

The Tobiads and the Maccabees: Hellenism and Power in the Ancient  
Judean Community

Research Thesis

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation *with  
research distinction* in History in the undergraduate colleges of The  
Ohio State University

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The Ohio State University

April 2013

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## The Tobiads: A Study of the Rise and Fall of Hellenism in the Ancient Jewish Community

I originally envisioned this paper as an in-depth study of the Jewish community in Alexandria under the Ptolemies: their societal position, their beliefs, and most importantly, their relations (or lack thereof) with the Judean community. My research covered everything from village studies to tombstones and I quickly began to realize that my topic was simply too vast to cover in a single paper; moreover, I became increasingly interested in the debate around Hellenistic Judaism, both in Egypt and Judea. Hellenistic Judaism, or Judaism that has been influenced or changed by Greek culture, is a controversial topic, and unfortunately, this new focus was not significantly smaller in scope. For me, then, the question was how to enter the discussion, how to shrink the vast topics of Hellenism and Judaism into a manageable size. Fortunately, I found my opening in the Tobiad family, a powerful Hellenizing Jewish family who served as government officials under the Ptolemies and Seleucids. This paper will look at the Tobiad family during the second century B.C. and their successors, the Hasmoneans (Maccabees), to examine their Hellenistic policies and the changing popular Jewish reaction to them. From there the paper will turn to a discussion of what may have driven the changing attitudes of the Jewish people to the Tobiads, and then consider whether Hellenistic Judaism was as controversial as has been suggested. Indeed, I would suggest that the Maccabean revolt was part of a larger struggle for control within the Judean community, and that Hellenistic Judaism was not the primary cause of the revolt, but in fact a victim of the politics of the time, in large part due to its association with the Seleucid emperor Antiochus Epiphanes, and the

clever manipulation of the partisan authors of first and second Maccabees. Thus, I would argue that popular opinion turned against Hellenism and the Tobiads because of their connection to the Seleucids, rather than turning against Hellenism per se.

The question, of course, is to what extent Hellenism affected Judaism: was Hellenistic Judaism widely accepted during the early reigns of the Diadochi (the successors of Alexander the Great, who would split his kingdom amongst themselves into empires centered around Egypt, Syria, and Macedonia) or was it, in fact, an anomalous movement that never gained significant traction in the Jewish community? One of the pitfalls of this subject is the emotional nature of the debate surrounding Hellenism and Judaism, a debate that has not only concerned scholars, but also rabbis, Christian theologians, and political-religious groups in Israel to this day.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, the discussions surrounding Hellenism, and its counterpart Hebraism, have frequently been driven by ideological concerns rather than being led by a genuine regard for the historical reality.<sup>2</sup>

These ideological concerns came to the forefront in Germany about 150 years ago, when Baur restructured the history of early Christianity as a conflict between the “good” Hellenistic Christians, of which Paul was the head, and the Judaizers, Jewish-Christians opposed to Hellenization and to spread of Christianity to Gentiles.<sup>3</sup> His interpretation, however, had more to do with characterizing Judaism as only about law and Christianity as only about the

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<sup>1</sup> Troels Engberg-Pederson, ed. *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 63-9.

<sup>2</sup> Engberg-Pederson, 64-5.

<sup>3</sup> Engberg-Pederson, 18-19.

spirit, than it did with a careful reconstruction of history.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, his characterization of the supposed conflict between Judaism and Hellenism was informed more by ideas of a grand dichotomy between Occidental and Oriental civilizations than by the actual particulars of those two societies.<sup>5</sup>

Baur's ideas were not met with complacency; another scholar, Schweitzer, instead took the opposite side, arguing that real Christianity was essentially Jewish and Hellenism was only a later corruption.<sup>6</sup> His argument in essence appealed to Hebraism, a concept in Christian theology which sought to separate ancient Israel and "Hebrews" from the later history of Jews and Judaism, which they regarded as corrupt and dead.<sup>7</sup> Thus, Schweitzer's concept of Jewish and early Christian history remained fundamentally skewed (and implicitly anti-Semitic), and he continued to accept Baur's false dichotomy between Judaism and Hellenism.

Since World War II, the dichotomy between Judaism and Hellenism has been increasingly questioned with the recognition that many Jews, including the rabbis, were Hellenized to some extent, and that Judaism and Hellenism are not utterly antithetical concepts.<sup>8</sup> Originally, this change arose in response to the anti-Semitism that had been part, unfortunately, even of some of the previous scholarship and had been so horribly brought to life in the Holocaust; no longer was Judaism categorized as static or decadent, but as progressive.<sup>9</sup> This led to some scholars, such as Schoeps, reintegrating Paul into the Jewish

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<sup>4</sup> Engberg-Pederson, 19.

<sup>5</sup> Engberg-Pederson, 20.

<sup>6</sup> Engberg-Pederson, 36-7.

<sup>7</sup> Engberg-Pederson, 38-9, 42.

<sup>8</sup> Engberg-Pederson, 53-61.

<sup>9</sup> Engberg-Pederson, 52-3.

faith by making the argument that Paul misunderstood Judaism as primarily law-driven due to his Hellenistic background, but was fundamentally in agreement with Judaism's emphasis on grace.<sup>10</sup> While Schoep's argument is questionable to say the least, it helped break down the idea that an individual must be one or the other, either Hellenistic or Jewish, allowing for the possibility of moving past the false dichotomy. Additionally, it has come to be understood that the concept of Judaism is not as clear-cut as once represented; it is at once conflated with religion, ethnicity, and state, and the norms of rabbinical Judaism do not represent all of Judaism, which encompasses a much wider field of thought and action than was once recognized.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, the term *Hellenism* is also rather nebulous; to be Hellenized is to be influenced by Greek culture, but how much Greek influence is necessary to be truly Hellenized is less certain. As an example of this difficulty, one need only look at the work of Krauss, who made the claim that Jewish rabbinical literature contained 2370 Greek loan words and 240 from Latin, showing, to him, definite evidence of Hellenization. Many scholars disputed his etymologies, and have since then whittled that number down to 1560 Greek loan words, and by removing any geographical and historical (names, for instance) terms have gotten the list down to 1100; some have even tried to argue that the loan-words are only significant if they were part of the spoken/daily language of the Jews or of cultural importance (of which they only counted 17).<sup>12</sup> Even if one accepts that only 1100 loan words are found in rabbinical literature, does that mean that Hellenism did not occur, but if there had been 2370 words it would have?

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<sup>10</sup> Engberg-Pederson, 54-5.

<sup>11</sup> Engberg-Pederson, 23-5, 59.

<sup>12</sup> Engberg-Pederson, 75-6.

Where does one draw the line? Unfortunately, the question of Hellenization cannot be reduced to a simple problem of mathematics, and the debate is frequently fueled less by the facts than by emotions. The discussion is further complicated by modern political rhetoric which uses Hellenism to refer to western culture as a whole (presumably descended from Greek civilization) rather than anything specifically Greek - a connotation that is certainly not intended by my use of the term.<sup>13</sup>

For the purpose of this paper then, Hellenism will be defined as the adoption of any particular facet of Greek culture. The term does not imply a broad acceptance of Greek culture or a fundamental betrayal of Jewish belief, but refers to the casual acceptance of particulars of Greek culture, such as names, language, and customs, things that are more superficial than fundamental, but nonetheless important. Despite those who would represent Judaism and Hellenism as natural opposites – antithetical ideas that cannot peaceably coexist – there were many beneficial interactions between Judaism and Hellenism in the ancient world (especially in Egypt), and in certain eras hybrids such as Hellenist Judaism certainly existed, and seem even to have thrived. It is difficult to read the obviously Hellenized 2 Maccabees and not be struck by the irony of this Hellenized Jewish author criticizing Hellenism – a situation that is hardly unique in Jewish literature, but one that exists precisely because Hellenism and Judaism have a long history of interaction and friction, something that was played out in a very large scale during the Maccabean revolt which was ostensibly about Hellenism despite the fact that both sides were more or less Hellenized, as we shall see later in the paper.

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<sup>13</sup> Engberg-Pederson, 65-6.

Indeed Hellenism greatly influenced Judaism, especially in Alexandria, but in Judea as well, during the early reigns of the Diadochi. Greek became the dominant language amongst Egyptian Jews, to such an extent, that it was deemed necessary to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into the famous Septuagint.<sup>14</sup> This is especially significant when one considers that Greek was the only language into which the Jewish scriptures were ever translated by Jews in antiquity – all other translations were made later by Christian missionaries.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the creation of the Septuagint shows just how much of an impact Hellenism had made on the Jewish community. At the same time Greek names became increasingly popular among the Jews, and even names of deities such as Dionysus and Horus were not shunned.<sup>16</sup> This was not limited to the lower classes, but notably extended even to the High Priests such as Jason and Menelaus who were unabashedly Hellenizers.<sup>17</sup> But was Hellenism just a superficial, whitewash of Graecized/Grecized names and culture or did it make for fundamental changes to Jewish orthodoxy?

The question is one that is hard to answer, but I would suggest that the Tobiad family offers an insight into this debate. The Tobiads were known as Hellenizers, and their policies became quite controversial during the Maccabean revolt, yet what is often forgotten is their seeming popularity in their earlier years; indeed Joseph and Hyrcanus, two of the most powerful Tobiads, appear as folk heroes in Josephus' account despite their Hellenistic tendencies. Moreover, their successors in power, the Maccabees, quickly proved to be almost

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<sup>14</sup> Victor Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (New York: Atheneum, 1959), 347-8.

<sup>15</sup> Elias Bickerman, *From Ezra to the Last of the Maccabees: Foundations of Post-Biblical Judaism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 81-2.

<sup>16</sup> Tcherikover, 346.

<sup>17</sup> Moshe Pearlman, *The Maccabees* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, Inc., 1973), 30-1.

as Hellenistic as the Tobiads. Thus, it must be questioned why Hellenism, and Hellenizers like the Tobiads, received such a bad name at the time (and frankly, in much of history to this day). By questioning why their popularity diminished, perhaps some light can be shed on the fate of Hellenism within the Jewish community during this period, and a better understanding of the dynamics of the Maccabean revolt can be achieved.

### A Brief Historiography

Before analyzing the Tobiad and Maccabean families, it is important to understand that history, as much as it might be wished, is rarely cut and dry. Perceptions of history tend to change over time, influenced not just by the gain or loss of information, but also by the world and environment that each historian lives in. This field, in particular, has seen many changes and controversies over the years, in part because of the difficulties inherent in the terminology of Hellenism and Judaism, which have often led to (I believe) unintentional emotional entanglement. Moreover, there is the simple fact that very little data remains from the time period, and most of our knowledge derives from a handful of texts: the four Maccabees, Josephus, the Letter of Aristeas, and a few smaller sources, such as the Zenon Papyri. As I will discuss later, the Maccabees are heavily biased texts, and Josephus, though a valuable resource, is plagued with chronological errors, making it difficult to reconstruct exactly what occurred.

Certainly, scholars used to view the Maccabean revolts as primarily about religion – the rejection of Hellenist Judaism and the rise of rabbinical Judaism were seen as the centerfold of this conflict; this interpretation arose no doubt because the Maccabees promulgated it, and of



course the religious persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes gave it much credence. Tcherikover, however, did much to undermine this concept. His interpretation of Jason's actions as founding a Greek polis in Jerusalem found acceptance (although, arguments over whether it was a polis or politeuma continue), and although he continued to see the revolt as strongly influenced by Hellenism, he had laid the foundations for an understanding of it as a more politically inspired event.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, scholars begin to question the trustworthiness of the Maccabees, realizing that they are in, fact, politically partisan works, and as a result their representation of their opponents, the Tobiad/Oniad families, is probably not entirely fair and accurate. This change in perspective has not been without its opponents, and there still remain many scholars who continue to place significant emphasis on the religious underpinnings of the Maccabean revolt and this interpretation remains ensconced in popular opinion, but overall the role which politics played in the revolt has become found increasing acceptance, and more attention has begun to be paid to understanding the dynamics of the internal politics within Jerusalem and Judea.

### The Early Tobiads

It is hard to trace the exact origins of the Tobiad family; the name Tobias occurs several times throughout Scripture and many of these may be members of the Tobiad family. Indeed, in the book of Judges speaks of the land of Tob where Jephthah of Gilead dwelt,<sup>19</sup> but the first clear reference to them comes in Zechariah 6:10-14, which speak of a Tobiah as one of three eminent supporters of the Zadokite high priest, Joshua.<sup>20</sup> Since the later Tobiads were well known for being close relatives and supporters of the high priestly family, it seems probable

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<sup>18</sup> Tcherikover, ch. 4-5.

<sup>19</sup> Judges 11:3-6 (NKJV).

<sup>20</sup> B. Mazar, "The Tobiads," *Israel Exploration Journal* 7, no. 4 (1957): 229.

that this Tobiah was indeed of the Tobiad family. Moreover, the Lachish documents have two references to a Tobiah, “the arm of the king”<sup>21</sup> of Judah, suggesting that the Tobiad family was also quite powerful under the Judean monarchy.

The Tobiad family did not escape the Babylonian Captivity unscathed, for it appears that at least some of the family were taken; documents from Nippur speak of the “children of Tobiah” living in the area.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the family is mentioned again in Nehemiah 7:62, which speaks of the “children of Tobiah” returning to Israel as part of a group that could not prove their ancestry.<sup>23</sup> Mazar, however, convincingly argues that this group, along with the others listed, is much too large to refer merely to a family.<sup>24</sup> Instead, he argues that these groups were in fact made up of people who lived on the lands ruled by these families; thus, those returning had been exiled from the Tobiad estates in the Trans-Jordan, but were not necessarily Tobiads themselves.<sup>25</sup> Nehemiah, himself, had a great dislike for the head of the family, Tobiah, whom he disparagingly called an Ammonite slave in Nehemiah 2:16 and elsewhere. Despite this derogatory phrase, Tobiah was in fact the Jewish governor of Ammon;<sup>26</sup> the term *slave of the king* was a title of nobility frequently used in Akkadian and Persian.<sup>27</sup> Despite Nehemiah’s dislike of Tobiah, the book of Nehemiah records that he was well thought of and well-connected in Jerusalem:

Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobi'ah, and Tobi'ah's letters came to them. For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shecani'ah the son

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<sup>21</sup> Mazar, “The Tobiads,” 234.

<sup>22</sup> Mazar, “The Tobiads,” 230.

<sup>23</sup> Mazar, “The Tobiads,” 230.

<sup>24</sup> Mazar, “The Tobiads,” 231-2.

<sup>25</sup> Mazar, “The Tobiads,” 231-2.

<sup>26</sup> C.C. McCown, “The ‘Araq el-Amir and the Tobiads,” *The Biblical Archaeologist*, 20, no. 3 (Sep., 1957): 63.

<sup>27</sup> McCown, 71-2.

of Arah: and his son Jehoha'nan had taken the daughter of Meshul'lam the son of Berechi'ah as his wife. Also they spoke of his good deeds in my presence, and reported my words to him. And Tobi'ah sent letters to make me afraid.<sup>28</sup>

It is unclear why exactly Nehemiah disliked Tobiah so much; Nehemiah records that Tobiah was unhappy when the walls of the Jerusalem were rebuilt<sup>29</sup> and accuses Tobiah of plotting to discredit him with the fake murder plot<sup>30</sup> but these do not seem to explain adequately why Nehemiah would set himself up against such a popular leader. It would seem that Tobiah and other regional governors were afraid of Nehemiah's growing power; certainly, Nehemiah records a letter from Sanballat accusing him of wishing to set himself up as king in Jerusalem, an allegation that Nehemiah denied.<sup>31</sup> The root of the controversy between Nehemiah and Tobiah, however, may have had as much to do with religious disagreements as political controversy. Nehemiah was strongly associated with the reforming scribe Ezra<sup>32</sup> who was well known for his strict policies on Jewish separation.<sup>33</sup> Tobiah's friends, however, were not limited to Judea, but also extended to the governors of Samaria and the Arabs, and thus, he seems to have held a more liberal attitude toward interactions with non-Jews, much like his Hellenizing descendants.<sup>34</sup> Despite Nehemiah's insinuations, Tobiah was neither anti-religious nor anti-Jewish, for as Nehemiah himself records, Eliashib the High Priest was allied with Tobiah and had prepared a room for him in the temple, which Nehemiah hastened to destroy.<sup>35</sup> While Nehemiah may have disliked Tobiah, his opinion does not seem to have been shared by many, for the Tobiads were a respected and powerful family in the Jewish community.

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<sup>28</sup> Nehemiah 6:17-19 (RSV).

<sup>29</sup> Nehemiah 4:7-8 (RSV).

<sup>30</sup> Nehemiah 6:10-14 (RSV).

<sup>31</sup> Nehemiah 6:5-8 (RSV).

<sup>32</sup> Nehemiah 8:1-15 (RSV).

<sup>33</sup> Ezra 9, 10 (RSV).

<sup>34</sup> McCown, 71.

<sup>35</sup> Nehemiah 13:4-9 (RSV).

After the fall of the Persians, the Tobiads continued to hold power. The Zenon Papyri, a series of government letters from the finance minister of Ptolemy II (r. 285-246 B.C.), include five were between Zenon and a Tubias who ruled over the Birta of Ammanitis (or fortress of Ammon) as a cleruch.<sup>36</sup> These letters speak of Tubias' troops and cavalry, and record a series of sales transactions with Zenon, as well as a gift from Tubias to Ptolemy.<sup>37</sup> This Tobias, although mostly known to history for being the father of Joseph and grandfather of Hyrcanus, had already laid the framework for their entrance into Ptolemaic politics. There is not enough remaining evidence to say just how powerful this Tobias was, but it is not inconceivable that Joseph's swift rise to power was on the strength of his father's influence in Alexandria, as well as his uncle's, the high priest's, connections. Certainly, however, the Tobiad family had shown a remarkable ability to adapt to the continual changes in their political environment, managing to remain in power for centuries. A large part of their success, no doubt, was enabled by their willingness to work with foreigners, whether they were the Persians, the Syrians, or the Greeks, and they would continue that policy quite successfully under the Ptolemies as well.

### The Tobiads: Joseph and Hyrcanus

While the history of the Tobiads up until this point is mostly uncontroversial, the history of two of the most famous Tobiads, Joseph and Hyrcanus, has sparked much more debate, largely because the most important text for their lives is Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews*.

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<sup>36</sup> McCown, 70.

<sup>37</sup> *Zenon Papyri*, The Center for Online Jewish Studies, Accessed date, [http://cojs.org/cojswiki/Zenon\\_Papyri:\\_Jews\\_in\\_Hellenistic\\_Egypt](http://cojs.org/cojswiki/Zenon_Papyri:_Jews_in_Hellenistic_Egypt).

Josephus is known for making chronological mistakes, and even for contradicting himself at times, none of which lend to his credibility; however, it is important to note that this is hardly a problem unique to him, but rather one that is rather common in ancient sources. More important to our discussion, however, is Josephus' known bias toward Hellenism. Indeed, Josephus wrote his accounts for the Roman emperors Vespasian and Trajan (perhaps most famous for the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and the building of the Flavian Coliseum), and is frequently accused of Jewish apologeticism. Thus, it is worth remembering when discussing the Tobiads that Josephus' emphasis on their family and its importance in Judea as Hellenizers is perhaps partially guided by his own inclinations towards Hellenism. It is necessary therefore to consider the question of how trustworthy Josephus' account of the two men is, but not, I think, to completely dismiss it.

According to Josephus, Onias was the reigning Zadokite high priest of Jerusalem at the time, but unlike his father, Simon the Just, Onias was greedy and decided not to pay his taxes to Ptolemy Euergetes (r. 246-222 B.C.).<sup>38</sup> Needless to say, Ptolemy was angry and told the Jews that if they did not pay their taxes, he would seize their land and settle soldiers on it, but Onias ignored him.<sup>39</sup> It was at this point that Joseph, the son of Tobias and the nephew of Onias stepped in, and somehow convinced or coerced Onias into sending him to Ptolemy III as an

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<sup>38</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, trans. by William Whiston, Christian Classics Ethereal Library accessed date, <http://www.ccel.org/j/josephus/works/JOSEPHUS.HTM> bk. 12, ch. 6, s. 1. It should be noted that there is controversy over which Ptolemy Joseph served under as Josephus' account contradicts itself naming Ptolemy Euergetes but dating these events during the time of Ptolemy Epiphanes, as well as misidentifying the Queen as Cleopatra rather than Berenice. Here I am going with the chronological solution offered by Tcherikover; for more information: Tcherikover, 127-131.

<sup>39</sup> Josephus, bk. 12, ch. 6, s. 1. It is generally thought by scholars that Onias' refusal to pay was motivated not by greed but by pro-Seleucid inclinations; Onias probably hoped that the Seleucids were going to reconquer Judaea, so he saw no reason to pay taxes to the Ptolemies. Since he was wrong and the Seleucids lost, it was quite fortunate, really, that Joseph insisted on smoothing matters over with the Ptolemies. Tcherikover, 129.

ambassador to smooth things out. Here, too, we see our first glimpse of the tumultuous politics of Jerusalem, for as it will be discussed later, this conflict was not so much about taxes as it was part of a struggle between pro-Ptolemaic and pro-Seleucid factions in Jerusalem.<sup>40</sup> Thus, Joseph went to Egypt and eventually personally met Ptolemy whom he greatly impressed.<sup>41</sup> When the day came to bid for the tax farms Joseph successfully outbid the others, and convinced the king that he could collect more taxes. Ptolemy agreed and gave him the right to collect taxes for Phoenicia, Judea, Samaria, and Coele-Syria as well as two thousand soldiers with which to enforce his rule.<sup>42</sup> Joseph initially met with resistance at Askelon and Scythopolis (Coele-Syria) but managed to enforce his tax-gathering rights there by killing twenty of the principle men in the city, at which point the others peaceably accepted his control.<sup>43</sup> Joseph continued to serve the king in this capacity for the next twenty-two years, during which time he had seven sons.<sup>44</sup>

Here Josephus' story takes a more personal turn, recounting the events leading up to the birth of Joseph's eighth and favorite son, Hyrcanus. According to Josephus, Joseph became infatuated with a dancing girl or actress in Alexandria and determined to sleep with her. His brother feared what it would do to Joseph's reputation in the Jewish community, and substituted his own daughter for the dancing girl; supposedly Joseph was so drunk he did not know the difference.<sup>45</sup> As Joseph's passion for the dancing girl did not fade, this deception went on for some time until his niece became pregnant. Upon learning the truth, Joseph

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<sup>40</sup> Tcherikover, 130-4.

<sup>41</sup> Josephus, bk. 12, ch. 6, s. 3.

<sup>42</sup> Josephus, bk. 12, ch. 6, s. 4-5.

<sup>43</sup> Josephus, bk. 12, ch. 6, s. 5.

<sup>44</sup> Josephus, bk. 12, ch. 6, s. 6.

<sup>45</sup> Josephus, bk. 12, ch. 6, s. 6.

married his niece, and the son she bore him was Hyrcanus.<sup>46</sup> Hyrcanus proved to be more clever and capable than his older brothers, and thus became Joseph's favorite; as a result, when the new king Ptolemy IV (r. 221-205 B.C) had a son, Joseph sent Hyrcanus to congratulate him.<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately, Joseph sent Hyrcanus to his steward Arion in Alexandria with an open letter of credit; instead of taking ten talents for a gift as Joseph had ordered, Hyrcanus took a thousand talents of his father's three thousand in Alexandria.<sup>48</sup> His magnificent gifts so impressed Ptolemy that he promised him his father's Joseph's position upon his death. Joseph was not pleased with Hyrcanus' actions, but his other sons were furious, and they went out with an army to fight him. Hyrcanus defeated their army and slew two his brothers in battle, but when he came to Jerusalem he found the gates closed to him.<sup>49</sup> He was therefore unable to maintain control over Judea, but successfully established himself in the family lands of Tobiah and collected the taxes for the other regions.<sup>50</sup> At this point, the region of Judea became divided between the supporters of Hyrcanus and the supporters of Tobias' elder sons, who were more numerous.<sup>51</sup> They could not, however, defeat Hyrcanus, and Hyrcanus greatly expanded his territory, defeating many Arab tribes, and building a magnificent palace which he called Tyros; he ruled the area for seven years until Antiochus Epiphanes seized his land and Hyrcanus committed suicide.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Josephus, bk. 12, ch. 6, s. 6.

<sup>47</sup> Josephus, bk. 12, ch. 6, s. 6-7.

<sup>48</sup> Josephus, bk. 12, ch. 6, s. 8-9.

<sup>49</sup> Josephus, bk. 12, ch. 6, s. 9.

<sup>50</sup> Josephus, bk. 12, ch. 6, s. 9.

<sup>51</sup> Josephus, bk. 12, ch. 6, s. 11.

<sup>52</sup> Josephus, bk. 12, ch. 6, s. 11.

Most scholars accept the basic narrative of these events if not the more fanciful details, such as the highly doubtful tale of Hyrcanus' conception.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, Josephus' account has come under attack for several noticeable errors. Solomon Zeitlin criticized the account because Josephus makes Joseph a tax collector over Coele-Syria during the reign of Antiochus III who twice conquered Coele-Syria, and because Josephus referred to the wife of Ptolemy II as Cleopatra, rather than by her proper name, Berenice.<sup>54</sup> Still, Zeitlin noted that a few chronological errors do not necessarily mean the basic story is false, and pointed out that the Zenon papyri established Tobias as a powerful Ptolemaic official, and that 2 Maccabees affirms that Hyrcanus of the Tobiads was a supporter of the Ptolemies.<sup>55</sup> Thus, with support for the Tobiad family's importance both before and after the time period of Josephus' account, it seems unlikely that his account is fictive. Indeed, neither of Zeitlin's complaints against the text is particularly compelling. It is true that Antiochus III seized Coele-Syria in 220 B.C., but he was defeated again at the Battle of Raphia in 217 B.C.<sup>56</sup> and did not reestablish his control of the area until 202 B.C., making it perfectly possible for Joseph to have been the Ptolemaic tax-collector over the area for the vast majority of the time, if not quite all of it.<sup>57</sup> As for the mistake concerning Berenice's name, it is hardly a fundamental part of the story, and given the Ptolemies propensity to use Cleopatra and Berenice for most of their women, it is easily understandable how Josephus could have gotten the names confused.

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<sup>53</sup> Dov Gera, *Judaea and Mediterranean Politics 219 to 161 B.C.E.* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 39-40.

<sup>54</sup> Solomon Zeitlin, "The Tobias Family and the Hasmoneans': A Historical Study in the Political and Economic Life of the Jews in the Hellenistic Period," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 4 (1932 - 1933): 170.

<sup>55</sup> Zeitlin, 170-1, 182-4.

<sup>56</sup> Zeitlin, 182.

<sup>57</sup> Zeitlin, 184.



Dov Gera in his book *Judaea and Mediterranean Politics 219 to 161 B.C.E.* took a much more critical view of the Tobiad story, although he admits that many historians consider the tale to be basically factual.<sup>58</sup> His first prong of attack was against the story of Hyrcanus; most obviously, Gera asserted, Josephus got it wrong when he suggested that Hyrcanus built the fortress of Tyros, as it clearly existed long before him.<sup>59</sup> However, as Mazar suggested, it could simply be that Hyrcanus refurbished and expanded the pre-existing fortress, not necessarily that he built the whole fortress, which dates back to the fifth century,<sup>60</sup> and even Gera admits that Josephus' description of the site is fairly accurate, lending credibility to the account.<sup>61</sup>

However, Gera's main problem with Josephus' account is the story of Hyrcanus' rule, of which he is highly dubious. To Gera, Josephus' representation of Hyrcanus as a powerful autonomous ruler is little more than fiction against which he presents two main arguments. His first line of attack is by arguing that if Hyrcanus was actually a renegade chieftain, then the high priest Onias III would not have tried to persuade the Seleucid official Heliodorus to leave the temple funds alone by mentioning Hyrcanus' deposits.<sup>62</sup> While Gera may have a point, it is also possible that Heliodorus did not want to needlessly enrage Hyrcanus, a Transjordan chief with whom they were currently at peace. Moreover, even if Hyrcanus was not an autonomous chief, that hardly changes the basic facts of Josephus' account, for Hyrcanus would still be a powerful ruler in the Transjordan that Heliodorus did not want to offend.

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<sup>58</sup> Gera, 39.

<sup>59</sup> Gera, 41-2.

<sup>60</sup> Mazar, 141.

<sup>61</sup> Gera, 44.

<sup>62</sup> Gera, 44-5.

Gera's second argument against the story of Hyrcanus is based on a misinterpretation of the text; indeed he argues that the story of Hyrcanus' kingdom is almost entirely fictional, although set in a real place, Birta, that exists to this day (and was accurately described by the story).<sup>63</sup> Gera presents Josephus' story as claiming that Hyrcanus' kingdom ceased to exist after Antiochus Epiphanes came to power,<sup>64</sup> but in truth Josephus' account merely states that Hyrcanus, fearing Antiochus' attack, killed himself and Antiochus seized his possessions – in no way suggesting that the area was destroyed or depopulated.<sup>65</sup> Gera, however, using the reference in 1 Maccabees to the wars fought against inhabitants of the former Land of Tobiah, argues that clearly the fort and soldiers continued to exist, at least until 163.<sup>66</sup> Thus, to Gera, Hyrcanus clearly could not have been a rebel or Antiochus would have destroyed the colony and disbanded the soldiers, making the entire story of Hyrcanus fictitious.<sup>67</sup> This argument is deeply flawed; first Josephus in no way suggested that the colony was destroyed, merely that Hyrcanus committed suicide and Antiochus took possession of it.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, there is no reason to suppose that Antiochus did not continue to keep soldiers in Tyros or Birta, a fortress that had been known for its strength for centuries. It is hardly unheard of for troops, especially mercenaries, to change leaders, especially if their former leader is dead, nor is there any reason to suppose that Hyrcanus was in fact a rebel against the Seleucids. Josephus' account actually presents Hyrcanus taking control of the Transjordan region after being unable to take

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<sup>63</sup> Gera, 55.

<sup>64</sup> Gera, 45.

<sup>65</sup> Josephus, bk. 12, ch. 6, s. 11.

<sup>66</sup> Gera, 45-47.

<sup>67</sup> Gera, 48-9.

<sup>68</sup> Josephus, bk. 12, ch. 4, s, 11.

Jerusalem from his brothers and before the Seleucids reconquered Judaea,<sup>69</sup> and there is nothing to indicate in Josephus' account that Hyrcanus ever served the Seleucids, let alone rebelled against them. Based upon these weak arguments, Gera determines that Josephus' source create a completely fictitious story – with Hyrcanus erecting the *baris*, rebelling against the Seleucid king, and finally committing suicide – and then set it in a known site, Araq el Emir, which he described with considerable accuracy.<sup>70</sup> The evidence for Gera's claim, however, is less than compelling, and unfortunately his next line of attack is even more questionable, as he moves to the always tricky question of biblical parallelism.<sup>71</sup> While in the footnotes below I have outlined a longer critique of Gera's supposed parallels, the essence of my critique is that, quite simply, many of his parallels are non-existent, relying on sloppy misidentification of facts, and most of the rest are little more than common facets of human experience that, such as sibling rivalry, that do not require biblical parallelism as an explanation. Ultimately, it is quite

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<sup>69</sup> Josephus, bk. 12, ch. 4, s. 9, 11.

<sup>70</sup> Gera, 49.

<sup>71</sup> Gera then moves the focus from Hyrcanus to his father Joseph. Here he argues that the story has too many biblical parallels to the story of Jacob and Joseph, and must have been changed or modified accordingly. Among these parallels, he notes the dislike between Hyrcanus and his older brothers, comparing it to Joseph and his older brothers in Genesis (Gera, 49). However, in Genesis Joseph is not the youngest son (Benjamin is), and he has ten other brothers, unlike the story of Hyrcanus, who is the youngest and has seven older brothers (Genesis 35:22-6). Moreover, is it really so unlikely that there could not be two sets of half-brothers, both wanting the inheritance, who disliked each other? Again, Gera points to the story of Joseph getting drunk and sleeping with his niece as nothing more than a parallel to the story of Laban tricking a drunk Jacob with Leah (Gera, 50). There are some parallels here, true, but on the other hand, guys getting drunk and sleeping with girls they don't know is, literally, an everyday occurrence for which we have a name: the one-night stand. Moreover, it is worth noting that Jacob and Leah were cousins, not uncle and niece, and that the intent in the story of Joseph was to save his reputation, while Laban's intent was to marry off his undesired daughter Leah. Besides these examples, Gera lists several more, most of which are frankly ludicrous. As an example, he notes that when the biblical Joseph went to Canaan to bury Jacob, he brought an army with him, and compares this to Josephus' account of the Tobiads receipt of two thousand men to help him enforce the gathering of taxes (Gera, 50). Beyond the fact that Egyptian troops entered Canaan (a not infrequent occurrence during the long years of the Egyptian Empire), there are no real similarities between these tales and no reason to suppose that this is just a case of biblical parallelism. Indeed, it is easy to find parallels in life anywhere one looks, but that does not mean that they are in fact anything more than coincidence.

easy to find parallels in life wherever one looks, but most such parallels are nothing more than coincidence, certainly not a purposeful attempt at imitation.

Finally, Gera notes that while most of the details mentioned about tax-farming mentioned in Josephus' account are accurate, Joseph would not have carried out the actual collection of the taxes, which would have been collected by other officials; thus, he argues Joseph was glorified by giving him more power than he actually had.<sup>72</sup> Generally tax-farmers did not personally enforce the collection, so perhaps this is true; however, it is also possible that Joseph received the grant and the troops because the Ptolemies were having trouble collecting taxes not just from Onias, but other regions as well, causing them to deviate from their normal course of action. It is certainly not clear; nonetheless, even if Joseph's power was exaggerated, that is hardly the focal point of the story.

In conclusion, then, despite Gera's determination to cast doubt on Josephus' story, the vast majority of his criticisms fall flat, and those that might be accurate do not cast doubt on the basic narrative of the text. There seems, therefore, no reason to doubt that the story of Joseph and Hyrcanus as presented by Josephus as mostly factual, even if it contains a few errors or exaggerations. What, then, can be said of the career of Joseph and Hyrcanus? It was a career based on friendly interactions with the Greeks in Alexandria, and it seems clear that they were not particularly conservative in their religion. The story of Hyrcanus' conception casts an illuminating light on Joseph's less than rigorous religious observance; the food at Ptolemy's parties could hardly be acceptable for a practicing Jew and Joseph's fascination with a dancing

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<sup>72</sup> Gera, 54.

girl was considered scandalous even by his brother Solymius.<sup>73</sup> Hyrcanus behaved similarly at Ptolemy's court, and when he was forced by his brothers to retreat to the family fortress, he adorned it with engraved "animals of a prodigious magnitude,"<sup>74</sup> some of which can be seen to this day.<sup>75</sup> Two things, however, are of particular note in their careers. First, they did not rise to power unopposed, but as part of a struggle within the Judean community. Joseph came to power at the expense of his uncle, the High Priest, who could not have been pleased at his loss of authority. Likewise, Hyrcanus achieved the king's favor at the cost of losing his father's support, and even though Ptolemy himself supported Hyrcanus, he was opposed by his brothers, resulting in military conflict that eventually led to his expulsion from Judea. Also significant, however, is the second point – this conflict was not driven by Hellenism or antipathy thereto, for all the participants were at least partially Hellenized; rather this was a conflict driven by a quest for power and control over Judea, a motivation that would continue to play an important role in the coming events.

#### The Tobiads: Joseph's Sons.

The greatest of the Tobiads may have died out with Joseph and Hyrcanus, but the remaining five brothers (for Hyrcanus killed two)<sup>76</sup> continued to play an important role in Judean politics. These sons of Tobias, as they are often called, were supporters not of the Ptolemies, but of the Seleucids who appeared to be more powerful.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, these brothers, usually identified with the Simon, Menelaus, and Lysimachus who play such an important role

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<sup>73</sup> Josephus, bk. 12, ch. 4, s. 6.

<sup>74</sup> Josephus, bk. 12, ch. 4, s. 9.

<sup>75</sup> McCown, 68.

<sup>76</sup> Josephus, bk. 12, ch. 6, s. 9.

<sup>77</sup> Tcherikover, 81.

in the events leading up to the Maccabean revolt,<sup>78</sup> helped the Seleucids take control of Jerusalem, strengthening their own position with the new ruler, Antiochus.<sup>79</sup> At least initially, the new Seleucid ruler did not seem to be too bad. Antiochus guaranteed the Jews their right to live according to their laws, and it appears that at this point the sons of Tobias worked in concert with the High Priest Simon the Just, who was also a Seleucid supporter.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, for several years the Jews were quite happy under Seleucid rule.

That, however, was destined for a change. Hellenization, the introduction of Greek culture, had been occurring amongst the Jews for quite some time under Joseph and Hyrcanus, known Hellenizers, although the question of how deeply it had penetrated their society is debatable.<sup>81</sup> Joseph and Hyrcanus, like their forefather in Nehemiah's time eagerly interacted with the surrounding nations, and built alliances with other powerful and wealthy families in Coele-Syria. Moreover, they adopted many Greek customs, as the construction and decoration of their familial fortress, the Araq el-Amir showed, and were clearly willing to bend the rules of Jewish dietary laws as their frequent participation in Ptolemaic court life and feast showed. The sons of Tobias would continue this policy of Hellenization, but the results would not be as favorable. The initial conflict may have arisen when Simon the Just died and was replaced by his son Onias III. In 2 Maccabees, Onias III is represented as friendly with Hyrcanus – a supporter of the Ptolemies and the enemy of his brothers, the sons of Tobias.<sup>82</sup> This led to friction between the Tobiads and the High Priestly family, traditional allies. Thus, three Jewish

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<sup>78</sup> Pearlman, 27.

<sup>79</sup> Tcherikover, 76-7.

<sup>80</sup> Tcherikover, 80-3.

<sup>81</sup> Tcherikover, 81, 140.

<sup>82</sup> Tcherikover, 156-7.

aristocrats, Simon, Menelaus, and Lysimachus (there is scholarly debate over whether they were or were not Tobiads<sup>83</sup>) sought to get rid of Onias. Their first efforts, including attempting to seize the Temple treasury, were unsuccessful, but at last they succeeded in convincing the king, Antiochus IV, to replace Onias with Onias' younger brother Jason.<sup>84</sup> Perhaps they thought they could control Jason, since they put him in power, or perhaps he was simply more sympathetic to their goals, but his appointment represented a significant break from the hereditary tradition of the High Priesthood, although he was still of the proper family, and this break would be further deepened over the following years.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, according to 2 Maccabees, Jason not only promised the king a great deal of money if he was made High Priest, but also promised to establish a Greek gymnasium and to "enroll the men of Jerusalem as citizens of Antioch."<sup>86</sup> The king accepted his offer, and it appears that a Greek polis (or depending on the scholar, a politeuma) was established in Jerusalem.<sup>87</sup> Jason's reforms were at least initially tolerated, and the rights won for the Jews by the granting of a polis (or politeuma) were significant indeed with rich economic promise.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, at least some enthusiastically partook in the new Greek establishments, for 2 Maccabees records that the priests "hastened to take part in the unlawful proceeding in the wrestling arena after the call to the discus, disdaining the honors prized by their fathers and putting the highest value upon Greek forms of

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<sup>83</sup> Tcherikover, 154.

<sup>84</sup> Pearlman, 27-30.

<sup>85</sup> Pearlman, 30.

<sup>86</sup> *2 Maccabees*. University of Michigan, Accessed Dec. 8, 2012, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/r/rsv/rsv-idx?type=DIV1&byte=4353562>, ch. 4:8-10.

<sup>87</sup> Tcherikover, 164-5.

<sup>88</sup> Pearlman, 31.

prestige.”<sup>89</sup> Indeed, much to the outrage of more traditional Jews, some priests underwent operations to undo their circumcision,<sup>90</sup> and 2 Maccabees accuses Jason of sending money to Tyre to offer sacrifices to Hercules (although his emissaries decided to use the money to build ships instead).<sup>91</sup> However, having a friend rule is not the same as ruling yourself, and three years into his rule, Jason made the mistake of sending one of the Tobiads, Menelaus, to present his tribute to the king. Menelaus instead took the opportunity to convince the king to make him, not Jason, the new High Priest, once again bribing the king with a vast sum of money.<sup>92</sup> Unlike Jason, Menelaus was not even remotely a valid candidate for the High Priesthood,<sup>93</sup> and 2 Maccabees says of him that he had the “hot temper of a cruel tyrant and the rage of a savage wild beast.”<sup>94</sup> Menelaus quickly earned the hatred of the people by selling off the Temple’s golden vessels, and ordering the assassination of the rightful High Priest Onias whose popularity was a threat to him.<sup>95</sup> Despite his appropriation of Temple goods, Menelaus proved unable to present the king with the money he had promised him; at this point, Jason, who had fled the city returned with an army and retook Jerusalem from Menelaus.<sup>96</sup> However, Jason was unable to hold it against Antiochus’ army which wreaked havoc on the city.<sup>97</sup> It was at this point that Antiochus would begin his persecution of the Jews, outlawing the practice of traditional

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<sup>89</sup> 2 Maccabees 4:14-15.

<sup>90</sup> Pearlman, 37-8.

<sup>91</sup> 2 Maccabees 4:19-20.

<sup>92</sup> Pearlman, 35-6.

<sup>93</sup> Pearlman, 37.

<sup>94</sup> 2 Maccabees 4:25.

<sup>95</sup> 2 Maccabees, 4:32-8.

<sup>96</sup> Pearlman 37, 39-40.

<sup>97</sup> Tcherikover, 188.



Judaism.<sup>98</sup> From here, the road would lead to the Maccabean revolt and the foundation of the Hasmonean Dynasty.

### The Tobiads: Aftermath

For the Tobiads, however, this signaled a decline in their fortunes, and for the most part they disappeared from the pages of history. What is most interesting about the Tobiads, however, is their transition from heroes to villains in such a brief period of time – indeed, in the same generation, for Hyrcanus and the sons of Tobias were brothers. Why did this change in attitude and behavior take place, and what caused the rejection (at least, the temporary rejection) of Hellenism in Judea during the Maccabean revolt, when it had been peaceably accepted for well over a century? Was the revolt actually in response to Hellenistic Judaism, or was it perhaps provoked by other factors, such as the recent change from Ptolemaic to Seleucid control? To answer that question it is necessary to take a closer look at the Jewish diaspora under Ptolemaic control.

### The Jews in Egypt

The Jews had a long history of returning to Egypt. In the story of Exodus they only made it two months before they wished to go back to Egypt, a land full of food.<sup>99</sup> This fascination with Egypt would continue through the ages; one of Solomon's first acts was to make a treaty with Pharaoh and marry Pharaoh's daughter (while this probably did not actually happen, what is important here is the chronicler's desire to remember it as having happened).<sup>100</sup> Likewise

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<sup>98</sup> Pearlman, 49-50.

<sup>99</sup> Exodus 16:1-3 (RSV).

<sup>100</sup> 1 Kings 3:1 (RSV).

both of Solomon's enemies, Hadad the Edomite and Jeroboam, who would found the kingdom of Israel, fled to the courts of Egypt for protection from Solomon.<sup>101</sup> Even in the end, when the kingdom of Judah fell, it was to Egypt the Jews fled, despite the dire warnings of Jeremiah.<sup>102</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that Egypt developed a large and thriving Jewish community, especially in the city of Alexandria. By the time of Philo (20 B.C.-50 A.D.) their numbers in Egypt were estimated to be around a million – large even in today's terms, but far larger in comparison to populations of that time.<sup>103</sup>

The earliest known large-scale Jewish settlement in Egypt was the military colony at Elephantine who served under the Persians from around 525 to 399 B.C.<sup>104</sup> although it is believed that the colony predated the Persian conquest.<sup>105</sup> Elephantine was an island near Aswan that protected the southern border of Egypt with Nubia, and as such, was place of great military and economic significance – not some minor fort in the desert.<sup>106</sup> The Jewish community here is remarkable for establishing a Jewish temple (something, as we shall see, that happened again in Egyptian Jewish history), wherein they appeared to worship not just YHWH but also 'Anat-Yaho, a consort goddess that may be the same Queen of Heaven whose worship Jeremiah condemned.<sup>107</sup> The settlement was eventually destroyed by a resurgence of Egyptian nationalism, and the temple was destroyed by the priests of Khnum (the ram-headed

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<sup>101</sup> 1 Kings 11:14-22;40 (RSV).

<sup>102</sup> Jeremiah 42-4 (RSV).

<sup>103</sup> Tcherikover, 286.

<sup>104</sup> Arych Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt: the Struggle for Equal Rights* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1985), 1-2.

<sup>105</sup> Joseph Meleze Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt: From Rameses II to Emperor Hadrian* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1995), 22-3.

<sup>106</sup> Modrzejewski, 22.

<sup>107</sup> Modrzejewski, 36-7.

god) who viewed the Jews' sacrifice of rams as sacrilege.<sup>108</sup> However, the destruction of this settlement did not signal the end of the Egyptian Jewish community, for Alexander's conquest of Egypt would once again open wide Egypt's doors.

Although there doubtless already many Jews living in Egypt – the descendants of those who fled in Jeremiah's time – the wars between the Diadochi led to many more Jews being brought into Egypt, some willingly, but many as captives of Ptolemy I (r. 323-283 B.C.),<sup>109</sup> who managed to seize Jerusalem unopposed on the Sabbath.<sup>110</sup> As with the earlier colony in Elephantine, many of the immigrants also found service as mercenaries; the *Letter of Aristeas* says that Ptolemy I brought 100,000 Jewish captives to Egypt, 30,000 of whom he drafted into his army, and although the number is certainly grossly exaggerated, it seems likely that Ptolemy did in fact employ many Jews in his army given the numerous Jewish cleruchs and katokoi found in the later Ptolemaic era.<sup>111</sup> Unfortunately, however, very little evidence exists about the Jewish community in this time period.

The reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (r. 283-246 B.C.) found the Jewish community in Alexandria growing. It was during his reign that the Septuagint was translated, supposedly at the behest of the Ptolemy himself (although that is a source of contention amongst scholars).<sup>112</sup> Regardless, the *Letter of Aristeas*, a work of Jewish literature written about a century after the reign of Ptolemy, views him in a very positive light.<sup>113</sup> Supposedly, Ptolemy sent to the High

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<sup>108</sup> Modrzejewski, 39,43.

<sup>109</sup> Kasher, 2-3.

<sup>110</sup> Tcherikover, 55-6.

<sup>111</sup> Kasher, 3. Cleruchs and katokoi were military settlers who received land grants in exchange for military service and protection of the area they lived in.

<sup>112</sup> Kasher, 4-5.

<sup>113</sup> W.V. Harris and Giovanni Ruffini, ed., *Ancient Alexandria Between Egypt and Greece* (Leiden: Brill 2004), 131.

Priest Eleazar asking that the Torah might be translated into Greek for his library at Alexandria, and as a demonstration of good faith, released the Jewish captives that his father had taken prisoner.<sup>114</sup> Eleazar agreed to Ptolemy's requests and sent seventy-two scholars to Egypt in order to translate the scriptures.<sup>115</sup> They worked in Alexandria and finished the translation in seventy-two days, after which it was presented with great fanfare to the king and the people.<sup>116</sup> Although the story recounted in the *Letter of Aristeas* may be little more than legend, the positive attitude of the *Letter's* author towards Ptolemy is nonetheless genuine and reveals a relatively harmonious relationship between the Jewish community and the Ptolemies.<sup>117</sup>

This relationship seems to have suffered a bit in the reign of Ptolemy IV Philopator (r. 221-205 B.C.), the antagonist of III Maccabees. According to III Maccabees, after Ptolemy Philopator beat the Seleucids at the battle of Raphia, he took a tour of the surrounding region, including Judea.<sup>118</sup> Upon arriving at Jerusalem, he decided he wanted to visit the Temple, to see the Holy of Holies, but was thwarted, supposedly by a miracle.<sup>119</sup> He returned to Egypt greatly displeased, and decided to punish the Jews there; he laid a heavy poll tax on them and demanded that they be branded with the sign of Dionysius.<sup>120</sup> Needless to say, the Jewish community refused to be branded with the sign of Dionysius, at which point Philopator decreed

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<sup>114</sup> *Letter of Aristeas*. Ed. R.H. Charles, *Early Jewish Writings*, <http://www.ccel.org/c/charles/otpseudepig/aristeas.htm>, v. 9-10, 17-20, 35-40.

<sup>115</sup> *Letter of Aristeas*, v 47-50.

<sup>116</sup> *Letter of Aristeas*, v 307-14.

<sup>117</sup> Harris, 132-2.

<sup>118</sup> 3 Maccabees 1:1-7, (RSV).

<sup>119</sup> 3 Maccabees 1:9-16, 2:22-24 (RSV).

<sup>120</sup> 3 Maccabees 2:26-31 (RSV). It appears that Ptolemy IV, who was himself a great devotee of Dionysius, had classified the Judaism as a Dionysian cult – indeed later Roman writers continued to equate the Jewish God with Dionysius. It did not help that some of the prominent Alexandrian Jewish writers, such as Aristoboulos, drew connections to Judaism and Orphic cults, which were closely related to Dionysian cults. It is possible then that the events of 3 Maccabees, whatever exactly happened, may have been partially the result of a theological miscommunication rather than a purposeful attack on Judaism. See Modrzejewski, 149-53.

them enemies of the state and commanded that the Jews should be bound and thrown into prison; anyone who helped them would be killed.<sup>121</sup> Having rounded up many Jews in Alexandria, Philopator decided to kill some of them with elephants drunk on wine and frankincense (it would seem perhaps, that this was intended as a sort of sacrifice to Dionysius, the god they rejected).<sup>122</sup> The first day, however, the king overslept,<sup>123</sup> and the second he suddenly changed his mind and called off the attack,<sup>124</sup> and the third day when he finally followed through with his plans, the elephants turned on his own troops rather than the Jews.<sup>125</sup> At this, the king relented, and blamed his friends and advisors for turning him against the Jews; he then freed them all and let them attack their oppressors.<sup>126</sup>

It is clear that this story should not be taken too literally, and the resemblance to the story of Esther, especially at the end, is remarkable. Still, there seems to be a core of truth in this story, suggesting that some persecution of the Jews occurred under Philopator, although it was resolved. There has, however, been some debate as to whether the events of 3 Maccabees occurred under Ptolemy Philopator or the much later king Ptolemy Eurgetes II (r. 144-116 B.C.). Josephus does not record this persecution under Philopator, but records very similar events, including the drunken elephants, as occurring during the reign of Ptolemy Eurgetes II after his defeat of Cleopatra whom the Jews, led by Onias, had supported.<sup>127</sup> Thus, some scholars argue that the events of 3 Maccabees really occurred in the reign of Ptolemy

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<sup>121</sup> 3 Maccabees 3:21-29 (RSV).

<sup>122</sup> 3 Maccabees 5:1-2, 10 (RSV).

<sup>123</sup> 3 Maccabees 5:11-14 (RSV).

<sup>124</sup> 3 Maccabees 5:28-32 (RSV).

<sup>125</sup> 3 Maccabees 6:16-21 (RSV).

<sup>126</sup> 3 Maccabees 6:23-9, 7:3-7, 11-5 (RSV).

<sup>127</sup> Tcherikover, 282.

Eurgetes II. Regardless, however, of whether the persecutor was Ptolemy Philopator or Ptolemy Eurgetes II, it is generally accepted that some approximation of these events occurred, which is what is ultimately important for our analysis of Ptolemaic-Jewish relationships, rather than the specific date of the event.

Good relations between the Ptolemies and the Jews seem to have continued under Ptolemy under Cleopatra III; the sons of Onias IV (the legitimate High Priest) Helkkias and Hananiah, served as strategoi in her army, and they faithfully supported her when civil war broke out between Cleopatra and Ptolemy IX Lathyrus (r. intermittently from 116-81 B.C.), her son, whom was defeated in the war.<sup>128</sup> After her death, Lathyrus did take the throne, but it is unclear if the Jews were punished for opposing him, although some have suggested that some persecution occurred.<sup>129</sup> As the Ptolemaic kingdom slowly fell apart due to numerous wars of succession, the relationship between the Jews and the Ptolemies deteriorated, and when Julius Caesar became involved in the wars between Cleopatra VII (r. 51-30 B.C.) and Ptolemy XIII, the Jewish troops of the land of Onias (the region that the descendants of Onias IV ruled over), joined Caesar's troops.<sup>130</sup> Thus, it would seem that Ptolemaic-Jewish relations gradually worsened, but the overall experience, especially in the early years of Ptolemaic reign seems to have been decidedly positive.

One of the most important aspects of that relationship was the military service rendered. Even before the Ptolemies conquered Egypt, the Jews were already serving as military colonists for the Persians in Elephantine where they had many of the same privileges

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<sup>128</sup> Kasher, 11.

<sup>129</sup> Kasher, 12.

<sup>130</sup> Kasher, 13-16.

that would be accorded to them under the Ptolemies. The Elephantine community had their own residential section, their own courts and religious leaders, and rather surprisingly, their own temple.<sup>131</sup> Ptolemy I utilized Jewish captives as mercenaries in Egypt and Cyrene, and Ptolemy II seems to have followed his policies.<sup>132</sup> Moreover, papyrological evidence shows that Jewish troops were scattered throughout the land of Egypt, particularly in the area of Fayum where numerous soldiers with Jewish names are recorded, and indeed one, Ela'azar son of Nicolaus had risen to the rank of hegemon, just below the rank of strategoi.<sup>133</sup> Egypt was not the only place that Jews served in the Ptolemaic military, for the Zenon papyri records that Tobias was a cleruch for the Ptolemies and had Jewish and Greek soldiers at his command.<sup>134</sup> Later, when Onias III and IV sought refuge in Egypt during the reign of Ptolemy VI Philometor, they were given the land of Leontopolis and troops to command, and they built there a fort and, much like the settlement at Elephantine, a Jewish temple.<sup>135</sup> Onias IV indeed served as a general for the Ptolemies, and much like his sons, took part in the Ptolemaic wars of succession, opposing Ptolemy Eurgetes II, although that war was not a success for him.<sup>136</sup> Still, as was mentioned above, this Jewish military community would remain at Leontopolis and play an active role in Egyptian politics until the Roman conquest.

It would seem then that the Jews prospered militarily in Egypt, even managing to achieve high ranks such as hegemon and strategoi. Did, however, the rest of the Jewish

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<sup>131</sup> Kasher, 38-9.

<sup>132</sup> Kasher, 42-4.

<sup>133</sup> Kasher 45-7.

<sup>134</sup> *Zenon Papyri*. The Center for Online Judaic Studies.

[http://cojs.org/cojswiki/Zenon Papyri: Jews in Hellenistic Egypt](http://cojs.org/cojswiki/Zenon_Papyri:_Jews_in_Hellenistic_Egypt) papyrus 1 58.

<sup>135</sup> Tcherikover, 276-81.

<sup>136</sup> Tcherikover, 279, 281-2.

community also prosper under the Ptolemies? Certainly, they seem to have had mostly peaceable relations with them, but was that merely because they were left alone, free to practice their religion as they wished, or did they possess a privileged place in Greek society? It appears that the Jewish community, probably because of their military service and adoption of Greek, was classified as Hellenes by the Ptolemies, who allowed many Syrians and Phoenicians similar privileges – privileges that were not accorded to the Egyptian natives.<sup>137</sup> Because of this favorable classification, the community in Alexandria was accorded the freedom of a *politeuma*, which means that the Jews were a recognized national group that had political privileges, most important of which were separate courts and the ability to follow one's ancestral customs.<sup>138</sup> This *politeuma* seems to have been governed by an ethnarch (or genarch) who governed with the help of a gerousia (a council) drawn from the Jewish aristocracy.<sup>139</sup> How much autonomy they actually had is unclear, but it seems indisputable that they possessed distinct privileges under the Ptolemies (and later, the Romans).

Within Alexandria itself, most of the Jews resided in two of the city's quarters (the word *quarters* is misleading as there were in fact five of them) although they were allowed to live in other places. The most famous of these quarters was the Delta quarter which was situated near the royal palace.<sup>140</sup> Indeed, it was in the cities of Egypt under the Ptolemies that the first great synagogues were built, the greatest of which was in the Delta quarter of Alexandria. This

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<sup>137</sup> Modrzejewski, 80-1.

<sup>138</sup> Kasher, 4. It is worth noting that many scholars have argued that Jews did not have a *politeuma* but were full-fledged citizens of Alexandria. Because of the religious nature of public life in that time, I find it difficult to believe that any even semi-orthodox Jew could attain full citizenship (which would surely require sacrifices to the gods), and therefore I am more persuaded by the argument that they had a *politeuma*. However, for more information read Modrzejewski, 82.

<sup>139</sup> Kasher, 253-5.

<sup>140</sup> Tcherikover, 284-5.



synagogue was renowned for its magnificence and size; it supposedly could house all the Jews in Egypt and had seventy golden thrones for its leaders.<sup>141</sup> Although it probably did not have seventy golden thrones, at the time it was considered to be more magnificent than the Temple itself. The synagogue in Alexandria, however, was just one of several in the city, and many more arose throughout the land of Egypt. Significantly, these synagogues were formally recognized by Ptolemy Eurgetes as places of asylum, just like the Greek temples,<sup>142</sup> and some of the synagogues were even dedicated to the Ptolemies, like the one at Krokodilopolis (which was just one of three synagogues in the city).<sup>143</sup> These synagogues (or “house of prayer” as they were then called<sup>144</sup>) served as foci for the community, and the Ptolemies’ official recognition of these synagogues is not to be underestimated.

The status of the Jews in Alexandria seems to have been largely privileged, if not on completely equally footing with the Greek citizens. The same benefits, however, were not shared to the same extent by those Jews that lived in the villages scattered throughout Egypt. At that time, most of the population in Egypt lived as tenant farmers and craftsmen, either as royal peasants or as tenants of military settlers.<sup>145</sup> While the vast majority of these people were Egyptian natives, many other ethnic groups, including Jews, were to be found among them. Papyrological evidence indicates that these Jews worked in many capacities as farmers, shepherds, vine-dressers, masons, but also as slaves and servants.<sup>146</sup> Unlike the residents of Alexandria, these Jews seem to have possessed a low social standing akin to the Egyptian

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<sup>141</sup> Modrzejewski, 91,93.

<sup>142</sup> Modrzejewski, 97-8.

<sup>143</sup> Modrzejewski, 88-9.

<sup>144</sup> Modrzejewski, 93.

<sup>145</sup> Kasher 63.

<sup>146</sup> Kasher, 64-7.

natives making a very meager living without any special protections.<sup>147</sup> Even amongst these folks, however, were wealthy and successful peasants, such as the vine-dressers and an orchard owner.<sup>148</sup> Indeed, in the case of the orchard owner, he even served as a tax-farmer for the Ptolemies, indicating that despite his low status he was relatively wealthy.<sup>149</sup> The status of these Jews in the Egyptian *chora*, however, seems to have less to do with their ethnicity than the region they lived in – the Ptolemies did not place a high value on the Egyptian countryside, but on the cities. Moreover, their status does not seem to be any lower than the other ethnic groups living in that region, again suggesting that it was not ethnic discrimination but location that determined their relatively low social standing in the *chora*.

The Jewish community in Egypt seems to have largely prospered under the Ptolemies, and to have achieved high status in the military in particular. A great deal of Hellenization also went on during this time that reached more deeply into the thought-process of Judaism than was probably realized by those so influenced. As noted earlier, the adoption of Greek as their primary language was a major step in the road of Hellenization – for indeed language frames the very way we think, and vocabulary can have an influence on not just expression but perception itself. This is seen in the literature produced in Egypt – Philo, who wrote in the early first century, is a prime example of the Hellenized Jew, but his writings hardly stood alone.<sup>150</sup> Indeed, most of the literature from the *Letter of Aristeas* (a Jewish text claiming to be written by a Greek) to the Maccabees (the angels at the temple were certainly not Jewish angels!) displays this subtle influence of Hellenism – and it was not just secular literature that was thus

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<sup>147</sup> Kasher, 70-3.

<sup>148</sup> Kasher, 64-5, 72-3.

<sup>149</sup> Kasher, 73.

<sup>150</sup> Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 227.

affected. These changes even reached into the scriptures themselves, most notably in the book of Ecclesiastes, which was probably written in Ptolemaic times, and despite its flirtations with unorthodoxy, found acceptance quite early on.<sup>151</sup> Yet, this Hellenization did not spark the outrage that occurred under Jason and Menelaus' Hellenistic regime in Jerusalem. The question must be asked then, did the Maccabean revolt really arise out of a rejection of Hellenism, or was it perhaps a convenient target, a cunning rhetorical device on the part of the Hasmonean faction that distorted the real crux of the matter? To answer that question, it is necessary to further examine the events that occurred once the Seleucids assumed control of Coele-Syria, and in particular to take a closer look at Jason and Menelaus' reign over Jerusalem to determine whether the accusation of idolatry and sacrilege that were thrown at them were valid, or were part of political propaganda on the part of their rivals for power, the Hasmoneans.

### The Seleucids

Ever since the defeat of Antigonus at Ipsus in 301 B.C., the Seleucids had desired to control Coele-Syria, a region that included Phoenicia, Samaria, Judea, and the old coastal cities of the Philistines. The region had originally been ceded to Ptolemy by his allies Seleucus (r. 305-281 B.C.) and Lysimachus, as his share of the land taken from Antigonus, and he conquered it in 302, but hearing a false rumor of his allies' defeat at Antigonus' hand, Ptolemy failed to show up for the final decisive battle, and his allies, annoyed at his absence, gave the rights to Coele-Syria to Seleucus instead.<sup>152</sup> However, when Seleucus showed up to claim his possessions, he found

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<sup>151</sup> Elias Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), 143-159.

<sup>152</sup> Tcherikover, 52-3.

Ptolemy and his army had already occupied the area. For reasons that are unclear, Seleucus did not challenge Ptolemy's possession of the area (despite the claims of some scholars there is no evidence that Seleucid took control of the area, nor any mention of the supposed war that Ptolemy Philadelphus undertook to reclaim it, and as a result there is no real reason to doubt Diodorus' account of this subject).<sup>153</sup> For almost a hundred years, the Ptolemies ruled peaceably over the region (for the wars they fought with the Seleucids rarely affected the area) until Antiochus III, a Seleucid, invaded Palestine in 219 and quickly conquered the area.<sup>154</sup> His success, however, was short-lived, for Ptolemy IV Philopator raised a large army and decisively beat him at Raphia in 217, forcing Antiochus to make peace and withdraw his army.<sup>155</sup> Despite his defeat, Antiochus' determination to conquer Palestine remained unbroken, and when Ptolemy Philopator died and was replaced by Ptolemy Epiphanes, a young child of five, he once again invaded Palestine. The Ptolemaic forces held their own for a while, even briefly driving his forces back, but by 198 Antiochus had succeeded in consolidating his control over Coele-Syria.<sup>156</sup>

During this time of larger conflict between the Ptolemies and Seleucids, the region of Coele-Syria had been thrown into political turmoil, and Judea was no exception. Under the Ptolemies, Judea had achieved a significant level of autonomy as a temple-state with the high priest serving as the main official of the region.<sup>157</sup> However, as the Ptolemies' grip on the region began to slip, the Jewish community developed two groups, one pro-Ptolemaic and the

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<sup>153</sup> Tcherikover, 53.

<sup>154</sup> Tcherikover, 72.

<sup>155</sup> Tcherikover, 74.

<sup>156</sup> Tcherikover, 75-6.

<sup>157</sup> Tcherikover, 59.

other pro-Seleucid.<sup>158</sup> The Tobiads originally belonged to the pro-Ptolemaic group and Joseph's rise to power at his uncle's expense hinged on this struggle. Despite Josephus' claim that the High Priest Onias II refused to pay Judea's taxes to the Ptolemies over greed, Onias was not just an avaricious old fool. On the contrary, it would seem that Onias expected the Seleucids to imminently conquer the region and saw no reason to pay the money to the Ptolemies that he would soon need to pay the Seleucids.<sup>159</sup> Moreover, some scholars have suggested that Onias was motivated by a desire for closer relations with the large Babylonian Jewish community (under Seleucid control), which was at the time much larger and more prosperous than the relatively new community in Alexandria.<sup>160</sup> Onias, however, had misjudged the strength of the Ptolemies and of the pro-Ptolemaic faction, and Joseph politically outmaneuvered his uncle – which was perhaps not such a bad thing as Judea remained in Ptolemaic hands for another twenty years and would probably have been punished harshly for Onias' betrayal (if Ptolemy had followed through on his threat to make Jerusalem a military settlement).<sup>161</sup>

Hyrcanus followed in his father's footsteps, currying favor with the Ptolemies and consolidating his power in the region. However, he had made the same mistake Onias had made twenty years earlier – supporting the losing side – for no longer did the Ptolemies possess the strength to hold on to Coele-Syria. Ptolemy IV's death left Egypt with a child monarch who was no match for Antiochus, and Hyrcanus' brothers were more than willing to invite him in to Jerusalem. By this time, the Seleucid faction seems to have gained the upper hand, for Josephus records that most of the people and the High Priest, Simon, sided with the elder sons

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<sup>158</sup> Pearlman, 23.

<sup>159</sup> Tcherikover, 128-9.

<sup>160</sup> Pearlman, 23.

<sup>161</sup> Josephus, Bk 12, Ch. 4, s. 1.

of Tobias against Hyrcanus.<sup>162</sup> Interestingly, the conflict between the two factions was not one concerned with Hellenization, for the leaders on both sides were positively inclined towards Hellenism. Rather the conflict was a political one, a conflict over which group held the reins of power. Initially, at least, the change to Seleucid control was a positive one; the High Priest, Simon the Just, rebuilt much of Jerusalem at Antiochus III's command, and Simon remained, as in Ptolemaic Judea, the chief official in Judea.<sup>163</sup> Moreover, Antiochus, in appreciation of the Jews support for him, granted them a series of privileges, including most importantly a three-year suspension of taxes, followed by a permanent reduction in the tax rate, and permission to live according to their ancestral laws.<sup>164</sup> Moreover, the concessions also freed the nobility and priesthood of Jerusalem from all tax requirements, a concession sure to please the Seleucid faction in Jerusalem.<sup>165</sup> Things seemed to be going quite well for the Jews, but that changed when both Simon and Antiochus died.

Simon appears to have reasserted the power of the High Priesthood which his father Onias had lost to Joseph, and while it is unclear how the Tobiads felt about that loss of power, they went along with it while Simon was High Priest, perhaps because he shared the same goals and was, after all, family. Upon Simon's death, however, his son Onias III became the high priest, and much like his namesake, quickly lost power. He held on to the High Priesthood, despite a plot to raid the Temple treasury,<sup>166</sup> during the short reign of Seleucus IV, but when Antiochus IV (r. 175-164 B.C.) came to the throne, Onias was successfully deposed in favor of

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<sup>162</sup> Josephus, Bk 12, Ch. 4., s. 11

<sup>163</sup> Tcherikover, 80-1.

<sup>164</sup> Josephus, Bk 12, Ch. 3, s. 3-4. Although this letter was once labeled a forgery, further scrutiny by Bickerman has borne out its authenticity to the satisfaction of most scholars.

<sup>165</sup> Schafer, 29.

<sup>166</sup> Pearlman, 28-9.

his brother, Joshua, who took the name, Jason. Jason bought the title of High Priesthood from Antiochus by offering him a significant sum of money, and outlining a plan to turn Jerusalem into a polis.<sup>167</sup>

This move by Jason has been the subject of much controversy, and for many, it has been seen as a move of radical Hellenization.<sup>168</sup> 2 Maccabees has done a great deal to feed this notion, by referring to priests trying to undo their circumcision, and accusing them of abandoning the priestly rites in favor of Greek customs.<sup>169</sup> It is important, however, to remember that 2 Maccabees was written with the express purpose of reviling the opposition and praising the Hasmoneans – it hardly presents an unbiased testimony. As Lester Grabbe pointed out in his essay, “The Hellenistic City of Jerusalem,” for all the wickedness Jason is accused of in the book of Maccabees, it is hard to pin down what exactly he did wrong. The assertion that the priests ignored the rites is ludicrous – there is no evidence to suggest that the sacrifices ceased in any way. Indeed, priests were only duty two weeks a year, as well as festivals, so the suggestion that going to the gymnasium was stopping them from their duties hardly seems likely.<sup>170</sup> It is true, of course, that the gymnasium was often frowned on by Jewish authorities, but it does not in fact break any law in the Torah, and there is no reason to assume that idolatry was involved at the Jerusalem gymnasium – if there had been idols or sacrifices offered to Greek gods at the gymnasium, it is certain that the writer of Maccabees would have noted it, but the account makes no such accusation. 1 Maccabees does claim that the men were trying to undo the marks of circumcision, and such a surgery did exist in ancient times –

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<sup>167</sup> 2 Maccabees 4:7-11.

<sup>168</sup> Pearlman, 30-5.

<sup>169</sup> 2 Maccabees 4:11-18.

<sup>170</sup> John R. Bartlett, ed., *Jews in the Hellenistic and Roman Cities* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 10-11.

but it was an extremely painful and dangerous surgery, and it is hard to imagine that too many men were lining up to do it (even in the day and age of anesthetics and morphine, I doubt many men would volunteer for the procedure).<sup>171</sup> It is possible that a few men actually did try to do this, but the story may very well be little more than the ancient equivalent of an urban myth; regardless, there is no reason to think that Jason wanted or supported such extreme actions.<sup>172</sup> Really, the only grave accusation leveled at Jason is that he tried to send 300 silver drachmas to Tyre for sacrifices to Hercules, which his ambassadors gave instead for the construction of triremes.<sup>173</sup> If Jason really did this, then that was indeed a serious violation of the law, but as Grabbe pointed out, the account seems unlikely.<sup>174</sup> Couriers entrusted with that much gold are generally people that are considered trustworthy and reliable, and it seems unlikely that they violated Jason's command; really, there is no reason to believe that Jason gave that order, as there is no other evidence to suggest that he was in any way an idolater. In truth, the money was probably always intended for the warships, and the accusation was nothing more than a nasty rumor.<sup>175</sup>

There is thus little evidence to suggest that Jason was truly a radical Hellenizer. There is a great deal of rhetoric involved, but despite his reputation for wickedness, the actual complaints against him are surprisingly thin. If, however, Jason was not motivated by a desire to pervert the religion, or force Hellenism on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, what was his motivation in creating a Greek polis in Jerusalem? What is frequently forgotten in this debate is

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<sup>171</sup> Bartlett, 12.

<sup>172</sup> Bartlett, 13.

<sup>173</sup> 2 Maccabees 4:18-20.

<sup>174</sup> Bartlett, 12.

<sup>175</sup> Bartlett, 12.



that the primary motivation for most Syrian, Asian, and Egyptian cities to reinvent themselves as Greek poleis was not out of a deep and abiding love for Greek culture. For most, it was way of gaining power, privilege, and a degree of autonomy. A Greek polis was essentially a small state that had a great degree of self-governance over itself and the surrounding region, and had economic, military, and religious freedoms not enjoyed by other cities.<sup>176</sup> While the traditional rights of Greek poleis were somewhat curtailed in the Ptolemaic and Seleucid empires,<sup>177</sup> there were still definite advantages to becoming such a city, which is why all the great cities of the region from Tyre to Askelon reimagined themselves as Greek poleis. I would suggest, then, that Jason's goal for Jerusalem was not Hellenization, any more than those other cities, but rather enhanced political power and freedom. Why then is he represented so negatively by the Maccabees? First, he was of the opposing political party, and this conflict ended not just in debate or political maneuvering, but war, so it is hardly surprising that Jason is painted by the other side as a villain. Second, however, I think much of the accusations leveled against Jason really had less to do with him than his successor, Menelaus, about whom little good can be said.

Indeed, Jason's reign over Jerusalem lasted a mere three years, during which time events in Jerusalem seemed to go fairly well.<sup>178</sup> While some have interpreted the later unrest under Menelaus as evidence that the people were displeased with Jason and his "Hellenism," the truth of the matter is that there is no evidence at all to suggest this. There was no unrest under Jason's rule, brief though it was. Moreover, once he was replaced by Menelaus, civil war

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<sup>176</sup> Tcherikover, 22-4.

<sup>177</sup> Tcherikover, 23.

<sup>178</sup> Pearlman, 35.

broke out amongst the Jews with the majority supporting Jason – twice he managed to reoccupy Jerusalem and it was only by the strength of the Seleucid army that Menelaus' rule was confirmed.<sup>179</sup> This popular support for Jason flies in the face of the assertion that most of the Jews were offended by the establishment of a gymnasium in Jerusalem; on the contrary, Jason seems to have been accepted by the majority of the populace. The characterization of him as wicked is, I would suggest, a later one that emerged after the events of Menelaus' rule and the Maccabean revolt and was driven more by political rhetoric than historical truth.

How then was Jason overthrown? Ironically, he was replaced in much the same way that he had replaced his brother, as Menelaus promised the king three hundred more talents of silver in return for the office, a sum that he would quickly find was un-payable.<sup>180</sup> While Jason's succession had certainly set an unfortunate precedence for simony, he had at least belonged to the right family and was probably not the first son to seize power illegitimately; Menelaus, however, had no such claim to legitimacy and represented a genuine break with tradition.

If Jason has been traditionally represented as an ardent Hellenizer, Menelaus has been presented as a rabid Hellenizer, intent on wiping out Judaism itself.<sup>181</sup> Certainly, I think Menelaus was a Hellenizer, just as Jason and Simon and Joseph before him, but a careful examination of the events reveals that they were about a struggle for power than extending Hellenization in Judea. There is, in fact, little to suggest that Menelaus was more of a Hellenizer than Jason, but rather that he was, quite simply, extremely unlucky, finding himself between the proverbial rock and a hard place. It is true, indeed, that Menelaus' coming to power very

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<sup>179</sup> Tcherikover, 171.

<sup>180</sup> 2 Maccabees 4:23-7.

<sup>181</sup> Pearlman, 37.

quickly led to massive civil unrest and eventually the Hasmoneans' revolt, but was Hellenization actually the spark?

Menelaus had achieved his newfound position by the promise, not of Hellenization, but of a great deal of money, money that he quickly found he was unable to raise. Antiochus was unhappy with this situation and called him to Antioch for an explanation; feeling trapped, Menelaus raided some of the golden vessels from the Temple and sent assassins to kill Onias III, now living in Antioch, lest he convince the king to once again make him High Priest.<sup>182</sup> However, the vessels he had taken were not enough to cover the fee, so his brother, Lysimachus, took more from the Temple treasury.<sup>183</sup> This led to a violent riot that pitted Lysimachus with some 3000 supporters against much of the populace; in the conflict, Lysimachus was killed and the rioters were triumphant, but Antiochus, now that Menelaus had paid his dues, forced them to come to order.<sup>184</sup> While it is true that there is some religious component to this conflict – the stealing of the Temple treasures – this is hardly a conflict over Hellenism, nor were Menelaus' actions religiously motivated. Menelaus desperately needed money, and he took it from the only source available to him, which as the High Priest, was the Temple treasury. Moreover, the assassination of Onias was not a hit on a pious man (who, truth be told, is probably only remembered so favorably because he was the enemy of Jason and Menelaus), but rather an attempt to stop a rival claimant from replacing him as High Priest – Antiochus, after all, was clearly willing to appoint the highest bidder. In essence, then, this was a power struggle, not a religious conflict, and when the people did get involved it was not

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<sup>182</sup> Pearlman, 38-9.

<sup>183</sup> Pearlman, 39.

<sup>184</sup> 2 Maccabees 4:39-50.

because of some deep resentment of Hellenism, but because Menelaus was robbing the Temple for his own personal gain.

It was at this point that Jason again invaded Jerusalem, no doubt inspired by the reports of Antiochus' defeat in Egypt at the hands of the Romans (and even rumors of his death) and easily reclaimed it.<sup>185</sup> Once again, however, it is not possible to characterize this conflict as truly religious in nature, nor is there any way in which the popular support for Jason against Menelaus can be construed as anti-Hellenistic, for this was not primarily a religious dispute but a power struggle between two claimants for the High Priesthood. Unfortunately for Jason, Antiochus was not dead and his army was in fact nearby; Jason's forces were defeated, the Temple was further raided, and a new fortress with a permanent garrison was built, the Acra.<sup>186</sup>

Up until this point in the conflict, I would suggest that religion had not been the primary controversy between the two parties; the events that followed, however, changed that perception. Antiochus, quite simply, had had enough. He had doubtless been pleased when Jerusalem became a Greek polis and was more than happy to accept bribe money for the High Priesthood. What he was not okay with was the constant fighting that was occurring in Jerusalem, and it could not have helped that he had just been humiliated in Egypt at the hands of the Romans who deprived him of his conquest.<sup>187</sup> Thus, Antiochus could not have been in a particularly good mood when he heard of Jason's re-conquest of Jerusalem; it is not then entirely surprising that he responded harshly to their insurrection.

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<sup>185</sup> Pearlman, 39.

<sup>186</sup> Pearlman, 40-1.

<sup>187</sup> Pearlman, 45.

The new rules prohibited the practice of Judaism – the observance of the Sabbath and religious festivals, circumcision, or dietary laws were forbidden on pain of death, and Jews were expected to offer sacrifices to the Greek gods instead.<sup>188</sup> There is no reason to believe that Menelaus wanted or initiated this in anyway, and while 2 Maccabees records that he allowed Antiochus to enter the inner sanctuary, this was after he had sacked Jerusalem, killing thousands and selling thousands more into slavery.<sup>189</sup> Menelaus was really not in any position to refuse, and was, at this point, little more than a prisoner. The Greeks that Antiochus had put in charge, Apollonius, Philip, and Andronicus, were the real powers in Jerusalem at this point, not Menelaus.<sup>190</sup> It was here that religion emerged as a true source of conflict, and here that being associated with Hellenism became a bad thing – not because Hellenism, as it had been practiced for a century before, was truly offensive to Jewish sensibilities at that time, but because it was now associated with the persecution of Antiochus. The accusation of Hellenism would become a powerful rhetorical weapon in the hands of the Maccabees; what had not during Jason’s reign been particularly controversial had now become a serious transgression, a “betrayal” of Judaism, but there is no reason to believe that that was how it had been perceived earlier. Indeed, the people’s support of Jason, and even their initial acceptance of Menelaus, until he robbed the Temple treasury, all testify to the fact that their Hellenism was not considered a problem, that they were not considered unorthodox or idolatrous. That would change once they became associated with Antiochus. A similar example of such a change would be the popular perception of fascism; the political idea of fascism was quite

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<sup>188</sup> Pearlman, 48-9.

<sup>189</sup> 2 Maccabees 5:12-21.

<sup>190</sup> 2 Maccabees 5:22-6.

popular in America before World War II – indeed if you visit the Lincoln Memorial you can still see the fasces on either side of his throne – but after World War II, its association with Hitler overcame all other associations. Because Nazism was a form of fascism, all fascism fell out of favor, even that which had nothing to with Nazism. In the same way, Hellenism became, at least for a time, associated with the atrocities committed by Antiochus, and anyone who supported Hellenization, fairly or not, was condemned with him.

I am not arguing that religion was un-important to the Maccabees, for indeed, I think it was. Antiochus' actions had changed the nature of the unrest in Judea. No longer was it an issue of elites struggling for control, and seeking to grab further autonomy for Judea (and as its rulers, for themselves). Now it had become a struggle for their right to be Jewish, to practice their religion as they always had, but, and this is the crucial point, it would not remain that way. Even though the Hasmoneans strongly criticized Hellenism publicly, their later actions showed that they themselves were not as opposed to it as they claimed. Their response in the early days of the Maccabean revolt was a reaction to Antiochus' persecution, not a fundamental disagreement with all facets of Hellenism.

Indeed, quite early in the revolution they broke with the traditional practice of Judaism; Judah Maccabeus realized that a successful war could not be fought if his forces were utterly helpless one day of every week, and so he decided that they would fight to defend themselves on the Sabbath.<sup>191</sup> While this was a necessary decision and eliminated a major weakness for the Jewish forces (a weakness that several of the Greeks had used against them in the prior century), it nonetheless was a break with traditional Judaism, as it was practiced at that time. It

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<sup>191</sup> Pearlman, 79.

was a pragmatic, even Hellenistic, decision that placed logic and common sense over faith in God's deliverance.

Then, when Antiochus died, and Lysias took over as regent, the prohibitions against the practice of the Jewish faith were repealed, and Menelaus was executed by the Seleucids.<sup>192</sup> A new High priest was appointed who was of proper Aaronic descent, if not a Zadokite; indeed, despite his connections with Hellenism, he was accepted by the orthodox Jews who had previously supported the Maccabees, the Hasidim.<sup>193</sup> If the conflict had indeed been merely over religion, it should have ended then and there, but it was not just a religious struggle, but a political one. As with Jason before him, Judah Maccabeus sought to increase the power and autonomy of Judea (and implicitly, himself), and a return to the former status quo was not what he envisioned. Judah, instead, retained his forces, looking for a reason to fight, and soon found it; the new High Priest decided to usher in his reign by inexplicably hanging sixty Hasidim, who had previously supported him – needless to say this destroyed any hope for a peaceful resolution.<sup>194</sup> The war once again spiraled out of control, further complicated by the wars of succession within the Seleucid family, and upon Judah's death, his brother Jonathan took control.<sup>195</sup> Jonathan then proceeded to do exactly what Jason and Menelaus had been criticized for doing: he allied himself with one of the Seleucids, Alexander Balas, and accepted from him the title of High Priest, which he was even less qualified to take than Jason. The Hasmoneans would retain this title throughout their rule as it was accepted and confirmed,

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<sup>192</sup> Pearlman, 178-80.

<sup>193</sup> Pearlman, 192.

<sup>194</sup> Pearlman, 193.

<sup>195</sup> Pearlman, 209.

initially at least, by the Jewish community.<sup>196</sup> Moreover, Jonathan would proceed to make diplomatic overtures with the Romans and the Spartans, a policy which would be followed by the later Hasmoneans as well.<sup>197</sup>

It is true that some changes were made – Jerusalem was no longer organized as a Greek polis with a gymnasium, but then those changes were not as revolutionary as it might seem.<sup>198</sup> The gymnasium was presumably founded by Jason because it played an important role in a polis as a place to train soldiers and athletes for the city, but the polis was no longer needed. The significant political and economic freedoms that the polis had offered had been fully realized by the independence achieved under the Hasmoneans. It was not, after all, the polis that was desired, but the power and autonomy. Truthfully, the similarities between the leaders of the two sides (Hellenizers and the Maccabees) was remarkable; both sought to make alliances with outside forces to strengthen their own power base in Judea, and both were more than willing to unlawfully assume the title of High Priest – accepted from the Greek rulers, no less – as a means of control. Moreover, the later Hasmoneans would prove to be quite Hellenistic, constantly coming into conflict with, and occasionally persecuting, the more traditionalist Pharisees.<sup>199</sup> Indeed, Aristobulus I, the grand-nephew of Judah and Jonathan, was even known as the Philhellene – friend of Greeks!<sup>200</sup>

It seems difficult then, when carefully examining the context – both before and after the Maccabean revolt to make the argument that Hellenism was truly the source of the primary

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<sup>196</sup> Pearlman, 224-5, 253.

<sup>197</sup> Pearlman, 238-41, 254, Schafer, 69.

<sup>198</sup> Bartlett, 19-21.

<sup>199</sup> Schafer, 70-3.

<sup>200</sup> Schafer, 73.



conflict, or that the Tobiads and their allies in the Hellenist party were outliers, aberrations in a Jewish community that abhorred any changes from traditional Jewish practice. The truth is that except for a brief period within the actual wars between the Seleucids and Hasmoneans, a war provoked by Antiochus' intolerance, Hellenism continued to be attractive to the ruling class. The leaders remained essentially Hellenistic, whether they were the Tobiads or the Maccabees, and the accusations of Hellenism against Jason and Menelaus (Jason in particular, though) were a political ploy rather than genuine outrage over his actions (although, Menelaus' robbing of the Temple treasury truly was a source of outrage, but one caused by greed not Hellenism). It seems clear that during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, feelings against Hellenism ran very high indeed, and probably many who had been former Hellenists turned against it, but once the conflict was resolved, the community seems to have settled back into its old patterns. The Maccabean revolt was part of a longer struggle amongst the Jewish aristocrats over who would control Judea and how much control they would exercise over the region, not for freedom from Hellenization. The nature of the conflict was temporarily altered when Antiochus intervened in their conflicts, but once he and his successors were successfully defeated, Judea returned to its old patterns with mildly Hellenistic rulers in place. In fact, the Maccabean revolt, even in its early stages, did not signify a rejection of all Hellenes – the Maccabees' (even Judah's), willingness to turn to the Romans and Spartans, both Hellenized people (indeed, the Spartans were Greeks not just culturally but ethnically as well), shows that the revolt was against the Seleucids that ruled them and the opposing Jewish party that was then in power, not a general crusade against all of Greek culture.

## Conclusion

What then can be said of the Maccabean revolt and of the Hellenistic Judaism in this period? It was not primarily concerned with religion, nor was it an anomaly in the course of Jewish history, but was part of a broader power struggle that had been going on throughout the reigns of the Diadochi and their successors. Hellenism's role in the struggle was relatively brief, a source of controversy in the few years surrounding Antiochus Epiphanes' persecution of the Jews, and it was later used as political rhetoric to attack the opponents of the Maccabees, despite the fact that the two parties did not hold particularly different beliefs. The Maccabean revolt was indeed important, as it was the foundation of the Hasmonean kingdom, the last independent Jewish state until modern times, as well as the beginning of the celebration of Hannukah, but it did not represent a complete break from the events leading up to it. The power struggle within the Jewish state would continue, now between the Hasmoneans and the Pharisees along much the same lines as the struggles before it between the Tobiads and Oniads, and the Tobiad-Hellenists and the Maccabees. Perhaps the most important outcome of the Maccabean revolt, however, was that it became increasingly less acceptable in the Jewish community (in Judea, not so much in Egypt) to openly identify oneself as a Hellenist, even though Hellenism was accepted in many small ways (or decidedly large ways, as with the Pharisees adoption, albeit somewhat altered, of the Greek concept of resurrection<sup>201</sup>). This attitude fed the notion, continued by some to this day, that Judaism and Hellenism (or Western culture) are automatically opposed, a supposition that ignores the points of agreement in favor of focusing on the (genuine) differences between the two cultures. This has been a decidedly mixed legacy, for while it has enabled the survival of Jewish culture, the frequent isolation of

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<sup>201</sup> Schafer, 72-3.

the Jewish community, both forced and chosen, has also made their existence more difficult and tenuous. The Maccabean revolt, then, was a turning point, not so much in the complete rejection of Hellenism, but the rejection of the idea, and for that it really is quite important.

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