the masses of the Jewish population of Galilee, Samaria and Judea. The reign of Antigonus demonstrates in no uncertain terms that the Jewish society, decades after the loss of their state's independence, still cherished greatly the memory of the Hasmonean rule (in spite of the negative opinion held by the authors of Dead Sea Scrolls or pseudepigraphic texts on their Hasmonean contemporaries).¹²⁷ The Hasmonean rule stood for such a crucial ingredient in shaping the Jewish collective consciousness that Herod determined to dispose of all male Hasmonean descendants who could potentially threaten his rule,¹²⁸ nevertheless, he sought to gain social acceptance by marrying Mariamne, the daughter of Alexander and a granddaughter of Hyrcanus II, and thus kept a part of the Hasmonean legacy alive.

Antigonus undoubtedly managed to hold onto his power for several years due to a very favourable combination of circumstances—crucially, the Parthian invasion of Roman territory that limited the Roman control of Judea. The inadequate Roman support for Herod during this period allowed Antigonus to more or less successfully use the advantages he possessed to maintain his position and power.

Despite Josephus' evident negative bias towards Antigonus and his activities, the historian unwittingly provides us with enough information to restore Antigonus to his

¹²² Cf. Josephus, *BJ* 3.36; *AJ* 15.294–295.

¹²³ See Raviv 2019; Raviv – Zissu 2019.

¹²⁴ Josephus, *BJ* 1.358; *AJ* 15.2–3.6.

¹²⁵ The surviving manuscripts give two versions of the father's name: the sons' names, however, are not given by Josephus.

¹²⁶ Cf. Josephus, *AJ* 15.260–266, esp. 262–263.

¹²⁷ Cf. Strabo, *FGrHist* 91, frg. 18 = Josephus, *AJ* 15.9–10.

¹²⁸ Josephus, *AJ* 15.51–56; 20.247–249. Cf. Josephus, *BJ* 1.437.

rightful place in the history of Judea. Contrary to Josephus' pro-Roman perspective (most likely coloured by his Roman patronage), Antigonus was neither a political troublemaker nor an agitator threatening public order: instead, Antigonus consciously strove for the political rebirth of Judea and its liberation from Roman supremacy. To achieve this goal, he deftly exploited his descent and the political legacy of his father and brother to win over his subjects. Thanks to favourable external circumstances and widespread public support, Antigonus successfully (if briefly) attained his goal and helped to revive the popularity of the Hasmoneans,¹²⁹ which later became a source of Herod's legitimate concern.¹³⁰

The episode of Antigonus throws into sharp relief the concurrent Jewish political attitudes, revealing a chasm between supporters of the former Hasmonean socio-political order and Herod's newly established administration.

ABBREVIATIONS

CIIP – H. M. Cotton *et al.*, *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palestinae*, vol. 1: *Jerusalem*, pt. 1: 1–704, Berlin–New York 2010.

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¹²⁹ Here, the public memory of the Hasmoneans signifies the positive emotional attitude of those subjects who directly experienced their rule, see Regev 2013, 267–272; Sharon 2017, 225–233. Such a living memory differs significantly from the image of the Hasmoneans that survives in writings of members of Judean religious groups active under the Hasmoneans and afterwards, cf. Sharon 2017, 227–230; Berthelot 2018, 341–426. The religious criticism of the Hasmoneans mainly decried the formal and theological aspects of their exercise of the priestly function that resulted in negative consequences for the Jewish religious life and the Temple cult.

¹³⁰ The Hasmonean supporters did not surrender immediately after Jerusalem's fall: for a time, they operated from the stronghold of Hyrcania, led by Antigonus' sister, Alexandra: Josephus, *BJ* 1.364; Atkinson 2016, 165; Sharon 2017, 164–165 and note 171.

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