


HASMONEAN JUDEA AMONG THE NATIONS: MASTERS, FRIENDS, RIVALS, ADVERSARIES¹

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Abstract

Between the revolt of 168 BC and 63 BC, the Hasmoneans established in Judea an increasingly autonomous power. The documentation, which is almost exclusively due to Jewish authors, gives Judea a central place, but an examination of the sources shows that the power of the Hasmoneans was essentially based on the weakness of their adversaries. The links maintained with Rome never resulted in a Roman intervention in their favour and the former Seleucid master acted almost freely in the new kingdom until the 80s. Judea remained a marginal region, struggling to assert itself against the states in the region, including the Nabataean kingdom.

Keywords: Judea, Hasmoneans, Maccabees, Rome, Judaization, Greek cities, Nabataeans, Arabs.

Introduction

In the unanimous opinion of contemporary historiography, the Maccabean revolt led to the gradual establishment of a new state in the Southern Levant, the Hasmonean State.² Our sources are almost exclusively Jewish, the two books of the Maccabees and Flavius Josephus.³ The latter delineates the 1 Book of Maccabees (further 1 Macc) for this period (up

¹ My colleague and friend David Jacobson kindly revised my English, saving me from many mistakes and making some very useful suggestions. The editor of this volume also corrected some errors and generously provided articles that I would have found difficult to find. Both of them know how grateful I am for their help; I remain, of course, responsible for any errors and inadequacies.

² Dąbrowa 2010a.

³ Cf. Dąbrowa 2024a, 415–417.

to 1 Macc 14:16), giving an account of little originality in his *Jewish Antiquities*. However, after Jonathan's death in 143, he borrowed heavily from Nicolaos of Damascus, as he had done in the *Jewish War*. Nicolaos himself had drawn on Polybios, Posidonios and Diodoros, which gives us some rare non-Jewish insights, but these are received indirectly and are not word-for-word quotations: distortion is therefore possible, as each author has his own ideological objectives. A few passages have been preserved from Greek and Latin authors (Diodoros, Strabo, Justin) that may shed some light, but they are mostly vague and isolated from their context. It's true that Palestine seemed of little importance to them, even if its inhabitants piqued their curiosity.⁴ As for the Qumran writings, most of which are contemporary with the Hasmonean period, they are unmitigated in their hostility towards the Hasmonean high priests, and so obscure in their allusions that it is hard to find reliable references to the events of that time.⁵ Encrypted texts can scarcely be used, as can the Book of Judith, reused to evoke the figure of Alexandra Salome.⁶

So we look at events through the eyes of a Judean, without knowing what the other players in this story thought of this new situation, how they reacted to the growing autonomy of the Judeans, and then to the rapid expansion of the domain under their control: Seleucids, Lagids, Romans, Nabateans, other neighboring Arabs, Greek cities on the coast or inland, none could remain without a reaction to Hasmonean Judea. We need to decipher the texts in an attempt to reverse the gaze, a task made all the more difficult by the fact that over a century and a half of historical exegesis has produced a gigantic bibliography that no one can claim to master. We will at least attempt to take account of the most notorious works.

Tiny Judea cannot be studied in isolation. Two major facts must be constantly borne in mind by historians if they are to understand the rise of Hasmonean Judea between the year 160 and the arrival of Pompey. On the one hand, from the beginning of the second century, Rome's power in the eastern Mediterranean was clear for all to see. Cynoscephalae (197), Magnesia ad Sipylum (189) and the treaty of Apamea (188), the Eleusis' meeting (168), Pydna (168), the destruction of Corinth (146), the bequest of Attalos (133) and the creation of the province of Asia (129) comprise so many spectacular stages that have not escaped anyone. A generation after Polybios, the author of 1 Maccabees is perfectly aware of the complexity and this no doubt explains the care he takes to show that Judas and his successors have been on the right side since the 160s. On the other hand, a real earthquake occurred in Syria-Mesopotamia around 140. The Fertile Crescent, which had been unified under the rule of great empires since the eighth century—successively the Neo-Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian, Achaemenid Persian, Seleucid—was divided from 141–140 between the Parthian empire in the East (Babylonia, Mesopotamia) and a tiny remnant of the immense Seleucid empire in the West,⁷ the middle Euphrates gradually serving as the border. Tension was perceptible there from the 160s (the expedition to Iran by Antiochos IV in 164) and persisted until the failure of the expedition of Antiochos VII and his death in 129: after that date, the sovereigns of Antioch fought for crumbs. Along the “fault line” thus created, local powers emerged throughout the 2nd century (Armenia,

⁴ Mendels 2003, 145–152.

⁵ Atkinson 2018, with Mendels 2020 (review).

⁶ Rocca 2014a, 69–70.

⁷ Kosmin 2021, 243–248; Coşkun 2021, 287.

Commagene, Osrhoene, Arab chiefdoms of Syria, Nabatean), where Hasmonean Judea naturally found its place.

In this general context, the question is to know what place Hasmonean Judea occupies in the geopolitics of the Near East; what threats or advantages do it represent for its neighbors or for a distant power like Rome? The boundaries of the inquiry seem to me to be the liberation of the Temple in December 165, which testifies to the Judeans' ability to resist their Seleucid rulers, and Pompey's capture of Jerusalem in 63, which deprived the last Hasmoneans of any real capacity for initiative—Antigonos Mattathias' last gasp v. 40–37 had no future. The Judeans' partners can be divided into three groups: a sponsor (Rome), rivals (the neighboring Arabs) and adversaries (the Greek cities of the region). But first, we must add a fourth, omnipresent group: the Seleucid master, whose objectives influenced the actions of the Maccabees/Hasmoneans.

Weakened but still present masters: Seleucids and Lagids

Although the revolt only broke out in 168, its origins lie some ten years earlier. A recent discovery forces us to reassess the causes and aims of this revolt. The establishment of a “sacred affairs officer” in the satrapy of Koilè-Syria and Phoenicia⁸—he is probably also a “high priest,” although the word is missing from the texts that tell us about this innovation in Maresha and Byblos—provoked an incident between the high priest Onias III and the local Temple finance officer, Simon (2 Macc 3:4), leading to the arrival of Seleucos IV's chief minister, Heliodoros, in Jerusalem (2 Macc 3:8–40). The dismissal of the high priest Onias in 175 and his replacement by a high priest, Jason, sympathetic to the king's interests, were accompanied by a marked increase in the tax burden⁹ and the establishment of new institutions, such as the *polis* of Antioch of Jerusalem (2 Macc 4:8–9). These tax measures and innovations shocked some of the population and led to revolt. The Seleucid authorities suppressed the revolt with the usual violence of the State, although the Jewish sources combine the various components into an “edict of persecution” that never existed, even if certain measures hindered religious practice. The underlying reasons for the revolt led by Judas Maccabaeus were therefore both fiscal and cultural, to freedom (*eleutheria*)—which is not synonymous with the modern notion of independence—i.e. the possibility of living according to one's own laws and customs, even within a kingdom.¹⁰ The fact that the revolt broke out at the very moment when Rome had just restored freedom to the Greeks following its victory over Perseus of Macedonia may have encouraged the rebels and, more certainly, convinced their leaders to become close to them (1 Macc 8:1–32).

The regaining of control of the Temple (December 165), a major symbol of Judean identity, marked the failure of the Judean supporters of King Antiochos IV, and his successor, Antiochos V, drew the lessons: he punished those who had failed (execution

⁸ Wörrle – Cotton 2007, 191–205; Gera 2009, 125–155 (Maresha) (cf. *SEG* 57.1838; cf. *BE* 2012, 476; *SEG* 60. 1723); Yon 2015, 92–97 (corrected *BE* 2016, 527) (Byblos).

⁹ Honigman 2014a; Honigman 2014b.

¹⁰ Mendels 2019; Mendels 2020, 632.

of Menelaos) and drew closer to the victors. His successors continued in the same vein, and were all the more forced to do so as a crisis of legitimacy led to war between two pretenders to Seleucid power, both seeking support.

For the new leader of the insurgents, Jonathan, brother of Judas (who died in April 160: 1 Macc 9:1–22), the war between the pretenders presented an un hoped-for opportunity to find his place among the Seleucid state's high officers. Solicited by the two contenders, Alexander Balas and Demetrios I, and later by Diodotos Tryphon, Balas' successor, he quickly rose to the top of the court hierarchy—those of the king's "friends" and then "relatives"—while enjoying sufficient autonomy to extend his political and military authority far beyond Jerusalem and its environs (Judea in the geographical sense).¹¹ His brother and successor Simon pursued the same policy, and, after a fairly long pause,¹² the latter's son John Hyrcanus, who in the last decade of his long "reign" took control of most of Judea and Samaria, including the adjoining coast. As Katell Berthelot has shown,¹³ this was by no means the implementation of a "biblical" plan, an attempt to restore the kingdom of David and Solomon, but an opportunistic policy to expand as any Hellenistic state would, while maintaining a certain form of loyalty to the dynasty.¹⁴

Historians therefore have good reason to speak of the creation of a territorial state, especially as the Hasmoneans had an army at their disposal, their main means of pressure on the Seleucids. But was it really a state? Jonathan was made high priest by Alexander Balas and never took on any titles other than those conferred on him by Seleucid kings. Simon, as soon as Jonathan died,¹⁵ "rejected servitude to the Macedonians," stopped paying tribute, proclaimed freedom, inaugurated a new era and took on the titles of high priest, ethnarch and strategos (Josephus, *AJ* 13. 213–214). Royal suzerainty subsisted, even if the dynast distanced himself according to his growing strength.¹⁶ Antiochos VII uses only the titles of high priest and ethnarch (1 Macc 15:2) and, once freed of Tryphon, reminds him that he is his king (1 Macc 15:28–31) before besieging John Hyrcanus in Jerusalem and taking him on his campaign in Iran.¹⁷ Before Hyrcanus was able to mint coins in his own name, he issued bronzes in Jerusalem on behalf of Antiochos VII.¹⁸ No Seleucid, until the end of the dynasty, ever ceased to consider Judea an integral part of his kingdom. Incursions became rarer, not because the Hasmoneans were getting stronger, but because the Seleucids were getting weaker. Suffice it to recall

¹¹ Dąbrowa 2024b, 176–177.

¹² Shatzman 2007, 267–269.

¹³ Berthelot 2018, 118–153.

¹⁴ Coşkun 2022; already Fischer 1990, 13.

¹⁵ Josephus dates these measures to the Seleucid year 170, or 143–142.

¹⁶ Dąbrowa 2024a, 413–435. Cf. Dąbrowa 2024b on the building of Hasmonean power with the help of the Seleucids.

¹⁷ Nicolaos seems to be quoted literally by Josephus, *AJ* 13.250, when referring to Antiochos VII's campaign among the Parthians; *contra* Rocca 2014b, 272, n. 21, who invokes Diodoros or Posidonios instead. Not only did Hyrcanus contribute generously to the costs of the campaign, but Antiochos accepted a two-day break near Lykos, as it was a feast day for the Jews and they were forbidden to travel. On the expedition: Justin 38.9.4–10; 40; Diodoros 24.15–19; Appian, *Syr.* 68. On the other hand, there is nothing to be drawn from Josephus' Slavonic version (Josippon), which interpolates here a treaty of alliance between Hyrcanus and the Parthian Phraates II: Rocca 2014b, 271–274.

¹⁸ Ariel 2021.

Hyrchanus I's quarrels with Antiochos IX Cyzikenos, who reconquered numerous cities around 114–113 (Josephus, *AJ* 14.247–255) and was only deterred by the resumption of war with his brother Antiochos VIII Grypos, or the intervention of Demetrios III Eukairos, called in by Pharisees opposed to Alexander Jannaeus, who crushed Jannaeus near Shechem (88), so much so that even his opponents seemed to fear the disappearance of their new state (Josephus, *AJ* 13.379),¹⁹ or Antiochos XII Dionysos, who campaigned against the Nabateans around 87–86 (?) only the death of the Seleucid king (battle of Cana) saved Jannaeus from an offensive comeback:²⁰ the Seleucids never ceased to consider themselves as sovereigns of Judea.

This type of dependent relationship between the king and a dynast is by no means exceptional, and has parallels in other regions of this immense kingdom. The Seleucids were accustomed to granting a large degree of autonomy to certain local dynasts, even if it meant risking one or other of them breaking away from the kingdom. This is a phenomenon observed not only in Central Asia, but also in Iran and Asia Minor: Judea's only originality in this respect is that it is infinitely better documented.²¹ Here, as elsewhere, there was a risk of complete independence, but it was not inevitable. When Rome agreed to sign a treaty with the Hasmoneans, it pretended to be unaware of the legitimate link between the latter and the Seleucids and anticipated their independence. Above all, Rome demonstrated its omnipotence: it acted as it saw fit in its own interests.

But to mention the Seleucids alone distorts the perspective. For the former master of the Lagid kingdom is omnipresent during the revolt and especially in the half-century following the death of Judas. The marriage of Ptolemy V to Cleopatra Syra, daughter of Antiochos III, ushered in an era of intermarriages that almost inextricably intertwined the two dynasties. One need only recall that Cleopatra IV (great-granddaughter of Syra) married successively Ptolemy IX and Antiochos IX, and who was the mother of Antiochos X and Ptolemy of Cyprus, while her sister, Cleopatra V Selene, wife of the same sovereigns, gave birth to Berenice III, Ptolemy XI, Antiochos XIII and Seleucos VII. In other words, the same family ruled the whole of Syria and Egypt and tore itself apart.²²

This interweaving clearly appears on several occasions, notably with the coronation of Antiochos IV in Memphis in 168²³ and that of Ptolemy VI in Antioch in 145,²⁴ even if these are extreme episodes. It is more difficult to assess the role that this may have played for or against the Hasmoneans. We see that Ptolemy VI supported Balas for a long time, as did Jonathan, but when he switched to Demetrios I, Jonathan did not follow suit. However, this did not prevent Ptolemy VI from continuing to provide

¹⁹ Goldstein 1989, 339, writes that the Jews who had rallied to Demetrios changed sides after Jannaeus' defeat. Josephus does not say this, but only that 6,000 Judeans, taken with pity, gathered around Jannaeus; only the Slavonic version equates them with those who fought for Demetrios: cf. Rabin 1956, 7; Dąbrowa 2010c.

²⁰ Josephus, *AJ* 13.387–391, summarizes the entire reign of Antiochos XII Dionysos in a few sentences; *BJ* 1. 99–102, says no more; cf. Will 2003, 450. In another passage, Josephus refers to Canatha in the Hauran as Cana, but Antiochos XII's itinerary in this campaign against Aretas III should have taken him further south, unless the Nabatean army was in the Hauran and the Seleucid wanted to catch him off guard.

²¹ Cf. Strootman 2018. In the same vein, Wenghofer 2018 (Bactria) and Engels 2018 (Persia), but especially Chrubasik 2021, which focuses on dynasts/high priests.

²² Kosmin 2021, 253–254; Coşkun 2021, 269–291; Fischer-Bovet 2021, 304–305.

²³ Porphyry in Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel*, 11.24; cf. Blasius 2009.

²⁴ Chauveau 1990; Kosmin 2021, 253.

financial assistance to Jonathan if the didrachms that were only found in Judea before 150 were indeed issued by him.²⁵ Furthermore, the question arises as to the desire of the Lagid branch of the family to recover at least Coele-Syria and Phoenicia, as the Seleucid chancellery constantly referred to Lagid Syria. It has often been ruled out, but it seems that Ptolemy VI, by renouncing the crown of the two kingdoms in 145, made a pact with Demetrios II to recover Koilè-Syria;²⁶ it is true that the fear of the Romans and the memory of the day of Eleusis must have played a primordial role in his renunciation. Similarly, by supporting Zabinas (128–123) against the same Demetrios II, Ptolemy VIII would be aiming for the same objective, ultimately giving up only because the power of John Hyrcanus now appeared too great: his numerous campaigns in various regions between 128 and 123, probably the cause of the burying of numerous hoards of treasure, would have dissuaded Ptolemy VIII from continuing along this path after the death of Zabinas.²⁷ Judea was therefore just one pawn among many in the struggle between the two branches of the royal family, with the Ptolemaic branch undoubtedly aiming to reconquer the region, or even reunify it for its own benefit. But in the end, the Ptolemies yielded to the policy long pursued by their Seleucid cousins or half-brothers, that of government by local dynasts who accepted their alliance.²⁸ The final episode involving the Lagid branch in the Southern Levant illustrates both this and the difficulty of the situation.

This is the episode known as the “War of the Scepters,” in 103–101.²⁹ Ptolemais, besieged by Jannaeus, appealed to Ptolemy IX Lathyros, king of Cyprus (Josephus, *AJ* 13.324–333).³⁰ But at the last moment, the people of Ptolemais feared that they would incur the wrath of Cleopatra III, his mother, with whom he was in open conflict (she supported her other son, Ptolemy X), and suffer from him what they feared from Jannaeus, according to Josephus.³¹ Ptolemy IX initially allied himself with Jannaeus, but broke with him when he learned that he was secretly negotiating with Cleopatra III. He campaigned in Galilee, capturing various places and inflicting a heavy defeat on Jannaeus near the Jordan (Josephus, *AJ* 13.334–347).³² Cleopatra III (who held Gaza and Ptolemais) was keen to seize all or part of the Hasmonean kingdom, thus following in the footsteps of Ptolemy VI and Ptolemy VIII. According to Josephus who found a good opportunity to highlight a Jewish official, she was diverted by her adviser Ananias (Josephus, *AJ* 13.348–355). In a hurry to return to Egypt, where the fratricidal war had

²⁵ Olivier 2018; Fischer-Bovet 2021, 301.

²⁶ Fischer-Bovet 2021, 299.

²⁷ Fischer-Bovet 2021, 305–307.

²⁸ Fischer-Bovet 2021, 309–310.

²⁹ A detailed study based on a copious dossier of Greek and Demotic papyri and Greek, Demotic and hieroglyphic inscriptions, which enrich and clarify Josephus’ detailed account: Van ’t Dack *et al.* 1989.

³⁰ Rocca 2014b, 276–277, 281–282.

³¹ This explanation seems to me to be completely unfounded, as there can be no doubt that the inhabitants of Ptolemais feared above all the forced Judaization that Samaria and other cities had just undergone, which Ptolemy IX was unlikely to impose; the real causes of the about-turn probably lie in a better assessment of the balance of power between Ptolemy IX and his mother Cleopatra III.

³² He is said to have massacred women and children to punish the population, says Josephus, citing passages from Strabo and Nicolaos.

shifted,³³ Cleopatra III concluded an agreement with Alexander Jannaeus at Scythopolis, which enabled the latter to lay siege to Gaza, which Ptolemy IX had just left. With the Lagids out of the way, Jannaeus seized Gadara in Transjordan, which fell after a ten-month siege (Josephus, *AJ* 13.356), but the campaign ended in a difficult retreat after Theodoros, son of Zenon Cotylas, tyrant of Philadelphia, massacred the Jewish troops and looted their baggage (101).

This single contact with neighboring Egypt *ultimately* benefited the new Hasmonean ruler, but the fact remains that Cleopatra III and her sons had acted freely in their former satrapy of Syria and Phoenicia.³⁴ But the episode testifies both to Jannaeus' fear of the cities (see below) and to his weakness: not only did he suffer several defeats at the hands of the royal armies, but he also had to retreat against the master of Philadelphia, the tyrant Theodoros, just as he had to return to the Arabs of Petra the conquests he had recently made in Moab and Edom to prevent them from supporting his Pharisaic opponents (Josephus, *AJ* 13.382). Against the Seleucids and the Lagids, the Hasmonean's strength lay in the disunity of his opponents, which he skillfully exploited.

We must keep these facts in mind, so as not to fall into the trap of Judean documentation that seeks to highlight the existence of a state that *de facto* exists but always remains at the mercy of its former masters. The fact remains that Hasmonean Judea was a power, useful to some (Rome), a rival to others (the Arabs), and a threat to those closest to it (the Greek cities).

Rome: A useful friend and ally?

When did Hasmonean *power* begin? Historians hesitate between Jonathan's installation in Jerusalem (between 157 and 152), the evacuation of Akra by Seleucid troops (142), the death of Antiochos VII (129), which put an end to his reconquest, the death of John Hyrcanus³⁵ or Aristobulos' assumption of the royal title (104–103). All these dates are legitimate, but the recapture of the Temple at the end of 165, fragile though it was, shows that the Judeans had achieved their main objective and were a force to be reckoned with.

The editor of 2 Macc has forwarded a series of documents, four of which seem to form a coherent whole (2 Macc 11:16–38),³⁶ despite some disorder and obvious errors. It seems to me that Dov Gera has given the best possible chronology and explanation.³⁷ A letter from a king Antiochos (doc. 2) to his minister Lysias mentions the recent death of his father and invites him to open negotiations with the Judeans (2 Macc 11:22–26); this is clearly the young Antiochos V and the document must therefore date from the very end of 164 or the beginning of 163. A letter from Lysias to the Judeans (doc.

³³ By June 102 at the latest, Ptolemy X Alexander, who had been sent by Cleopatra III to Damascus, had returned to Pelusium.

³⁴ Whitehorne 1995.

³⁵ Dąbrowa 2024a, 434.

³⁶ I exclude an undated letter from Antiochos IV to the Judeans announcing the appointment of his son as successor (2 Macc 11:19–27). The authenticity of the documents seems in little doubt, despite some dating errors: Fischer 1974, 90–93.

³⁷ Gera 1998, 242–247; I use Gera's numbering for convenience.

1) takes stock of the situation after he has received an embassy from them, and states that certain requests have been passed on to the king. The date given (the year 148 Seleucid era) precludes it from emanating from the same Antiochos V (it is therefore not a continuation of doc. 2), since the wording indicates that the king is not close to Lysias (which is never the case with the child Antiochos V) and, as guardian of the same Antiochos V, Lysias surely does not need to consult him to reply to the ambassadors. The date must therefore be in the summer of 164, when Antiochos IV was in Iran; we can't be more precise, as the month indicated is unknown and the year given is surely incorrect. Roman legates on their way to Antioch (doc. 4) had met the Judean ambassadors around the same time, and were familiar with Lysias's replies; they offered to intervene on behalf of the Judeans with the king (implying that they were awaiting his return from the war). The date given—15 Xanthikos 148, March–April 164—is absurd, as the Romans would never have used the Seleucid calendar; this dating is based on an initiative on the part of the editor, who got confused about the chronology of the documents. Finally, a letter from King Antiochos IV, dated Xanthikos 15, 148, proposes an amnesty; but the 15-day deadline is absurd if the king has already left for the East, as the letter would not even have time to arrive! So this letter is not the king's response to the requests presented by the Judean ambassadors, but an earlier proposal addressed to Menelaos.³⁸

The letter from the Roman legates in 164 has been deemed anachronistic³⁹ and would indeed be the only time the Romans would take the initiative to enter into relations with the Judeans, in the midst of a conflict with their sovereign authority. Nevertheless, the whole is coherent and therefore probably authentic. That there were Roman legates⁴⁰ is probable, and they were no doubt keeping an eye on what was happening in Judea. Why did the Romans intervene? Rome's aim was to weaken a Seleucid power that remained firm, as demonstrated by Antiochos IV's invasion of Egypt in 168. Admittedly, since the Peace of Apamea (188), Rome had imposed limits on the Seleucids in the Mediterranean, as well as significant war damages, which had perhaps not yet been fully paid in 164.⁴¹ Supporting the Judeans meant exerting indirect pressure on the court of Antioch, as they had done shortly before by supporting the Galatians (declaring them "autonomous") against Eumenes II of Pergamon, who was nonetheless their "friend and ally."⁴² This was not the Romans' only means of exerting pressure, since they held the son of Seleukos IV, the future Demetrios I, the legitimate heir, as a hostage, and, in 175, allowed his brother Antiochos IV to seize the diadem in a manner contrary to custom. The legates' proposal in 164 was no more than informal support, and did not lead to any *fœdus* that would commit Rome.

The truce observed in 163 allowed Judean armies to campaign on behalf of peripheral Jewish communities supposedly under threat,⁴³ but there is no evidence that this was the result of Roman intervention. After a lull, fighting resumed with the Seleucids

³⁸ Gera 1998, 246–247, following Habicht 1979.

³⁹ Coşkun 2018, 112, n. 115.

⁴⁰ The names are corrupted and impossible to reconstruct: Gera 1998, 250.

⁴¹ *Contra* Goldstein 1989, 298: paid before 168–167.

⁴² Gera 1998, 199–200, 251–252.

⁴³ 1 Macc 5 = Josephus, *AJ* 12.335–340.

in 162, and almost immediately Demetrios, the legitimate heir of Seleukos IV, “fled” from Rome (autumn 162), no doubt with calculated complicity, to weaken the Seleucid monarchy through competition between the two branches of the family.⁴⁴ He landed at Tripolis (*AJ* 12.389, late 162), and had Antiochos V and Lysias⁴⁵ executed, without giving up the fight against the rebels. But his flight put him in a bad light with Rome, which did not recognize him as king until 159. So when, in 161, Judas sent Eupolemos, son of John, and Jason, son of Eleazar, on an embassy to Rome to propose, according to 1 Macc, a treaty of friendship and alliance (1 Macc 8:17 = Josephus, *AJ* 12.415–419), it was very well received.⁴⁶ Some have doubted the validity of such an agreement, and wanted to limit it to a simple declaration of *amicitia*.⁴⁷ Altay Coşkun has shown that this was not the case and that, as early as 161, it was indeed a *fœdus* in due form.⁴⁸ If the Judeans could have been ignorant of Roman customs in 161, when the continuator of the primitive version of 1 Macc inserts into the Greek version, at the beginning of the reign of Hyrcanus I,⁴⁹ a series of official documents, he may have abridged them (omitting passages that would have shocked some pious Jews such as oaths before pagan gods or that were of no political interest such as procedures), but they are certainly not distorted because everyone could read them and check them.⁵⁰ In the time of John Hyrcanus, the author had good reason to believe that the future of the entire region was in Rome’s hands, as Polybios had emphasised a generation earlier.⁵¹

The meeting of 164 BCE, then the embassy of 161 BCE inaugurated regular relations between Rome and the Hasmoneans. It may come as a surprise that the Romans would sign such a treaty with a people who were in principle subject to royal rule. The previous year, it had not hesitated to support Timarchos of Miletos, strategos of the Upper Satrapies, who had proclaimed himself king against Demetrios I.⁵² Roman-Judean relations were marked by the regular renewal of the treaty of friendship and alliance by Jonathan,⁵³ Simon⁵⁴ and John Hyrcanus, the latter by three embassies.⁵⁵ The Judeans were not singled out for special treatment because, as 1 Macc notes, the Romans “offered their friendship to all who came” (1 Macc 8:1), illustrating a remark by a Campanian

⁴⁴ Cassius Dio 20.25 (Zonaras 9.25) suggests as much.

⁴⁵ Livy, *per.* 46; Josephus, *AJ* 12.389–390.

⁴⁶ On its authenticity, see Hadas-Lebel 2011, 19–21; this is the first treaty according to Josephus *AJ* 12.419, which ignores the exchange between the Roman envoys and the Judeans two years earlier.

⁴⁷ Mandell 1991; Zollschan 2017.

⁴⁸ Coşkun 2018, which refutes the claims of Zollschan 2017 on every point.

⁴⁹ I unhesitatingly adopt the editor’s high dating of 1 Macc, which is more likely 130 than 100 BCE: Schwartz 1991.

⁵⁰ Coşkun 2018, 113.

⁵¹ MacRae 2021, 331–346.

⁵² Diodoros 31.27a, 1: the text is mutilated, but the Senate seems to recognize Timarchos as king.

⁵³ 1 Macc 12:1–4 mentions him just after Antiochos VI’s proclamation as king.

⁵⁴ 1 Macc 14:16–24 mentions this immediately after Jonathan’s death. The renewal of friendship concerns both Rome and Sparta: 1 Macc 14:20–23 (letter from the Spartans) and 14:24 (Noumenios in Rome) and 15:15–24 (return of Noumenios and letter from the Romans to Ptolemy VIII).

⁵⁵ At the beginning of his reign around 134 (1 Macc 15:16–21 = Josephus, *AJ* 14.145–148), in 128 after the death of Antiochos VII (Josephus, *AJ* 13.260–263) and around 112–111 (Josephus, *AJ* 14.247–255, reproducing the *senates consultum* within a decree from Pergamon). Cf. Dąbrowa 2019, 392.

ambassador to Rome reported by Livy.⁵⁶ But despite this formal agreement, Rome never became involved militarily in the conflict between the Judeans and the Seleucids, even in the most dangerous circumstances for the Judeans. On the other hand, it widely publicized the existence of its support, as Josephus recalls after Simon's embassy.⁵⁷ Similarly, the third embassy sent by John Hyrcanus around 113–112 (Josephus, *AJ* 14.247–255),⁵⁸ obtained Rome's recognition of the Judeans' territorial possessions, in response to the requests made by a first embassy.⁵⁹ It coincided with the resumption of a much more aggressive Hasmonean policy than before towards neighboring states and peoples.⁶⁰ Rome sent a letter on the subject to all its friends and allies, and the Roman *senatus-consultum*⁶¹ is known from a decree issued by Pergamon, which, like other cities, ratified Rome's decision (Josephus, *AJ* 14.247–255). However, there is no reason to doubt the *fœdus* between Rome and Judea, even if the word does not appear explicitly either in Diodoros (40.2),⁶² or in Justin's abridgement of Pompeius Trogus (36.3.9).⁶³

Judea was far from being an exception, and Rome probably paid no more attention to it than to other allies. So, where Josephus refers to Jerusalem and Judea, outside authors are much more vague. According to Athenaeus of Naucratis (10.439), citing Polybios (30.9), Daphne's feasts were largely financed by the systematic plundering of most of the kingdom's sanctuaries, in addition to the booty taken in Egypt in 169 and 168, and contributions from Antiochos IV's friends. Josephus prefers to highlight the looting of the Jerusalem temple alone in 169 (Josephus, *AJ* 12.246–247) and again the following year (Josephus, *AJ* 12.248–250).⁶⁴ Polybios' lacunar state may deprive us of previously unpublished information on Judean affairs, but it is striking that Josephus never mentions Polybios, who gives, according to the surviving fragments, numerous details on the return of Demetrios I to Syria (book 31), the dispatch to Rome of the presumed assassins of C. Octavius (book 32)

⁵⁶ Livy, 7.30.5: *Fuit quidem apud vos semper satis iusta causa amicitiae, celle eum vobis alicum esse, qui vos appeteret* ("The fact that he who seeks you wants to be your friend has always been for you a sufficiently valid reason for friendship").

⁵⁷ 1 Macc 15:16–21 transmits the letter addressed to Ptolemy VIII, but adds at the end (1 Macc 15:22–24), that a copy was sent "to King Demetrios, to Attalos, to Ariarathes, to Arsaces. And to all the countries allied to them, to Lampsakos, the Lacedaemonians, Delos, Myndos, Sicyone, Caria, to Samos, Pamphylia, Lycia, Halicarnassos, Cos, Sidon, Arados, Rhodos, Phaselis, Gortyn, Cnidos, Cyprus and Cyrene," and Simon.

⁵⁸ Josephus combines the Pergamon decree with other, much later ones.

⁵⁹ Cf. Will 2003, 450–451; Dąbrowa 2019, 392.

⁶⁰ Shatzman 2007, 250–251, 267–269.

⁶¹ Rocca 2014b, 283, attributes both the Athens decree and the Pergamon decree to Hyrcanus II, which remains highly problematic.

⁶² Diodoros 40.2 (Loeb) (40.4 CUF); during Pompey's stay in Damascus, the delegation of notables (ἐπιφανέστατοι) opposed to both Hyrcanus II and Aristobulos II, recall that embassies sent to the Senate in the time of Demetrios had obtained for the Judeans to be "free and autonomous." Justin specifies that the Judeans were the first to obtain this privilege, which is clearly untrue, even when identifying King Demetrios with Demetrios I. More likely, however, it refers to Demetrios II and the embassy of 128: Coşkun 2018, 93, n. 29; 103, n. 75.

⁶³ *A Demetrio quum descivissent, amicitia Romanorum petita, primi omnium ex Orientalibus libertatem receperunt. facile tunc Romanis de alieno largientibus.*

⁶⁴ Josephus, referring to the sacking of the Jerusalem temple, mentions the testimonies of Polybios and Apollodoros of Athens (*FGrHist* 244 F 79), probable sources for Timagenes of Alexandria (*FGrHist* 88 F 4), from where the information passed to Strabo (*FGrHist* 91 F 10) and Nicolaos of Damascus (F 91 in: Parmentier – Barone 2011, 168–171), then Castor of Rhodes the Chronographer (*FGrHist* 250 F 13).

and the competition between Demetrios and Balas (book 33): the Judeans never appear in the surviving fragments. As for Strabo, a century and a half after the fact, he remains so general that it's sometimes hard to know whether he's really talking about Hasmonean Judea. One of the few possible allusions made by him is limited to mentioning "rebels who plundered their own country and those of their neighbors," while "those associating with their leaders, seized the property of others in most of Syria and Phoenicia."⁶⁵

The Roman *fœdus* was not renewed after Hyrcanus I, or at least Josephus does not mention it.⁶⁶ Occupied in Italy by the Social War (90–88), then in Anatolia and the Balkans by Mithridates VI Eupator (88–63), not to mention the civil war between Marius and Sylla, the Romans paid little attention to the Hasmonean state. Is this why Alexander Jannaeus and his wife Salome did not send an embassy to Rome? Or was it because the treaty did not protect the kingdom from Seleucid incursions?⁶⁷ The very unfavorable references to Rome in the Qumran writings (*Habakkuk peshet*, for instance) do not commit the Hasmonean royal power, and there is no indication of a change in Hasmonean policy towards the Romans. On one occasion, however, there may have been a disagreement between Judea and Rome. In 70, during the reign of Salome Alexandra, Tigranes II of Armenia laid siege to Ptolemais. According to Josephus (Josephus, *AJ* 13.419–421), rumors spread that he was targeting Judea. Salome sent an embassy with rich gifts to try to avoid this outcome. The affair was short-lived, as the city had only just surrendered to Tigranes when he evacuated the whole of Syria on learning that Lucullus was ravaging his kingdom and threatening his capital. Rome, the Seleucid queen Cleopatra Selene and Alexandra Salome had the same adversary,⁶⁸ Tigranes II, but Salome's embassy to Tigranes was in no way a sign of alliance between Salome and Selene, as Rocca asserts; on the contrary, Salome's gifts were not aimed at lifting the siege, but at warding off the continuation of the war towards Judea; moreover, Josephus adds that Tigranes appreciated the tribute, and gave the ambassadors "the best of hopes," which remains vague. The tribute paid to Tigranes also indirectly marked a break with Rome, whose armies, led by Lucullus, were ravaging Armenia and pursuing Mithridates. It is doubtful, despite Rocca's claim, that Salome knew in advance that Lucullus was planning to invade Armenia and to seize the capital, thus colluding with Lucullus.⁶⁹ In any case, no one seems to have held Salome to account for a policy guided solely by Judean interests.

When Rome was forced to concern itself once again with the Hasmonean kingdom, in 64–63, the Seleucids no longer reigned in Syria: Rome had replaced them. The Hasmoneans realized this immediately, as the quarrel between the two sons of Jannaeus was brought before Pompey by Hyrcanus II and Aristobulos II themselves, and no doubt by a third delegation opposed to both. Aristobulos, "king of the Judeans" appears by name in Pompey's list of subjugated peoples and sovereigns.⁷⁰ From friends and allies, the Hasmoneans became clients.

⁶⁵ Polyb. 16.2.37: Οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἀφιστάμενοι τὴν χώραν ἐκάκουν καὶ αὐτὴν γειτιῶσαν, οἱ δὲ συμπράττοντες τοῖς ἄρχουσι καθήρπαζον τὰ ἀλλότρια καὶ τῆς Συρίας κατεστρέφοντο καὶ τῆς Φοινίκης πολλήν.

⁶⁶ Rocca 2014a, 62–63, believes that the treaty remains in force.

⁶⁷ Dąbrowa 2019, 396.

⁶⁸ Rocca 2014b, 285–286.

⁶⁹ Rocca 2014a, 69–70.

⁷⁰ Diodoros 40.3.4.

Nabateans and other Arabs: Rivals?

Until John Hyrcanus, Arabs appeared only sporadically in the political environment of Judea. After the disappearance of the Tobiad chiefdom of Iraq al-Amir in Ammanitis in the early 160s, Jason, driven out of Jerusalem by Menelaos in 169, returned beyond the Jordan and found himself indicted by the Nabatean Aretas (1 Macc 5:7–8). He had to flee from city to city, ending up in Egypt, from where he reached Sparta. This is the first mention of contact between Nabateans and Judeans. A decade later, in 160–159, the Beni Jambri of Madaba (1 Macc 9:36)⁷¹ plundered the Maccabees' luggage, which the youngest brother, John, had been charged with taking to safety with the Nabateans. To Rabbatamana? Petra? We don't know, but Jonathan and Simon engaged in fierce reprisals at a wedding shortly afterwards (1 Macc 9:37–42). It's a classic vendetta, but the episode reveals that the Nabateans chose to support the Maccabees. As early as 163, Nabateans from the Hauran⁷² had warned Judas and his brothers of the threats facing the Jews of the region. It was among them, the Nabateans "his friends" (1 Macc 9:35), that Jonathan and his brothers wished to shelter their possessions.

It's easy to see why the Maccabees needed allies, but what about the Nabateans? The weakening of Seleucid power could only encourage their expansion northwards. What's more, the Maccabean policy of repatriating Jews west of the Jordan River seemed to give them a free hand. However, this community of interests led to a rivalry: Jonathan's expansionist policy risked thwarting the Nabateans' progress northwards. As long as the Hasmoneans remained west of the Jordan, conflict was avoided. But when they crossed it, they came up against the rulers of Petra. Conflict also arose in the south, notably for control of Idumea and Gaza. But that clash would be deferred until the last decades of the 2nd century.

Without wishing to be exhaustive, it is worth noting the proven points of friction between Judeans and Nabateans. The earliest is in the northern Negev, with the capture of Beersheba (no later than 104) and other nearby towns, where the Hasmoneans engaged in forced Judaization (Josephus, *AJ* 13.257–258),⁷³ although Strabo (16.2.34) exonerates the Hasmoneans from the forced conversion of the Idumeans who were originally Nabateans and perpetrators of a sedition; they were expelled and had voluntarily adhered to Judaism.

A second confrontation occurred in 101, when Jannaeus seized Raphia and Anthedon (the port of Gaza), then laid siege to Gaza, which was forced to surrender after a year, despite an attempt by the Nabateans to lift the siege (Josephus, *AJ* 13.359–364). Gaza and its

⁷¹ Cf. Milik 1980 proposed to identify them with the members of the tribe (the lineage) of 'Amrat, attested by numerous graffiti in the Syro-Jordanian desert and by a Greek-Nabatean bilingual in Madaba.

⁷² The sites mentioned in 1 Macc 5:26 and 36 are traditionally located in the Hauran, due to the possible identification of three toponyms (Bosor, Bosora and Alema) with Busr al-Hariri, Bostra and Alma, but the author indicates that all these sites are located in Gilead, which is indeed the usual horizon of the Judeans. However, Gilead corresponds to northwestern Jordan (Ajloun) rather than to Hauran. It is conceivable that the Judeans may have named the territories in the extension of this region Gilead, for want of a name for this remote region. Neither Kasher 1988 (cf. map p. 31), nor Goldstein 1989, 304–305, really ask this question.

⁷³ Josephus seems to be confirmed by the only fragment preserved from Ptolemy the Historian, *Herod the King*, in Stern 1974–1984, no. 146; on the meaning of this more or less forced conversion, cf. Cohen 1990, 211–218.

neighboring ports were the traditional outlet for the incense route and the point of communication between the Arabs and the Mediterranean. Held back for some time by riots, Jannaeus again clashed with the Nabateans for control of Moab and Gilead, i.e., the western and north-western sectors of Transjordan. where he took control of Amathous. Competition moved further north, as the war with Obodas ended in a Hasmonean disaster on the Jawlan (Battle of Garada) (Josephus, *AJ* 13.375). By that time, the Nabateans had conquered the Hauran as far as Damascus, which explains why the inhabitants of this city called on Aretas III to protect them from the Itureans of Lebanon in 84. Without any connection with the preceding events, Josephus reports that Aretas III in turn attacked Judea (circa 84–83) and inflicted a further defeat on Jannaeus (battle of Adida) (*AJ* 13, 392), which did not prevent Jannaeus from extending his domain beyond the Jordan. He died in 76 while besieging Regaba in the territory of Gerasa (Josephus, *AJ* 13.398),⁷⁴ east of Amathous, i.e. on the edge of the Nabatean domain. It is possible that Jannaeus' choice of Antipas, Herod's grandfather, as strategos for Idumea, who maintained close relations with the Nabateans, was enough to defuse a possible conflict with them (Josephus, *AJ* 14.10).⁷⁵

The end of Judean imperialism after the death of Jannaeus brought a pause in the conflict. There was even a rather spectacular rapprochement between the rulers of Petra and Jerusalem under the influence of the new strongman of Judea: the Idumean Antipater, the son of Antipas. In the conflict between Hyrcanus II and his brother Aristobulos, Antipater sided with Hyrcanus, the legitimate heir. Despite an agreement between the two brothers, whereby Hyrcanus ceded the royal title to his brother but retained the office of high priest (Josephus, *AJ* 14.7), Antipater persuaded Hyrcanus that his life was in danger and that he should seek refuge with the Nabateans, with whom he had special ties (he had married a Nabatean, Herod's mother). Hyrcanus hesitated, then agreed to call Aretas III for help. The latter saw this as an opportunity to recover the Transjordanian villages that he had been forced to cede to Jannaeus. The arrival of Roman legates in Damascus, followed by Pompey himself later presented both sides with new challenges: Aristobulos was besieged in the Temple by Pompey (63) and Scaurus, one of Pompey's legates, agreed to stop besieging Petra against a heavy ransom (62). The Hasmoneans and the Nabateans alike entered the Roman orbit and became, *de facto*, "allied and friendly" states, an elegant way of saying "clients:" they both appear on Pompey's list of the defeated!

The territorial rivalry between Judeans and Nabateans was coupled with a peaceful political rivalry, which I have already attempted to highlight.⁷⁶ At the same time, the Arabs of Petra and the Judeans of Jerusalem were building two Hellenistic-type kingdoms on either side of the Jordan and the Wadi Arabah, with the establishment of a kingship,⁷⁷ a royal army based at least in part on mercenaries, a coinage,⁷⁸ a court (and sumptuous

⁷⁴ Mittmann 1970, 90, mentions *raġib* on the wadi of the same name, west of Gerasa, without mentioning the toponym mentioned by Josephus; but Kasher 1988, 102, places Ragaba in much the same position, but in the wrong valley, since he places it on the edge of the nahr az-Zerqa, which flows a little further south from wadi Raġib.

⁷⁵ Kasher 1988, 86–105.

⁷⁶ Sartre 2008.

⁷⁷ Under Aristobulos I (104–103), according to Josephus *AJ* 13.301). Strabo 16.2.40) attributes this innovation to Alexander Jannaeus but the short reign of Aristobulos may have escaped him.

⁷⁸ Meshorer 1975; Barag – Qedar 1980, 16–19; Rappoport 1976, 171–186; Rappoport 1984, 32–40 (under John Hyrcanus); Meshorer 1990–1991, 106.

palaces), which brought them into line with the other kingdoms of the eastern Mediterranean, notably those of Anatolia. They did not copy each other but borrowed from the same institutional repertoire. The facts are better dated for the Hasmoneans (thanks to Josephus) than for the Nabateans, but the parallelism in the establishment of royal institutions is remarkable. This state-building, which was not the result of acculturation but merely of adaptation to the practices of the time, not only enabled them to preserve their own identity intact, but also to communicate with neighboring states that shared the same mode of operation.⁷⁹ Hasmonean Judea could not find its place in the Mediterranean of the 2nd–1st centuries BCE without this institutional transformation.

Non-Jewish sources know nothing of this rivalry and only begin to mention the Nabateans when Pompeian legates arrived in Syria. No Arab Flavius Josephus has written their history, but it's clear that they shared a common goal: to take advantage of the weakening Seleucids to build a viable territorial state for themselves. For the Nabateans, long confined to the arid zones of the northern Arabian Peninsula and Transjordan, two sectors were vital: on the one hand, the coastal zone of northern Sinai, the Arabs' traditional outlet to the Mediterranean terminal of the incense route (Pliny, *HN*, 12.63–64); on the other, the watered hills of western Transjordan, from Moab to Jawlan and Hauran, the only areas where non-irrigated agriculture could develop and provide cereals, vines and orchards. However, in these two areas, they were in competition with the Judeans, whose demographic expansion had led part of their population to emigrate beyond the Jordan since the 2nd century BCE. This explains the friction between Judeans and Nabateans over control of areas beyond the grasp of a powerful kingdom, whether Lagid or Seleucid. This fundamental fact logically continues beyond the disappearance of the Hasmoneans, as can be seen at the end of the 30s.⁸⁰

Greek cities: Close enemies, distant friends

The founding of a *polis* in Jerusalem in 175 had been one of the causes of the revolt, and its liquidation one of its objectives. The region's *poleis* therefore had good reason to be wary of the Hasmoneans. There were fewer cities in the southern Levant than in northern Syria, but there were some close by in Phoenicia (Ptolemais, Dora), on the coast (The Tower of Straton, Joppa, Ascalon, Gaza), as well as north of Jerusalem (Samaria, Scythopolis), especially beyond the Jordan and Lake Tiberias (Gadara, Gerasa, Pella, Philadelphia, Seleucia-Hippus, Dion).

From the Hasmonean point of view, the cities neighboring their kingdom were not states with which they maintained relations, as they did with the Nabateans or Ptolemies, but military and economic objectives which they wanted to control.⁸¹ In most cases, they succeeded, even if some of them put up long resistance, such as Samaria (siege from 112

⁷⁹ Dąbrowa 2021, 208–209.

⁸⁰ Cf. Sartre (forthcoming).

⁸¹ Kasher 1990 is too schematic to be useful (cf. Mendels 1994); hatred between Greeks and Judeans is by no means systematic and was undoubtedly fuelled by the Hasmoneans' policy of forced Judaization, but it already existed before the revolt: Safrai 2000.

to autumn 109) (Josephus, *AJ* 13.275–281; *BJ* 1.64–66),⁸² Gadara (*AJ* 13.356: 10-month siege), Scythopolis (*AJ* 13.280) or Gaza in 144 (*AJ* 13.150) and 101–100 (*AJ* 13.358–364). They were never partners of the Hasmonean state,⁸³ but targets coveted by the kingdom. Some were unsuccessfully targeted, as in the case of Ptolemais in 101 and Damascus in 70, while others, such as Ascalon,⁸⁴ seem to have escaped covetousness. According to Josephus (*BJ* 1.115; *AJ* 13.418), Salome Alexandra sent an army to the aid of Damascus, which was being harassed by the Iturean dynast Ptolemy, son of Mennaios, but “returned without having accomplished anything remarkable.”⁸⁵ Under the guise of fighting brigandage, Alexandra’s aim was undoubtedly to take control of the rich oasis which had regained a major regional role since the middle of the 2nd century.⁸⁶ It’s safe to assume that if she succeeded, Damascus would have suffered the same fate as Samaria, Scythopolis and the other subjugated cities. The appeal of Ptolemais to Ptolemy IX in 103 was already explained by the same reasons. The Hellenism that permeated the kingdom’s institutions and royal palaces did not go so far as to tolerate the presence of a non-Jewish population and Greek city institutions in the kingdom’s cities. The title of *Philhellenes* borne by Aristobulos I (Josephus, *AJ* 13.318) has nothing to do with his policy towards the Greeks and non-Jews of his kingdom, and Josephus, in the sentence that follows (Josephus, *AJ* 13.319), quoting Strabo himself a tributary of Timagenes, accurately describes his policy of forced Judaization. The title of *Philhellene*, worn only by non-Greek rulers (the Parthians Mithridates I and Mithridates II, Mithridates I and Antiochos I of Commagene), enabled him to rank among the rulers of his time. That said, it’s likely that for rhetorical reasons, ancient authors sometimes exaggerated the scale of the destruction. Safrai shows with good arguments that indigenous cities such as Shechem and Mareshah were hit harder than the *poleis*, and among these, those inland (Samaria, Scythopolis) more than those on the coast (Joppa, Dora),⁸⁷ even if it is doubtful whether this corresponds to biblical injunctions.⁸⁸

This hostile policy towards the Greek cities of the region did not prevent the Hasmoneans from maintaining regular diplomatic relations with at least one distant city: Sparta.⁸⁹ According to Jonathan’s letter to the Spartan magistrates (c. 144), contacts between Judeans and Lacedemonians go back a long way, perhaps to the end of the fourth century BCE.⁹⁰ But the content of the exchanges suggests a kinship between peoples, as can be seen from other examples.⁹¹ Could there be a political dimension? The high

⁸² The chronology was clarified by Finkielsztein 1998, 33, 63; cf. Dąbrowa 2007.

⁸³ Dąbrowa 2020, regarding their Judaization, land allocation and repopulation; cf. also Dąbrowa 2010a.

⁸⁴ Safrai 2000, 89.

⁸⁵ I fail to see from where Rocca 2014b, 286, concludes that the Hasmonean army captured Damascus.

⁸⁶ Kosmin 2021, 249, 251.

⁸⁷ Safrai 2000, 76.

⁸⁸ Safrai 2000, 77.

⁸⁹ 1 Macc 12:6; Josephus, *AJ* 13.165–170; cf. Katzoff 1985, 485–489; Berthelot 2024.

⁹⁰ The mention of a high priest Onias is of little help, but the Spartan king Areus refers to either Areus I (309–265) or Areus II (260–254). The latter, who died at the age of 8, seems to have been excluded, whereas a high priest Onias is attested at the time of Areus I, poorly dated, but undoubtedly in place at the end of the ivth century; cf. Katzoff 1985, 486, n. 3. Berthelot 2024, 360–362, presents the arguments for and against the authenticity of the Maccabean documents, with an extensive bibliography.

⁹¹ Curty 1992 with a possible explanation of this unexpected *syngeneia*.

priest Jason, driven out by Menelaos, ends up in Sparta (2 Macc 5:7–9).⁹² When Jonathan sent an embassy to Rome around 144, he sent a letter to the Spartans and “to other cities” to renew the alliance and friendship (1 Macc 12:2). The author does not mention any other city by name, and it is clear that no city in the Aegean world was in a position to help the Judeans, not even the Spartans. The notion invoked, “alliance and friendship,” borrowed from Roman diplomatic vocabulary, was a way of showing off a network of friends and possible helpers. For the author of 1 Macc, it is above all a question of placing Judea in the concert of nations. The Spartans’ reply came after Jonathan’s death, and merely stated that Jonathan’s letter had been deposited in the archives (1 Macc 14:16–24): the clever parallelism drawn by Katzoff between the re-establishment of Spartan *agoge* (abolished by Philopoimen in 189/188) around 178 and the return of traditional Jewish education after the liquidation of the Antioch *polis* of Jerusalem nevertheless seems insufficient to justify such a declaration of kinship. The fact that there were real similarities between Sparta and the Judeans⁹³ is less important than the fact that, by manipulating the Greek notion of *syngeneia*, the Hasmoneans demonstrated their ability to insert themselves into the Mediterranean world.

Moreover, an Athenian decree undoubtedly honors Hyrcanus I in 106–105 (Panemos of the year [2]9) (Josephus, *AJ* 14.149–155),⁹⁴ which proves at most that Athens wished to establish good relations with the Judeans. 1 Macc claims that the aim was to facilitate Athenians’ stay in Judea, but it’s hard to see what could bring Athenians to Judea when trade relations, previously flourishing, are virtually non-existent since the end of imports of products deemed impure. Rather, these were courtesy exchanges of no practical significance. The same is true of Pergamon: the city obeyed, through its decree (Josephus, *AJ* 14.247–255), the instructions of Rome, which had recently taken control of the new province of Asia. It’s no coincidence, moreover, that Josephus has included this decree in a much later set (c. 50–47) (Josephus, *AJ* 14.185–267), in which numerous Asian cities issued decrees to incorporate Rome’s instructions in favor of the Jews living there into their civic law. All in all, Judeans and Greeks in cities outside Syria shared a common goal: to give themselves the illusion of independence by establishing relations that were as extensive as possible, but without any practical content. This contradicts the fact that the Hasmoneans represented a threat to the Syrian cities, many of which suffered destruction, depopulation, confiscation and forced Judaization, such as Pella (Josephus, *AJ* 13.397) and Gadara.⁹⁵ The Romans took advantage of this: Pompey’s arrival was welcomed, as he attached them to the province of Syria

⁹² On the idea of a kinship between Jews and Spartans, which would have led Jason to seek refuge in Sparta before several friendship treaties were concluded between the Hasmoneans and this city, cf. Guinsburg 1934, 117–122; Schüller 1956, 257–268; Katzoff 1985, 485–489.

⁹³ Berthelot 2024 insists on the parallels between the claim to the lost territories.

⁹⁴ The Athenian decree follows a *senatus-consultum* authorizing Hyrcanus II to relieve Jerusalem after Pompey’s siege, and designates the Hyrcanus honored with a crown as “son of Alexander,” which applies only to Hyrcanus II. But the eponymous archon mentioned in the decree is that of 106–105, and Josephus must have been misled by the homonymy with Hyrcanus I (son of Simon). Josephus also confuses Onias I, contemporary of Areus I, with Onias III, high priest in 178–175.

⁹⁵ Pliny, *HN* 35.200: some Greek notables from cities annexed by Jannaeus went into exile, such as Meleager of Gadara in Cos or his compatriot Philodemos in Campania. Demetrios of Gadara sold on Rome’s slave market, may have been expelled under the same circumstances: having become Pompey’s freedman, he got

and, with his legates, set about rehabilitating the cities, which adopted a new era as if they had been refounded.⁹⁶

Conclusion

In the geopolitics of the Near East, Judea plays a modest role, despite the accuracy of its sources. The fact that only the two books of Maccabees and Josephus have been preserved in their entirety distorts judgment. Outside authors often ignore the Hasmoneans, and the few identifiable allusions confirm the marginal nature of Judea. Antiochos IV had never campaigned exclusively against rebellious Judea and left it behind when campaigning against Iran. In the laws against pirates passed in Rome in February 100,⁹⁷ it is possible that Judea is included among the “friendly and allied peoples” (*FD* III.4, no. 37B, ll. 5–6 and 21), but no “king of Judea” is listed among the addressees. Is the dynast of Judea included in “the kings reigning in Syria?” The plural refers to the two competing kings, Antiochos VIII Grypos and Antiochos IX Kyzikenos (*FD* III.4, no. 37B, ll. 8–10),⁹⁸ but it is highly unlikely that it includes Jannaeus. There’s no doubt that the Hasmoneans were able to play the Seleucid dynastic crisis to their advantage, but they were almost never able to secure their independence by force. Until Aristobulos seized the royal title, they behaved as high-ranking royal agents, as was the case in other provinces of the Empire. Paradoxically, they also equipped themselves with the ultimate regal instruments, notably the army and the currency. But the Seleucid and Ptolemaic masters remained capable of campaigning against them (or against their neighbors by passing through their territory) right up to the end of the reign of Alexander Jannaeus. The weakness of the Hasmoneans in the face of the Seleucid kingdom in the throes of domestic crises, or even civil war, was notable: the “War of the Scepters” is just one example, even if in the end Jannaeus was able to take advantage of the situation and increase his territorial hold. But some cities managed to resist (Ptolemais, Ascalon, Damascus) or to make their surrender costly (Samaria, Gaza, Gadara). Judea’s importance was certainly due to its geographical position at the crossroads of the last two great Hellenistic kingdoms, and its

Pompey to restore his city: Josephus *AJ* 15.75 = *BJ* 1.155. Other possible exiles have been identified in Athens and Delos: Weber 1996, 10–17.

⁹⁶ Josephus, *AJ* 14.74–76; cf. Safrai 2000, 78–83, who downplays the importance of these civic reconstructions and notes that prosperity did not return until much later (pp. 89–90).

⁹⁷ Ferrary 1977, 654.

⁹⁸ “The consul elected first will send letters to all the peoples, to those who are friends and allies of the Roman people” (ll. 5–6), “and likewise he will write to the king who reigns on the island of Cyprus, and to the king who reigns in Alexandria and Egypt, to the king who is in Cyrene **and to the kings who reign in Syria, to them all with whom exist friendship and alliance with the Roman people**, (to tell them that it would also be right) that they take every measure to ensure that no pirate can use either their kingdom or any of their territories as a base of operations, and that no magistrate or garrison commander they may appoint receive pirates under their protection, and that they see to it that, as far as possible, the Roman people count them as zealous helpers for everyone’s safety” (ll. 10–12); and line 21, the incumbent governor will send γράμματα πρὸς τοὺς δήμο[υς φίλους καὶ συμμάχους ἀποστειλᾶτω καὶ πρὸς] τοὺς βασιλεῖς τοὺς ἐπάνω γεγραμμένους, i.e., those just named ll. 8–10.

role as a communication corridor, but its greatest strength lay in the Hasmoneans' ability to take advantage of the mistakes, weaknesses and conflicts of its neighbors, whether powerful or not. From this point of view, Jewish authors, whatever their objectives, are surely right to emphasize real continuity.

ABBREVIATIONS

BE – *Bulletin Épigraphique*.

FD – *Fouilles de Delphes*, III: *Épigraphie*, vol. 4, pt. 1: G. Colin, *La terrasse du temple et la zone du sanctuaire*, Paris 1922–1930.

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