

## Chapter 8

### Decline of the Seleukids and Restoration of a Judaeen Monarchy

Since the establishment of Israel as a nation-state the Maccabean revolt against the Seleukids has been celebrated by many Israelis, and to a lesser extent by various Christian Millennialists in Britain and the U.S.A. The Maccabee brothers have been hailed as heroes who against impossible odds defeated the powerful Seleukid empire and won Jewish independence. This view of the Maccabean revolt owes something to history and something to romance.

#### Sources on the Maccabean revolt

Jewish and Christian readers of the Apocrypha have seen the history of Judaea in the second century BC from the perspective of two Judaeen authors who wrote the books known to us as First and Second Maccabees.<sup>1</sup> First Maccabees was probably composed ca. 100 BC. The original language was probably Hebrew, and it was soon translated rather clumsily into Greek. In sixteen chapters it celebrates the careers of the three Hasmonaean brothers - Judas Maccabaeus, Jonathan and Simon - and ends with the murder of Simon in 135 BC. There are few miracles in this text: the course of events is explained mostly in human terms, the Lord (or "Heaven") playing only a secondary role. The last verses of the book (16:23-24) inform the reader that the deeds of Simon's son, John Hyrcanus (who ruled Judaea until his death in 104 BC), can be read in a separate work. That separate work is no longer extant, but we can assume that ca. 100 BC Judaeans had available a laudatory history of the Hasmonaean dynasty from the outbreak of the Maccabean revolt through the reign of John Hyrcanus.

A much more romantic story of the Maccabean revolt, written in Greek and evidently at Alexandria, was also available in the first century BC.<sup>2</sup> Second Maccabees is a sensational and credulous book that became a favorite in early Christian churches and has come down to us as part of the canonical apocrypha. In fifteen chapters Second Maccabees covers the period 176-161 BC, down to Judas Maccabaeus' victory over Nikanor. For historians Second Maccabees is of some value because almost half of the book is devoted to the preliminaries to the revolt, which are not dealt with by First Maccabees: the period, that is, from the accession of Antiochos IV to his Hellenizing of the Jerusalem temple. Although it seems to have been composed after First Maccabees, Second Maccabees was based on a five-book "history" composed by a Jason of Cyrene. When Jason lived and wrote is much disputed, with some scholars arguing that he was a contemporary of Judas Maccabaeus and wrote shortly after the death of Judas in 160 BC, while others would put Jason much later. In any case, Second Maccabees features divine punishment of evildoers and divine assistance to the pious, miraculous events and apparitions, and a happy ending (the victory of Judas over Nikanor).<sup>3</sup>

Both First and Second Maccabees were written by admirers of Judas Maccabaeus and his brothers and offer a triumphalist view of the brothers' struggle: led by the Maccabee brothers, little Judaea triumphs over the mighty Seleukid kingdom. That the struggle was in large part an internal conflict - between Hellenizing Judaeans in Jerusalem and anti-Hellenizing Judaeans in

the countryside - is mostly obscured, and the only internal conflict recognized is between the pious and the wicked. The "revolt" is won in part because of the heroism of the rebellious Judaeans and their leaders, and in part - especially as Second Maccabees presented it - because of the miraculous assistance that the Lord provided to his people. In Second Maccabees the role played by chance is regularly assigned to divine intervention, and in both books the roles played by the Parthians, the Romans and the Ptolemies are either minimized or entirely ignored. This mythicizing of the revolt, and the distortion of the real history of Judaea and the Seleukids in the second century BC, misled the Judaeans of a much later time into a disastrous revolt against Nero and the Roman Empire, and for almost three centuries provided inspiration for Christian martyrdom.

If we take a more balanced overview we will see that the Maccabean revolt against Hellenism and its Seleukid patrons was not so impressive as our authors supposed it to be. The Hasmonaean kingdom came into being because the Seleukid kingdom declined, fitfully from 190 through the 130s BC and then precipitously in 129 BC. The decline was in small part the result of the Maccabean revolt, and in great part the result of three factors outside Judaea: Roman hostility, factionalism within the Seleukid royal house, and the growth of Parthian power. Relative to these major developments, the Maccabean revolt seemed at the time a matter of minor significance, and non-Judaeans paid little attention to it. Polybius and Diodorus, who were much interested in the progressive decline of the Seleukids, must have had almost nothing to say about the Maccabean revolt (the Byzantine excerptors of Polybius and Diodorus, at any rate, excerpted nothing from these authors on that topic). One could in fact go so far as to say that even had Judas and his brothers not led a revolt, Judaea would still have become de facto independent in 129 BC, when Antiochos VII Sidetes was killed and his army was destroyed by the Parthian king Phraates II.

### **The Romans' weakening of the Seleukid empire**

The Roman senate was somewhat paranoid about the Seleukid empire, many senators believing that the Seleukids were bent upon breaking the power of Rome. The paranoia was stoked in 196 BC by the flight of Hannibal from Carthage to the Seleukid court, where he was welcomed by Antiochos III ("the Great"). Soon the Roman senate began looking for a reason to go to war with Antiochos, and found it in Antiochos' ambition to establish a foothold in Greece. Although it was hardly the Romans' business to decide who could and who could not make alliances with any of the Greek states, the senate in 192 BC declared war on Antiochos, and easily expelled his expeditionary force from Greece.

That, however, was just the beginning. The next move was to send the legions to Anatolia, and to evict the Seleukids from there. The Roman senate had an excuse of sorts: in northwest Anatolia the Attalids' King Eumenes II, a reliable Roman toady, had requested that the Romans come to Anatolia in order to repel "aggressions" by Antiochos the Great. For the encounter Antiochos brought his entire army, some 70,000 men, and in midsummer of 190 BC they met the Romans and Eumenes in battle on a plain near Magnesia, a city approximately forty miles northeast of modern Izmir. At Magnesia the Roman legions defeated Antiochos' huge army, virtually annihilating his phalanx. Antiochos could not replace the men he lost, and

recognized that he would have to accept whatever terms the Roman senate imposed on him.

In 189 BC, at Apamea in Syria, Antiochos III was forced to sign a peace treaty that truncated his empire. The Roman senate forced him to abandon all claims to Anatolian territory: no Seleukid military force was to operate north or west of the Tauros mountain range. With its dozens of Greek cities, many of which had been founded by the early Seleukids, Anatolia had been the Seleukids' principal source of manpower and one of its main sources of tax revenue. In addition, the Romans imposed upon Antiochos an indemnity of 15,000 silver talents, the payment of which would drain his kingdom for decades. The king's last years were spent in a futile effort to recoup his monetary losses by squeezing his remaining subjects, including the many temple-states of the Levant and Mesopotamia. He died a sorry death in July of 187 BC, murdered in Elam (or southwestern Iran) while engaged in stripping an Elamite temple of its gold and silver dedications. The Seleukid empire that Antiochos III bequeathed to his son, Seleukos IV, was a far cry from what it had been in Antiochos' prime.

### **The Hellenizing of Jerusalem in the early years of Antiochos IV Epiphanes**

Seleukos' reign of twelve years was cheerless. When he died in 175 BC the Seleukid throne was transferred in orderly fashion to his younger brother, Antiochos IV Epiphanes. Epiphanes, who had spent the preceding years as a hostage in Rome (thus guaranteeing for the Roman senate that King Seleukos would behave properly), was more talented, ambitious and eccentric than his older brother. Epiphanes had seen enough in Rome and Italy to appreciate the strengths of the Roman state, and from the beginning of his rule he seems to have attempted to strengthen the Seleukid kingdom, giving it more cohesion and creating tighter bonds between the government - namely himself - and the governed. One of the most important ingredients of this policy was Hellenization: the extension of the Greek language and of Greek *paideia* throughout the major cities of his realm. This process had been going forward for a century and a half, but had slowed after the initial spate of royal foundations by Seleukos I and Antiochos I.

The one great city in Judaea, and one of the eight or ten largest cities in all the Seleukid kingdom, was Jerusalem. Hellenization was under way in Jerusalem, but was relatively slow. Although the Greek language had become familiar there, Greek culture was scarcely in evidence. The city was dominated by its huge temple to Adonai. From the tenth century to the early sixth the temple - which according to tradition had been built by Solomon - had co-existed with a royal palace. Both were destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC. The Persian kings did not of course revive the Judaeian monarchy, and so Jerusalem had no royal palace in the Persian period, but the temple of Adonai was rebuilt and was dedicated in 516 BC. After that, the city of Jerusalem came more and more to be controlled by the temple's high priest, who was both the religious and the temporal authority in the Persian province of *Yehud*, and this tendency continued under the Ptolemies and early Seleukids. The position of high priest was the prerogative of a few families that claimed descent from Zadok, priest of King David, and ultimately from Aaron, brother of Moses (by producing imaginative genealogies lesser priests in the temple were also able to claim Aaronite descent).

From at least ca. 200 BC onward, and probably for much of the third century BC, the high

priest shared power with a council of some sort, which in later times was called the Sanhedrin (*synhedrion* in Greek). The members of this council were evidently revered elders, most of them priests and “scribes” (*soferim*) who were experts in the *torah*. The Sanhedrin functioned as a criminal and civil court, following in all cases “the laws of Moses,” and also judged those Judaeans who were charged with breaking one of the cultic laws. Together, the high priest and the Sanhedrin were the “local government” of Judaea, and of course were ultimately under the control of the Hellenistic kings: the Ptolemies before 200 BC, and the Seleukids after that date.

In the early second century BC the incumbent high-priest was Onias. He saw to it as best he could that for all Judaeans in and around Jerusalem the Law of Moses guided not only the form of religious observances but also the routines of daily life. Onias was probably not the kind of leader whom Antiochos Epiphanes wanted as high priest of the Jerusalem temple, and an opportunity to make a change came in 175 BC, almost immediately after Epiphanes’ accession. Several prominent Judaeans complained to the new king that Onias was mismanaging the marketplace in Jerusalem, and was also cooking the books in which temple-deposits were recorded. These charges of malfeasance gave the king a pretext for demanding that Onias step down from the high priesthood, and in his place Antiochos appointed Onias’ brother, who had early been called Joshua but who preferred the Greek name of Jason. For the position of high priest Jason is reported to have presented to Epiphanes an honorarium of 440 talents, and the financial consideration was surely a factor in the king’s decision. Perhaps of equal importance was the fact that Jason was less devoted than was his brother to the Judaeans’ ancestral traditions. In any case, once installed as high priest Jason quickly set about making Jerusalem a more Hellenic city. Its government, although still directed by the high priest, would include an elected council, all the councillors being men of substance. And for the young sons of the aristocracy Jason would provide schools of Greek literature, a stadium, and a gymnasium. Religious life, and the rituals of the Jerusalem temple, would continue to conform to the Torah, but in other respects Jerusalem would begin to resemble such nearby Greek cities as Pella, Philadelphia (Amman) and Gerasa (Jerash). Jason secured Antiochos’ permission to give to the men who had trained in the gymnasium the honorary status of “the Antiochenes of Jerusalem.”<sup>4</sup>

Jason’s program moved forward with little difficulty. The upper classes in Jerusalem embraced it, and it was surely a source of great satisfaction for Epiphanes, whom Jason welcomed to Jerusalem with a splendid torch-light parade. But the king’s relentless quest for money spoiled the stew. In 172 BC Antiochos was approached by another prominent Judaeans, Menelaus, who offered the king another three hundred talents of silver in exchange for the appointment as high priest. Antiochos agreed, and replaced Jason with Menelaus. In justifiable indignation Jason retired across the Jordan, and Menelaus took charge of the temple and Jerusalem. Who precisely Menelaus was is unclear. Josephus (*Antiquities* 12.5.1) says that he was the brother of Onias and Jason, which would have given him the necessary Zadokite credentials, but Second Maccabees (3:4 and 4:23) identifies him as a Benjaminite. Menelaus seems to have continued the Hellenizing that Jason had begun, and evidently was acceptable to most of the wealthier men in Jerusalem. Young Judaeans enjoyed wearing the cloak and the wide-brimmed hat (the *petasos*) of Hellenic ephebes, and many frequented the gymnasium. Greek athletes customarily competed in the nude (the word *gymnos* in fact meant “naked”), and muscular Judaeans undressed accordingly. An occasional Judaeans athlete was sufficiently

embarrassed about his circumcised penis that he underwent a “corrective” surgery that made him look more Hellenic.<sup>5</sup> So popular a place was the Jerusalem gymnasium that even the younger priests hurried to complete their sacrificial duties at the temple in order to join in the athletic competitions.

### **Antiochos IV Epiphanes’ ambition to conquer Egypt**

For the rest of the *oikoumene* the Hellenizing of Jerusalem seemed one of the least important developments in the late 170s BC. In contrast, the Romans’ war (172-168 BC) with Perseus, the Antigonid king of Macedon, was watched closely by everyone in the eastern Mediterranean. Most Hellenes hoped that Perseus could stand his ground, but the realists knew that in the end Rome was likely to prevail. Among the Romans’ few supporters in the Greek-speaking world were the Ptolemies, who for more than a century had counted on their treaty of friendship with the Roman senate and people. With the Romans taking on the Antigonids, the advisors and regents of Ptolemy VI Philometor, who was still an adolescent, foolishly decided that the time was propitious to take back the southern Levant from the Seleukids. A Ptolemaic army marched into Palestine in 169. Antiochos Epiphanes, however, was quick to counter and defeat it. Epiphanes then proceeded into Egypt and in fact briefly entered Alexandria, perhaps to test the Alexandrians’ loyalties to their young Ptolemaic king.

On his return from Alexandria to Antioch, late in 169, Epiphanes stopped in Jerusalem. Despite the king’s demands, Menelaus had not yet paid the sum promised for his appointment. Epiphanes therefore entered the temple of Adonai, requisitioned what he claimed was his from its vast stores (thousands of talents in gold and silver had been dedicated or deposited there), and carried it off to Antioch. Most people in Jerusalem were offended and some were furious at this appropriation. Violence broke out around the temple and a number of Judaeans were killed.

In June of the following year (168 BC), with the Romans’ war against Perseus still in progress and the outcome still in doubt, Antiochos made his second foray into Egypt, this time apparently with the intention of adding Alexandria and the rest of the Delta to his kingdom. The Ptolemies were unable to prevent him from entering the city, and at least some of the Alexandrians seemed ready to recognize his rule. By late June, however, the Romans had won a crushing victory over Perseus at Pydna, and the Roman senate sent Popilius Laenas to Alexandria, Laenas carrying with him the senate’s written demand that Antiochos leave Alexandria immediately. Laenas found Epiphanes in Eleusis, one of the suburbs of Alexandria, and handed him the text of the Roman senate’s order. Surprised at its peremptory message, Epiphanes announced that he would discuss the matter with his advisors. At that, Laenas drew in the sand a circle round Antiochos and said “Discuss it here!” indicating that if Epiphanes did not accept the senate’s demand before leaving the circle he would be at war with Rome. The humiliation of Epiphanes could hardly have been more complete and more public. He had no choice but to abandon, then and there, any hope of adding Egypt to the Seleukid kingdom. The Ptolemies would survive for another five generations.

### **Violence in Jerusalem, and Antiochos’ Reform**

Dramatic as were these events in Alexandria, their report was magnified by the time it reached Judaea. Sightings of heavenly hosts, the Lord's horsemen clad in golden armor and galloping through the skies, were reported and verified in Jerusalem, and the rumor spread that Antiochos Epiphanes had been killed in Egypt. The rumor inspired Jason, who four years earlier had been deposed as high priest, to strike while the iron was hot. Abruptly ending his exile and gathering together a thousand supporters, Jason returned to Jerusalem and declared himself the rightful high priest. Menelaus fled for shelter to the citadel.<sup>6</sup> Most of the poor in Jerusalem cared little for either Jason or Menelaus, but seized the occasion to riot against everything Seleukid and Hellenic. They had been angered by the gymnasium, the stadium, the council, and the creation of "the Antiochenes of Jerusalem," and news that the Lord had struck down the impious king near Alexandria encouraged mobs to lash out at the Seleukid regime and its beneficiaries.

Antiochos was of course not dead, and the riot subsided as quickly as it began. Second Maccabees describes an immediate bloodbath: in this fantasy, Epiphanes brings his troops directly from Egypt to Jerusalem, orders them to attack the city's unarmed inhabitants, and after three days 40,000 Jerusalemites are dead and the same number are enslaved. First Maccabees, contrarily, knows nothing of an incursion by Antiochos into Jerusalem in 168, but reports instead (1:30-34) that in the next year - 167 BC - the king sent to the city one of his top officers with a powerful force. Once inside the city the officer (who is probably to be identified as Apollonios, whom we later find governing Judaea for Epiphanes) proceeded to construct a fortress, walled and protected by towers, to house a permanent Seleukid garrison. Such an *akra* was not unusual in unreliable cities within an empire, but Jerusalem had been spared the indignity under Persian, Ptolemaic and early Seleukid rulers. Even worse, the Akra was sited very near to the temple. The Judaeans who tried to halt the project were dealt with violently, and many were killed.

The construction of the Akra was followed by the announcement of a dreadful policy: Antiochos issued an edict that the people of Judaea were henceforth to abandon their traditional Laws of Moses and were to conduct themselves as Hellenes. Circumcision was outlawed, pork was to be sold in the city, all copies of the Torah were to be confiscated, and the Sabbath was to be a day of work and business. Finally, the temple of Adonai was to be converted into a temple of Zeus Olympios. This final stipulation may not have seemed to Epiphanes so radical as the others, because by this time educated Hellenes and also a few Judaeans, as indicated by the *Letter of Aristeas*, had begun equating both Adonai and Zeus with the Lord of the Universe. At other temples new names for old gods were accepted and sometimes welcomed. At Heliopolis (Baalbek) in eastern Lebanon the god Baal Hadad ("Lord Hadad") was called Zeus by the Hellenes, and later the Romans would call him Jupiter, apparently without unduly irritating local sensitivities. In any case, Epiphanes set up no statue in the Jerusalem temple, thinking not that he was evicting one god from the temple and installing another, but that he was giving the old god a Greek name and a Greek persona. Menelaus remained in charge as the temple's high priest (he seems to have been agreeable to the reform) and evidently most of the lower priests continued to perform their duties as usual. On the 15<sup>th</sup> day of Kislew (December) in 167 BC the altar of the temple received its first sacrifices to Zeus.

Although alterations in cults were frequent, a forcible change of cult and an attempt to

stamp out long-standing traditions were unprecedented. Hellenistic kings had heretofore been careful to portray themselves as benefactors of the many local cults in their polyglot kingdoms. Long before the Hellenistic period the Jerusalem temple had been the target of kings, and the Assyrians had required the Jerusalem priests to pay cult to Assur as well as to Yahweh. But neither Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria nor Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had thought of suppressing the religion of Judah. After Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple in 587 BC, the Judahites were still free to worship Yahweh with a makeshift altar, and were expected to carry on with their traditional pieties. The policy embarked upon in 167 BC by Antiochos Epiphanes was very different. In the aftermath of his expulsion from Egypt by the Romans, and of the Jerusalem revolt at the same time, Epiphanes had evidently decided to push through an immediate and thorough Hellenizing of Jerusalem if not of all Judaea. The animosity of pious and traditional Judaeans against the Hellenizers in Jerusalem and against the Seleukid kingdom persuaded Epiphanes that some aspects of the Adonai cult in Jerusalem were in themselves incompatible with Hellenization. The author of I Maccabees says that Antiochos intended to make Hellenes of all his subjects throughout his vast empire, but this is unlikely. In any case, that Antiochos interfered with the Judaeans congregations in Mesopotamia is not indicated by our sources, which focus entirely on Judaea itself.<sup>7</sup>

Strategically, in issuing his radical edicts Epiphanes made a mistake of historic dimensions. It is clear from both First and Second Maccabees that a significant number of Judaeans, especially in Jerusalem, were in favor of liberalizing the Law of Moses, and of joining the wider Hellenistic world. In abandoning the policies of Antiochos III and Seleukos IV, which invited but never coerced the Hellenizing of Jerusalem (and which never envisaged the Hellenizing of villagers), Epiphanes not only goaded the countryside into revolt, but also lost some support among the upper classes in Jerusalem. It was one thing to add to the city a gymnasium and a school of Greek literature, and to ease off from the more onerous of the Judaeans traditions. It was something very different to outlaw those traditions altogether, given the fact that most Judaeans believed that their way of life had been ordered by Adonai himself and that past deviations from it had resulted in terrible displays of his wrath. In the event, Antiochos' reform in 167 BC backfired, with enormous consequences. In the short run it stopped the progress of Hellenization in Judaea. In the long run, the abortive reform set in motion a course of events that ultimately converted the entire Greco-Roman world and more to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

The very terms "Hellenism" and "Judaism" appeared for the first time during the conflict that Epiphanes ignited. For Judaeans who used the terms, *ioudaismos* and *hellenismos* were antithetical. Although the terms certainly had theological connotations they seem to have more immediately denoted customs or traditions: the Judaeans way of life versus the Greek way of life.<sup>8</sup> The antithesis was perhaps set up not in Jerusalem but in the Judaeans countryside, where Hellenic innovations were least appreciated. It is again at the time of the Maccabees that our texts first mention *hasidim*, "pious ones," and the *hasidim* to which the texts refer were located in rural Judaea.<sup>9</sup> Judaeans living in Alexandria and serving in the Ptolemaic army could not have regarded the Greek way of life as incompatible with their identity as Judaeans, and even in Jerusalem such a dichotomy would not have made much sense: urbanites who spoke, read and wrote in Greek and gave Greek names to their children were obviously aware that in at least a

few respects “Greek ways” were not to be despised. The *hasidim* and the opposition to *hellenismos* apparently originated in the Aramaic-speaking villages, where the Greek language was alien. Such attitudes were very likely there even before Antiochos Epiphanes came to power, but they would have amounted to little more than rural conservatism had he not provoked the confrontation by his edicts in 167 BC. Even then, when Antiochos implemented his reform he had some reason to believe that it would succeed. Its failure resulted in part from his underestimating the hostility of the Judaeian countryside, and in part from a string of remarkable and unforeseen contingencies.

## **The emergence of the Maccabees**

Drastic as the reform was, it did not ignite a riot in Jerusalem. The lower classes there were hostile to Epiphanes and his program, but the bloodbath supervised by Apollonios was still vivid in their minds. Violence began early in 166 BC, when Seleukid officials began introducing Hellenic cult into rural Judaea, setting up a temporary altar at each town or village that they visited and requiring the inhabitants to participate in a sacrifice to one of the Greek gods. Such sacrifices may have been only slightly offensive to sophisticated urbanites in Jerusalem, who knew that the Seleukids themselves did not take the old Greek gods any more seriously than they took the purported divinity of the dead Seleukid kings. In rural Judaea, however, Antiochos’ new policy was met with outrage. And in rural Judaea a military tradition was still very much alive, as the recruitment of professional Judaeian troops by Ptolemy Soter and his successors had shown.

At the small town of Modein, twenty miles west of Jerusalem, the ceremony turned to bloodshed. Modein was the home of an elderly priest named Mattathiah and his five sons. Descended from a progenitor named Hashmon or Hasmon, the family was in later times called “the Hasmonaeans.” The nickname Makkabaios (Latinized as *Maccabaeus*) was a Hellenized form of an Aramaic word meaning “the hammerer.” It was applied first to one and eventually to all of Mattathiah’s sons. Refusing to make sacrifices to Zeus, Mattathiah was one of the priests who had left the Jerusalem temple in the preceding year, and he and his sons vowed not to allow the Seleukid sacrilege to take place in their community of Modein. When the first villager stepped forward to taste the sacrificial meat, Mattathiah and his sons burst forward and slew both the villager and the Seleukid official in charge. Father and sons then fled to the hills, where they soon were joined by dozens of other young *hasidim* from Modein and the neighboring communities. Initially the group was small and fanatical, and restricted itself to terrorizing the towns and villages within its reach. Although scrupulously resting on the sabbath day, the group spent the rest of the week identifying and slaying Judaeians who “disobeyed the Law” or who had approved of the innovations introduced in Jerusalem by Jason and Menelaus. Evidently many of the rural Judaeians and *hasidim* condoned the terrorist tactic, and in the countryside Hellenizing Judaeians would have been too few and scattered to mount an effective resistance. The Hellenized minority necessarily looked to the Seleukid governor for protection, and Apollonios set out with a contingent of his mercenaries to destroy the terrorists.

The latter, however, had become more numerous than Apollonios supposed, and had a talented leader. Mattathiah died soon after the revolt began, and leadership passed to the third of



his five sons, Judas, whose nickname was “the Hammer” (*Maccabaeus*). After being worsted in an initial encounter, which Apollonios launched on a Sabbath day, Judas and his fellows made the wise decision to allow at least limited military action on the Sabbath. Late in 166 BC, and possibly on a Sabbath day, Judas ambushed Apollonios’ small force and defeated it, traditionally at Nahal el-Haramiah, killing Apollonios himself and most of his mercenaries. After their victory the Maccabean rebels despoiled the enemy dead of their armor and weapons (Judas himself took Apollonios’ sword, which he carried for the rest of his life).<sup>10</sup> Although it was a small battle, the victory of the Maccabees over Apollonios’ brigade made a great impression in rural Judaea, convincing the faithful that the Lord was fighting at the side of Judas Maccabaeus and his *hasidim*, and more Judaeans flocked to join Judas’ band.

When word of Apollonios’ defeat and death reached Antioch, Epiphanes ordered another general, Seron, to right the situation. With his Seleukid troops and assisted by those Judaeans who opposed the rebels, Seron made his way toward Jerusalem, to join the Seleukid garrison that held the city. At Beth-horon, a mountain pass fifteen airline miles northwest of Jerusalem, Judas and his guerillas surprised Seron’s column.<sup>11</sup> Eight hundred of the Gentiles and their Judaeans supporters were slain, and the rest fled back down to the Palestinian plain. News of the victory spread quickly through the hill country, and thousands of young men now joined Judas Maccabaeus and his brothers.

### **Epiphanes’ campaign in the east, his death, and the Seleukid succession**

None of this seems to have been of great concern to Epiphanes. His mind was not on the religious fanatics in the hills of Judaea, but on a grand expedition to the east, which he hoped would compensate for his father’s loss of Anatolia and for his own failure to annex Egypt. He was preparing, that is, for a great campaign into Iran, all of which he intended to subdue and firmly to attach to his kingdom. In northeastern Iran the regime that controlled Bactria did not recognize Seleukid authority, and Epiphanes was determined to bring the mavericks to heel. More worrisome were the Arsacid kings of Parthia, in northwestern Iran. The Arsacids had constructed a formidable independent power, a Parthian kingdom, and that too needed to be crushed. Finally, and most importantly, the Seleukids had lost control of Armenia. Evidently Antiochos the Great had ruled Armenia through a *strategos* named Artaxias in Greek sources, and “Artašes, son of Zareh” in recently discovered Aramaic inscriptions. But in the aftermath of Antiochos the Great’s defeat by the Romans in 190 BC, Artaxias had set himself up as an independent ruler of Armenia and had built himself a fine new capital which he named Artaxata, after himself.

For his showdown with the various rebels Antiochos Epiphanes assembled a vast force of 50,000 men and an elephant corps. To govern the Levant while he was gone, and to watch over his young son, the crown prince, he appointed an experienced official named Lysias. With everything in order, more or less, and with high ambitions, Epiphanes set out for the east, probably early in 165 BC. Although we have almost no information about the campaign, it is likely to have begun in Armenia, because we are informed that Epiphanes brought Artaxias to heel. What happened with Antiochos’ Parthian plans we do not know (it is not likely that a major battle was fought on that front), but in spring of 163 BC Antiochos was far to the south, in

Elam. We can assume he did other things in Elam, but the only action reported is his “plundering” of a temple that was home for a goddess whom our Greek sources equate with either Artemis or Aphrodite. Whoever she was, the goddess was so angered by Epiphanes’ violation that she struck him with a wasting disease. He died in the east, still in middle age and having ruled just under twelve years. A general named Philip, to whom Epiphanes had delegated authority, took charge of bringing the huge army back to Antioch. As for the succession, as soon as word of Epiphanes’ death reached Antioch, Lysias saw to it that Epiphanes’ nine-year-old son was elevated to the throne, to rule as Antiochos V Eupator.

In retrospect we can see that Epiphanes’ untimely death (he was perhaps fifty-two when he died) set the Seleukid kingdom into a downward spiral from which it would never recover. Instead of conquering Parthia and the rest of Iran, the Seleukids now began to quarrel among themselves. As Philip and the expeditionary army made their way toward Antioch, Philip proclaimed himself as the regent for the boy Eupator. That angered Lysias, who believed himself to be Eupator’s regent, and a brief civil war ensued before the sympathies of the army settled on Lysias. With Philip out of the way, Lysias was the real power behind the boy-king’s throne, but the arrangement lasted little more than a year. Late in 162 there arrived from Rome another Seleukid, whose claim on the throne was every bit as good as Eupator’s and who was, in addition, an unusually attractive and intelligent young man. This was Demetrios, 24-year-old son of Seleukos IV, and so a cousin of Eupator. Demetrios had spent all of Epiphanes’ reign as a hostage in Rome, guaranteeing his uncle’s good behavior, and had become a friend of many young men in Roman senatorial families. Although the senate itself did not give Demetrios permission to leave Rome, his well-placed friends (including the historian Polybios) helped him to escape and to make his way back to Syria. In Antioch the masses gave Demetrios an enthusiastic welcome, to the dismay of Lysias and the boy-king Eupator. The army too preferred Demetrios to the regency, and an officer announced to Demetrios that Lysias and Eupator had been placed in custody. When the officer asked what was to be done with them Demetrios replied, “I do not wish to see them,” and Lysias and Eupator were done away with. Thus began Demetrios’ reign (162-150 BC).

### **The Maccabees in the meanwhile: from defense of *Ioudaismos* to political revolt**

While these events of international importance were taking place in Elam, Mesopotamia and Syria, the obscure Maccabaeian movement continued in Judaea. In 165 BC Lysias, as regent for all of the Levant, had sent a small army (5000 men, according to First Maccabees) under the command of Gorgias to wipe out the guerillas, who controlled much of the mountainous interior of Judaea. Gorgias set up his camp at the edge of the sea-plain and near to the city of Emmaus, and with most of his troops he climbed into the hills to search out the guerillas. Informed that the main body of the troops was away, Judas led his men down into the plain and stormed the camp. After killing the defenders, the rebels plundered the camp and then set it afire. As described by the author of I Maccabees, “that day saw a great deliverance for Israel.”<sup>12</sup>

When news of the rebels’ feat spread through Judaea, thousands more joined Judas’ group, and the harvest of arms and recruits transformed the guerilla movement into a national army. Judaeans who had a liking for military service and who for centuries had taken

employment with Chaldaean, Persian, Ptolemaic and even Seleukid kings, were now at the disposal of Judas Maccabaeus. With success, the goals and character of the movement began to change. Judas' mission was no longer just to punish the lax and unfaithful Judaeans, or to terrorize the Gentile communities around Judaea, but also to drive the Seleukids out of Judaea. The Maccabean revolt, which had originated as a defense of what was beginning to be called *Ioudaismos*, was now seen by many of the *hasidim* as an offensive war against *Hellenismos*. But Judas' goals, after his burning of Gorgias' camp, were becoming more political and more secular than those of the *hasidim*. Judas' enemy was now not so much Hellenism as the Seleukid monarchy. Far from making war on Hellenism, the Hasmonaean leaders proclaimed the supposed "kinship" of the Judaeans and the Spartans (someone - perhaps Nabis, who had ruled Sparta early in the second century BC - had discovered that the Spartans too were descendants of Abraham).

### **Lysias' campaigns into Judaea (164 and 163 BC)**

With the Maccabean movement becoming a full-fledged political revolt against Seleukid authority, Lysias himself led an army into Judaea in 164 BC, this army being considerably larger than the force brought by Gorgias in the preceding year. Lysias' intention was to reach Jerusalem, which was still under Seleukid control but was now isolated from the coast. Having in mind how Seron's column had two years earlier been ambushed in the western approach through the mountains, Lysias decided to approach Jerusalem from the south. The southern route to Jerusalem was as mountainous as the western and proved to be no better for the Seleukids. At Bethsura, about twenty miles (as the crow flies) southwest of Jerusalem,<sup>13</sup> Judas and his army of ten thousand men descended upon Lysias' column and defeated it. From a strictly military standpoint, this was the high point of the Maccabean revolt, as Lysias and his beaten army retreated to the coast and then north to Syria.<sup>14</sup>

The rebel army, on the other hand, proceeded to Jerusalem. How it was received there we do not know. Perhaps most of the inhabitants welcomed the troops, while the Hellenizing faction - including the high priest Menelaus - fled for safety to the Akra and the Seleukid garrison. The rebels took control of the temple and the rest of the city. Because the old altar had been polluted by sacrifices to Zeus, the rebels tore it apart, stone by stone, and built a new altar. And because the temple itself had been gravely compromised by the presence of uncircumcised Gentiles, elaborate purification rites were performed. Then, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev (December), 164 BC, the Maccabean rebels presided over the re-dedication of the temple to Adonai. This is the occasion celebrated in the Jewish festival of Hanukkah (*chanukkah*).<sup>15</sup>

Early in 163 BC, with most of Judaea temporarily in their hands Judas and his brothers led expeditions south into Idumaea, east into Ammon and north into Galilee, slaying thousands of Gentiles. Although Judas did not strike out at Hellenes indiscriminately, he did bring terror to those Gentile towns and cities whose sympathies were with the Seleukids. In Galilee and Transjordan (Gilead) the Maccabees devastated whole communities. At Ephron, Bozrah, Alema and other towns in Transjordan all the males were slaughtered, and the towns were plundered and burned.

Despite the elation, the long-range prospects of the Maccabaeen movement were nevertheless somewhere between dim and hopeless. Lysias' failure to reach Jerusalem in the summer of 164 BC made it imperative that he succeed the next year, and in summer of 163 he returned, this time with a force large enough to crush any opposition. In the account - grossly exaggerated, again - that has come down to us, the army led by Lysias "numbered one hundred thousand infantry, twenty thousand cavalry, and thirty-two war elephants."<sup>16</sup> This time Lysias pushed through the mountains to Jerusalem and forced his way into the city. With the rest of Jerusalem under his control he laid siege to the temple precinct itself, where the rebels prepared to make their last stand. The end of the revolt seemed imminent.

### **Back from the brink: the end of Epiphanes' assault on *Ioudaismos* (163 BC)**

What was about to end, however, was not the Maccabaeen revolt but the Seleukid offensive against Judaism. With Lysias poised to deliver the knockout blow against the Maccabean rebels, luck once more intervened on their behalf. Months earlier Antiochos IV Epiphanes had died, and Lysias had crowned the king's nine-year old son as the new king, Antiochos V Eupator. Lysias himself, however, was clearly the power-behind-the-throne and intended to remain in that position for a long time. But as he was besieging the Jerusalem temple in late summer of 163 BC news came to Lysias that the general Philip, wearing Epiphanes' signet ring and commanding the great expeditionary army, was on his way back to Syria and was intent upon taking charge of the boy-king and the kingdom. With his own position as regent under challenge, Lysias had little choice but to halt the siege operations in Jerusalem and - in effect - to make peace with the Judaeen rebels. Accordingly, he announced to the rebels and to all Judaea that Epiphanes' last act had been to reverse his Judaeen policy: henceforth the people of Judaea were once again free to live according to their ancestral laws, and the Seleukids recognized Adonai as the god in the Jerusalem temple. Acting on behalf of the boy-king Antiochos Eupator, Lysias appointed a new high priest of the temple (Menelaus was put out of the way). The appointee was Eliakim, or Alkimos as Greek sources call him, a Zadokite and therefore acceptable to most Judaeans. Although a Seleukid garrison remained in the citadel (the Akra) at Jerusalem, the effective government of Judaea would once more be lodged in the high priest of Adonai. Decamping from Jerusalem with his army, Lysias returned to Syria and there faced down Philip.

Judas Maccabaeus and his brothers were not happy with the restoration of peaceful relations between the Seleukid throne and Judaea, since it seemed to make their leadership and their revolt superfluous. But the goals of the *hasidim* had been reached: Epiphanes' assault on Judaism had come to nothing. Thanks to the misfortunes of the Seleukid royal house, the temple of Adonai was secure and (except for the Hasmonaeans themselves) Judaeans of all sorts, from Hellenizers to *hasidim*, had reason to rejoice.

### **Renewal of violence and defeat of the Maccabaeen rebels**

Unfortunately, peace did not last, as extremists within the opposing Judaeen factions struck out at each other. The Maccabaeen party, first of all, succeeded in driving Alkimos out of Jerusalem, and attacked those of their countrymen who supported an accommodation with

Hellenism and the Seleukids. Perhaps the expulsion of Alkimos occurred when Lysias' and the boy-king Eupator's attention was distracted by the unexpected arrival of Eupator's cousin, Demetrios. As we have already seen, in 162 BC Demetrios returned from Rome to Syria, and the Seleukid troops went over to him and put Eupator and Lysias to death. Among the delegations that came to congratulate King Demetrios on his accession were Judaeans who favored Hellenization and who were therefore suffering at the hands of the Maccabees. These Judaeans requested that Demetrios suppress the anti-Hellenist faction and bring back Alkimos as high priest. Demetrios was happy to do so, and sent a Seleukid regiment to escort Alkimos back to Jerusalem. Once Alkimos had regained his position, and with the help of his Seleukid troops, he moved against the ringleaders of the anti-Hellenist party, executing sixty of them. The consequence of this purge was predictable: Judas Maccabaeus himself, whom Alkimos had tried but failed to arrest, once again was able to gather a large band of followers, and to resume the armed conflict. This time the goal was not to defend the Law of Moses or to recover the temple for Adonai, since those goals had already been reached, but to take control of Jerusalem by driving out a high priest who belonged to an opposing Judaeans faction. Demetrios sent a small army under Nikanor to eradicate the Maccabean force, but Judas was victorious near Beth-horon again, and Nikanor himself was killed (the author of Second Maccabees chose to end his history with this triumph).

The new Seleukid king, however, was determined to get Judaea under control and had the wherewithal to do so. In the following year, 160 BC, a Seleukid army of 20,000 men marched against the rebels and met Judas Maccabaeus between Berea and Alasa, not far from Modein. Judas' army numbered only three thousand men, just a fraction of the numbers gathered for the defense against Lysias, before Epiphanes' reform was rescinded.<sup>17</sup> By 160 BC the bulk of the population in Judaea was evidently satisfied with Demetrios' rule and with Alkimos as high priest. Even the small army that Judas brought to Alasa was not fanatic: by the day of the battle most of the army had melted away, leaving Judas with only eight hundred men for a suicidal last stand.<sup>18</sup> Judas was buried in Modein, the Maccabean revolt evidently a failure.

### **A modus vivendi: Seleukid Jerusalem and Maccabean countryside, 160-152 BC**

This was, militarily, the low point of the Maccabean revolt. The Seleukids were once again in control of Jerusalem and much of Judaea, with a friendly high priest governing the land for them and the Hellenizing movement once again conspicuous. "After the death of Judas, the renegades in every part of Israel emerged from hiding, and all the evildoers reappeared, and the country, afflicted at that time by a terrible famine, went over to their side."<sup>19</sup> But Alkimos once again proved incapable of coping with success. Under his auspices, so reports the author of First Maccabees, the "ungodly" faction of Judaeans arrested and put to death many of their enemies in the countryside. The countryside reacted by resuscitating the Maccabean rebellion, which had a new and important friend. Shortly before his last battle, Judas had dispatched an embassy, led by Eupolemos, to Rome, in order to ask for Roman help in making Judaea independent of the Seleukids. According to First Maccabees (8:23-32) the Roman senate had granted a defensive alliance to "the *ethnos* of the Judaeans," and warned Demetrios not to try to subdue the Judaeans. By the time the Roman senate acted Judas had been defeated and killed, but the Roman response rekindled his partisans' flagging spirits.

The guerillas selected as their leader Judas' brother Jonathan, who was the youngest but most talented of the surviving sons of Mattathiah. For their base the band fortified the town of Bethbasi, not far from Bethlehem. Demetrios sent an officer named Bacchides to besiege the place, but as the siege dragged on it became clear to Bacchides and ultimately to Demetrios that the project could not succeed: the Judaeans of the countryside were supportive of the Maccabees, and so opposed to Alkimos and the Hellenizers, that the best policy for the Seleukids was simply to content themselves with the city of Jerusalem and with fortified strongholds such as Shechem and Samaria, and to concede many of the villages and unwalled towns to Jonathan. Bacchides and Jonathan came to an agreement along those lines, the Seleukids abandoning the Hellenizing minority in the Judaeian countryside. In a short time the Maccabees exterminated most of the impious, surprising them in their houses or tents, and converted the rest to the anti-Hellenist movement. In the words of I Maccabees (9:73), "So the war came to an end in Israel. Jonathan took up residence in Michmash and began to govern the people, rooting the godless out of Israel."

Jerusalem, on the other hand, was peaceful through most of the 150s BC. The Seleukid garrison in the Akra had little to do, as the city paid its annual tribute to Demetrios and went about its business. How it was governed is not clear, since for most of this period the temple had no high priest. In 159 BC Alkimos suffered a paralyzing stroke and died soon thereafter, his Hasmonaean enemies of course seeing his death as divine retribution for his many sins. For the next seven years Jerusalem was probably without a high priest, perhaps because Demetrios could not find a Zadokite who was acceptable to both the Hellenizers and the *hasidim*.<sup>20</sup>

### **Seleukid turmoil, and the elevation of Jonathan to the high priesthood in 152 BC**

In 152 BC the Seleukid dynasty was severely shaken. The Ptolemies, the Attalids, and the Roman senate, all worried that the Seleukid kingdom was prospering under Demetrios, joined in promoting a rival for the Seleukid throne and so embroiling the Seleukids in a civil war. In Smyrna lived a young man who had a physical resemblance to Antiochos Epiphanes, and who claimed that he was indeed Epiphanes' son. The young man was called to the attention of Attalos III, ruler at Pergamum, who in turn brought the discovery to the attention of the Ptolemies and of friends in the Roman senate. These traditional enemies of the Seleukid kingdom wasted no time in preparing the young man for the role of "long-lost son" of Epiphanes. Supported and armed by his various foreign backers the young man, whom historians know as Alexander Balas, arrived in the city of Ptolemais in 152 BC, declaring that he was the son of Epiphanes and was now returning to claim his paternal kingdom. Demetrios and his advisors, knowing that Alexander Balas was not a Seleukid at all but an imposter, did not at first take the threat seriously. But crowds cheered Balas, believing that he was indeed the son of Epiphanes, and when units of the army began transferring their loyalty to Balas, Demetrios had to respond with as much force as he could muster.

In need of troops, Demetrios turned to the Judaeian countryside and to Jonathan. A letter from the king offered to appoint Jonathan as a *strategos* and to authorize him to raise an army in Judaea, if Jonathan would help to crush Balas' coup. Balas, not to be outdone, sent Jonathan an even more tantalizing offer: in return for Jonathan's military support, Balas would recognize

him not only as the secular leader of the Judaeian nation but also as high priest of Adonai's temple. That would effectively extend Jonathan's control from the towns and villages of Judaea to Jerusalem itself, and of course the offer was too good to pass up. Demetrios, driven to extravagance, countered with a promise to cancel all taxes and tribute from Judaea, but Jonathan had already committed himself to Balas. In 150 BC Balas prevailed over Demetrios, and the imposter ruled the Seleukid kingdom until 145 BC. For his part, Jonathan moved into Jerusalem and immediately set about surrounding the city with a fortification wall of squared stones. Most importantly, he took over the temple, making much of his brother's role in purifying it in the chanukkah twelve years earlier. At the Feast of Tabernacles in 152 BC Jonathan was invested with the high priestly garments. Although a Seleukid garrison remained in the *Akra*, the city henceforth was governed by the Hasmonaeans.

Jonathan's remarkable rise from rural outlaw to high priest of the Jerusalem temple and ruler of Judaea had profound religious and social consequences, and seems to have led to the disappearance of one "sect" and to the growth of three others that were to be of great significance in Judaea. To the surprise of nobody, Jonathan's triumph spelled the end for the Hellenizing party in Jerusalem. These people had consistently opposed Judas and Jonathan, and now they were at the mercy of their opponents. Within a few years of Jonathan's arrival the Hellenizers who still survived in Jerusalem were too few to matter. The military success of the *hasidim* over the Hellenizers throughout Judaea cleared the field for three religious movements much more rigorous than the Hellenizers: the Sadducees, Pharisees and Essenes.

Unfortunately for Jonathan, many of the pious - whether Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes or rural *hasidim* - were not pleased to see him installed as high priest. For the rural *hasidim*, Jonathan was not severe enough in rooting out Hellenism from Jerusalem. Offensive to the pious in both the countryside and Jerusalem was Jonathan's acceptance of the high priesthood when Alexander Balas offered him the position. The Hasmonaeans were not Zadokite by descent, and although the *hasidim* had cheered the battlefield exploits of Judas Maccabaeus and Jonathan until this point, they and many other Judaeans were dismayed at the prospect of a non-Zadokite - even a pious guerilla chief - presiding over the sacrifices at the temple. Josephus (*Antiquities* 13. 171-173) says that it was in the time of Jonathan that the three "schools of thought" - Essenes, Pharisees and Sadducees - made their appearance in Judaea. Although the roots of all three "schools" seem to extend back well before the second century BC, and in the case of the Pharisees to the Judaeans of Mesopotamia, it is probable that in Judaea itself the three "schools" first became conspicuous ca. 150 BC.

However much consternation there was at Jonathan's takeover of Jerusalem and its temple, his associates of course celebrated the triumph. And because the only military force in Judaea was Jonathan's there could be no resistance to his elevation. It is an irony that fourteen years after the Maccabean movement began as an *hasidic* outburst against the movement toward Hellenization, the Hasmonaeans began to distance themselves from the *hasidim* in order to play a larger political role within the Seleukids' faltering kingdom.

### **The Seleukid debacle: 152-129 BC**

And the Seleukids' fortunes were indeed continuing to deteriorate. The imposter Alexander Balas added to his prestige by marrying the daughter of Ptolemy VI Philometor, one of his backers (Jonathan went to Ptolemais for the wedding and was treated as a great dignitary by Balas and Ptolemy). But the true Seleukids were of course determined to remove Balas, and in 147 BC Demetrios' son came from Crete with an army of mercenaries. Many of Balas' subjects sided with Demetrios II but Jonathan did not, and with an army of 10,000 men Jonathan captured Joppa and sacked and burned Ashdod. That atrocity was a serious error. When Ptolemy Philometor visited the smoking ruins of Ashdod he was appalled, and decided to pull the rug out from under Balas. Proceeding to Antioch, Philometor extricated his daughter from Balas' household, and then opened negotiations with young Demetrios, offering him Ptolemaic support and the Ptolemaic princess. Balas' followers melted away, and by 145 Demetrios II was king in Antioch.

Demetrios' popularity was ephemeral, in part because his Cretan mercenaries were an unruly and violent crew. Perceiving the public's disappointment with Demetrios II, a man named Trypho, who had held a command under Balas, saw an opportunity to launch a coup d'état. Taking custody of one of Balas' young sons, Trypho paraded the child as Antiochos VI Dionysos, and so established a royal rival to Demetrios. Trypho quickly got the upper hand over Demetrios, and soon felt confident enough of success that he killed the child and claimed to rule in his own right. With Seleukid fortunes at the verge of anarchy the king of Parthia, Mithridates, decided to enter Mesopotamia and take it over. Demetrios responded in 140 BC with a desperate gamble, going to Mesopotamia in hopes of rallying the Hellenes there, defeating Mithridates, and then returning with a force sufficient to defeat Trypho. But Demetrios lost his gamble: not only did Mesopotamia remain in the hands of the Parthians, but Demetrios himself was captured by Mithridates and was hauled off to Parthia.

In 139 BC Demetrios' brother, Antiochos VII Sidetes, arrived in Syria from Rhodes and claimed the Seleukid throne. He was an able and a popular leader, and citizens and army gave him their overwhelming support. Trypho's insurgency ended and for a brief time the Seleukid kingdom was once again in good hands. Sidetes was in fact the last significant king in the Seleukid line. After spending his first nine years restoring Seleukid fortunes in the Levant, in 130 BC Sidetes transported a great army across the Euphrates, determined to take Mesopotamia back from the Parthian king, who by this time was Phraates. The Greek cities of Mesopotamia gave Sidetes what support they could, and the first season of the campaign was a Seleukid success. But during the winter Phraates attacked Sidetes' camp and destroyed most of the Seleukid army. Sidetes himself was among the dead, and for all practical purposes the Seleukid kingdom lost its importance in international affairs. After his victory Phraates magnanimously ordered the release of Demetrios, who had been his captive since 140 BC. Demetrios accompanied his brother's bones back to Syria, and resumed reigning over what little was left of the Seleukid realm.

## **The Hasmonaeans become independent rulers of Judaea**

As Seleukid power shriveled, the Hasmonaeans prospered. During the wars that Demetrios II fought, first against Balas and then against Trypho, Jonathan's support veered from



side to side. At one point Demetrios, having retreated to his palace in Antioch, called upon Jonathan and his Judaeen army to come to his rescue, and First Maccabees (11:47) boasts that Jonathan performed brilliantly, killing a hundred thousand Antiochenes. At another point Trypho sent Jonathan a table service of gold plate, authorized him to wear a purple robe, and appointed Jonathan's brother Simon as general of the seacoast south of Tyre. But in the game of double-crossing Jonathan was eventually himself a victim. In 143 Trypho lured him to the great harbor city of Ptolemais, arrested him, and several months later slew him.

The high priesthood and rule over Judaea passed from Jonathan to his brother Simon (143-135 BC), who responded to Trypho's treachery by throwing his support to Demetrios II. Demetrios reciprocated by declaring Judaea essentially independent, and in 142 BC Judaeans began dating their contracts "in the first year of Simon, great high priest, *strategos* and leader of the Judaeans." When Demetrios was taken captive by the Parthian king, and Antiochos VII Sidetes arrived in Syria to continue the war against Trypho, Sidetes let it be known that he disapproved of the arrangement and intended to tighten Seleukid control over Judaea. He did not achieve that, however, so long as Simon was alive. Simon's death, in 135 or 134 BC, was brought about not by the Seleukids, but by Simon's own son-in-law, Ptolemaios, who hoped to take over his father-in-law's positions. Ptolemaios invited Simon and two of his sons to an entertainment at Jericho, got them drunk, and then slew them. Assassins had also been dispatched to murder Simon's third son, John (Jehohanan) Hyrcanus, but Hyrcanus was informed of the plot and escaped. Whether or not Sidetes had been privy to Ptolemaios' plot, the upheaval gave Sidetes the opportunity he had been waiting for: he invaded Judaea, and besieged Jerusalem. During the siege the Feast of Tabernacles came round, and when John Hyrcanus asked for a truce of seven days Sidetes gallantly granted the truce and sent over a brace of bulls with gilded horns, to be added to the sacrificial victims. That show of goodwill persuaded Hyrcanus to accept Sidetes' sovereignty. Sidetes required the dismantling of Jerusalem's fortification walls, but accepted Hyrcanus as a vassal and permitted him to continue ruling the country. Judaea was once again, and for the last time, a vassal state of the Seleukids.

John Hyrcanus evidently commanded a considerably larger army than had his father Simon, and many of his troops were Gentiles. Josephus reports, incredibly, that in order to pay for the new troops Hyrcanus opened the tomb of David and took from there 3000 talents of silver.<sup>21</sup> In 130 BC Hyrcanus and his army went along on the great campaign that Antiochos Sidetes mounted to evict the Parthians from Mesopotamia. John returned before winter, however, and so was not present when Phraates made a surprise attack upon Sidetes' camp and overwhelmed it. On hearing the news of Sidetes' death and the destruction of the Seleukid army, Hyrcanus renounced his allegiance to the Seleukid kingdom and rebuilt the wall around Jerusalem that Sidetes had torn down. He insured himself against Seleukid retaliation by sending a delegation to Rome and renewing Judaea's treaty of friendship with Rome. After 129 BC Hyrcanus was the ruler of what was de facto an autonomous state.

## **The reign of John Hyrcanus**

Almost immediately Hyrcanus set about conquering his weak neighbors and enlarging his realm. The Roman senate had no objection to this aggression, since the senate was in the habit

of endorsing anything that seemed to diminish or humiliate the Seleukid kingdom. Among Hyrcanus' main targets were the urban communities of Shechem and Samaria. These had been first Ptolemaic and then Seleukid strongholds, and in both cities the worshipers of Adonai made sacrifice atop Mt. Gerizim rather than at the Jerusalem temple. Such "Samaritan" worshipers of Adonai were anathema to the priesthood in Jerusalem, and throughout Judaea there was much support for Hyrcanus' assault upon these cities. Both Shechem and Samaria were destroyed, and Hyrcanus diverted a creek to run over the ruins of Samaria (the city was rebuilt by Hyrcanus' son). Then came Galilee, to the north, which was mostly occupied by Aramaic-speaking Gentiles. Hyrcanus forced the Galileans to Judaize, requiring the males to undergo circumcision. To the south of Judaea lay Edom, or Idumaea as it was now called, and this land too Hyrcanus conquered. Like Galilee, Idumaea was inhabited by Aramaic-speaking villagers, and Hyrcanus' policy was therefore to Judaize them.

Toward five Greek cities on his northern frontier- Skythopolis, on the west bank of the Jordan, and Pella, Dion, Gadara and Hippos, all east of the Jordan - Hyrcanus' policies were quite different. These cities, all of which would eventually become members of the league called the Decapolis, he wished to control but not to alienate. The cities were not destroyed and their inhabitants were not forced to convert to Judaism. Instead, the Greek cities on the northern frontier were made tributary and so they helped to support and enrich the new Judaeian state. Although the Hasmonaeans had begun - in their Maccabean phase - as champions of *Ioudaismos* against *Hellenismos*, with power had come accommodation and even a limited philhellenism. Hyrcanus' sons were given Greek as well as Hebrew names, and also a Hellenic education. Neither father nor sons seemed to believe that Judaism and Hellenism were incompatible.

Until his death in 104 BC Hyrcanus ruled a large and independent state, but he did not take the title of king. One consideration may have been his determination to stay on the good side of the Romans, who were pleased to see the Seleukid kingdom in shambles and were not eager for another kingdom to take its place. More importantly, the only kings ever to have ruled over Judaeans, or Judahites, had been David and his descendants, and the Hasmonaeans were no more descendants of David than they were descendants of Zadok. John Hyrcanus therefore was content to be called ethnarch and high priest. But during his long and glorious rule nobody doubted that he was the monarch of Judaea. If the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* was composed during his reign, as seems probable, two of these fictional testaments (*Levi* and *Judah*) allude to him in almost Messianic terms. In any case, for the next two hundred years a multitude of baby boys in Judaea were named "John" (Jehohanan, or sometimes shortened to Johanan) in his honor.

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1. E. J. Bickerman's history of the Maccabean revolt (Bickerman 1947) is still valuable, although it was written before the discoveries at Qumran. For a brief and balanced overview of the Maccabees and the early Hasmonaean monarchy see Koester 1982, vol. I, pp. 210-218.

2. Bartlett 1973, p. 215: "the book may belong almost anywhere in the last 150 years B.C. It is more generally agreed that the book's home may have been the Jewish community at

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Alexandria.” The original beginning of II Macc was very likely II Macc 2:19. At some point in the transmission of the manuscript the text of II Macc was prefaced by two letters that had been sent from Jerusalem to the Judaeans of Egypt. These letters are now designated as II Macc 1-2:18. The first of these letters is dated to the 188<sup>th</sup> year of the Seleukid era, or to 124 BC.

3. Third Maccabees has nothing to do with the Maccabean revolt and presents a pseudo-history of the Alexandrian Judaeans under Ptolemy IV Philopator. Fourth Maccabees is an elaboration of the Eleazar and Seven Brothers stories from Second Macc. Both Third and Fourth Macc seem to date from the 1<sup>st</sup> cent CE. For an in-depth exploration of the role of historical fiction in shaping the Hellenistic Jewish identity see Johnson 2005.

4. II Macc 4:9. On the meaning of this enigmatic passage see Hengel 1981, p. 73 with note 118, and p. 277.

5. Josephus, *AJ* 12.241.

6. II Macc 5:5 (“to the *akropolis*”).

7. I Macc 1:41 and 1:51 say that Antiochos sent his edict “throughout his kingdom,” but Hengel 1981, p. 284, observes that “the historical value of this report is of course considerably disputed. Whereas earlier historians attached decisive importance to it, E. Bickermann declared that it was unhistorical.” Most recently, Othmar Keel has argued that Antiochus’ reform was applied mostly to Jerusalem and its environs. See the third chapter of Keel and Staub 2000, and the review of this book by John Collins in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* 121 (2002), pp. 157-58.

8. The term *Ιουδαισμός* first appears at II Macc 2:21, and *Ἑλληνισμός* at II Macc 4:13. Here the author says that because of the impiety of the high priest Jason there was such an *ἄκμῃ τις Ἑλληνισμοῦ καὶ πρόσβασις ἄλλοφυλισμοῦ* that the younger priests neglected their duties in order to participate in the wrestling and gymnastics of the gymnasium. When Paul, at Galatians 1:13-14, says that at one time he was a zealous advocate of *Ιουδαισμός* and implies that he no longer is, his reference is clearly to the traditions of the Judaeans and not to their worship of Adonai.

9. I Macc 2:42 says that a band of *Ἀσιδαῖοι*, “strong (*ischuroi*) of Israel,” joined Mattathias and his sons when the family fled from Modein.

10. I Macc 3:10-12.

11. For the location of Beth-horon, and an indication of the terrain in which it lay, see the map sketched at Bartlett 1973, p. 95.

12. I Macc 4:25 (OSB).

13. See again Bartlett 1973, p. 95, for the location of Bethsura.

14. On the battle at Bethsura see I Macc 4:28-35. The author had no way of knowing the size of

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Lysias' force, but said that it consisted of 60,000 infantry and 5000 cavalry. Those impossibly high figures (an army even larger than the one Epiphanes took to conquer the Parthians and Iran) may have originated in an attempt to show that Judas must have had assistance from Adonai. Had 60,000 of Lysias' troops survived the battle Lysias would hardly have retreated to Syria. The author may have known (4:29) that Judas had an army of 10,000 and a body-count may have concluded that about 5000 of Lysias' men were killed in the battle (4:34). If those figures are approximately correct the army of Lysias may have numbered about 15,000 men. The account of the battle at Bethsura given by II Macc (at Chapter 11:1-5) is of little value. The author of II Macc assigned to Lysias an army of 80,000 infantry plus cavalry. The author of II Macc wrongly believed that Lysias owed his appointment to Eupator rather than to Epiphanes, and therefore placed the battle at Bethsura after rather than before the death of Epiphanes. Josephus *AJ* 12.313-315 is a summary of the account in I Macc.

15. I Macc 4:36-59.

16. I Macc 6:30 (OSB). II Macc 13: 1-2 gives different but similar figures: 110,000 infantry, 5300 cavalry, 22 elephants, and 300 scythed chariots.

17. At Bethsura, according to I Macc 4:29, Judas had 10,000 men, and after the victory there he had 11,000 men (I Macc 5:20).

18. I Macc 9:5-22.

19. I Macc 9:23 (OSB).

20. Josephus knew of no high priest between Alkimos and Jonathan. Stegemann 1998, pp. 147-49, argues that the high priest between 159 and 152 BC was the "Teacher of Righteousness" mentioned frequently in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and that when this legitimate high priest was in 152 BC expelled from Jerusalem by the Maccabees he established the "Essene Union."

21. Josephus, *J.A.* 13.249.