

From The Maccabees to The Maccabi

*Tracing the Hasmonean Story from I Maccabees to the  
Modern Day*

by

Peter Alexander Gilchrist  
Class of 2010

A thesis submitted to the  
faculty of Wesleyan University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Bachelor of Arts  
with Departmental Honors from the College of Letters

## Table of Contents

<b><u>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</u></b>	<b>1</b>
<b><u>INTRODUCTION</u></b>	<b>3</b>
<b><u>1: A BIT OF CONTEXT: SCRIPTURAL DIFFERENCES, 'HELLENIZATION,' AND A WORD ON TERMINOLOGY</u></b>	<b>7</b>
<b><u>2: THE EXPLORATION OF JUDEAN CULTURE IN MACCABEES I AND II</u></b>	<b>21</b>
JUDEAN TRADITION IN MACCABEES I AND II	22
PORTRAYAL OF GENTILES AND HELLENIZING JUDEANS IN MACCABEES I AND II	37
LEADERSHIP AND AUTHORITY IN MACCABEES I AND II: HEAVEN-SENT OR HUMAN-LED?	47
CONCLUSION	56
<b><u>3: THE HASMONEAN STORY IN RABBINIC LITERATURE AND IN THE WRITINGS OF EUROPEAN JEWS IN THE ERA OF EXPULSION</u></b>	<b>57</b>
THE HASMONEANS IN RABBINIC LITERATURE	57
SAMUEL USQUE AND THE ERA OF EXPULSION	70
<b><u>4: CHAPTER FOUR: <i>WISSENSCHAFT</i> AND THE 'MODERN' JEWISH HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE</u></b>	<b>79</b>
HEINRICH GRAETZ AND JEWISH NATIONALISM	81
SIMON DUBNOW: FROM ISOLATIONISM TO AUTONOMISM	89
SALO W. BARON: THE DIASPORA PERSPECTIVE	96
CONCLUSION	102
<b><u>CONCLUSION: MOVING ONWARD WITH THE HASMONEAN STORY</u></b>	<b>104</b>
<b><u>WORKS CITED</u></b>	<b>110</b>

## Acknowledgements

I embarked on this project knowing very little about either the Hasmoneans or the vast body of Jewish literary and intellectual work, which can be quite challenging for an untrained reader to navigate. In this endeavor, I have been incredibly fortunate to have two professors to serve as my guides. First and foremost, I owe a debt of gratitude to my wonderful thesis advisor, Professor Magda Teter. I met Professor Teter in the fall of my junior year, when I took one of her courses on Jewish history. Professor Teter has a gift for making sense of the intricacies of Jewish history, and without her advice, this project would not have been possible. Professor Teter, thank you for your guidance, for your meticulous editing, and for the hours of illuminating conversation that helped inspire my arguments.

I am also thankful to Visiting Professor Loren Spielman, who took me on as a student and introduced me to the study of rabbinic literature. Without Professor Spielman's energy, expertise, and advice, I would have wandered into the maze of rabbinic literature entirely unawares. Thank you, Professor Spielman, for pointing me in the right direction, for helping me enter the minds of the rabbis, and for encouraging me to take chances in my writing when I was reluctant to begin.

Writing my thesis has been the culmination of a truly extraordinary four years at Wesleyan, and I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for all of the wonderful and gifted teachers who have contributed to my intellectual experience. Special thanks go to the faculty of the College of Letters, who have crafted a unique and special program, and to my advisor, Professor Howard Needler,

for the willing and thoughtful advice that has successfully steered me through my Wesleyan career. And many thanks to my classmates within the College for making all of my classes illuminating and vibrant.

Finally, I am grateful for all the friends who have made my college experience worthwhile. To the lovely people of Outhouse: you gave me a home, you gave me a Wesleyan family, and you have left me with memories that I will cherish forever. To Jeff Stein, for being a true friend and for giving life a little more adventure. To Eleni Healey, whose constant love and friendship has made me a better person, helped me surmount challenges, and helped me enjoy serious and trivial moments. Also, to my delightful sister Carey, who joined me at Wesleyan this fall and has made every moment brighter and more entertaining. Carey, I know that you will enjoy yourself and will thrive in the years that lie ahead of you, and you will leave your own special mark on the Wesleyan community. Last, but certainly not least, I am immensely grateful to my wonderful parents, Bruce and Sarah Gilchrist, for providing me with so many incredible opportunities and for supporting all of my goals. I love you both, and I benefit from your example in everything I do. I hope that you enjoy reading this, because I could not have done it without you both.

*-Peter A. Gilchrist, April 2010*

## Introduction

It has been more than two thousand years since the story of the Hasmoneans and the Hasmonean Revolt was recorded in what came to be known as I Maccabees, telling the tale of a family that rose to power in 167 B.C.E. by leading a successful revolt against the Seleucid Empire and winning Judean independence by 134 B.C.E. Today the story of the Hasmoneans still survives, due in part to images of the Hasmoneans made popular by the Zionist movement. The story of the Hasmoneans has enjoyed different levels of prominence during the many centuries of its existence. During the centuries immediately following the fall of the Hasmonean dynasty the temporary disappearance of its early accounts –Maccabees I and II – and a lack of interest in the Hasmoneans among the rabbinic community meant that the Hasmoneans receded into the background of Jewish consciousness. However, through the Hanukkah festival the Hasmoneans themselves created, the Hasmonean story survived, mostly as legend, among the general Judean-Jewish populace. More than a thousand years later in the sixteenth century, when Jews living in Europe grappled with the expulsions and forced conversions of Jews in the Iberian peninsula, the Hasmonean story again emerged briefly, as it would in the nineteenth century, in response to the newly created Reform Judaism.

With each of these episodes, the portrayal and importance of the Hasmoneans changed, absorbing the relevant interests, concerns, and biases of each author responsible for crafting a chapter in their story. The earliest portrayals of the Hasmoneans, now known as the Books of Maccabees I and II, cast them as religious

symbols that represented Judean tradition and God's law. During the Rabbinic Period, when the Hasmoneans were scarcely mentioned and not largely praised by rabbinic authors, the Hasmonean story lost much of its prestige. In the sixteenth century, while they remained religious figures, the Hasmoneans developed into symbols of divine redemption and mercy. By the nineteenth century, the Hasmonean story began a shift into the cultural realm, and the Hasmoneans became icons of various strains of Jewish identity, and in the twentieth century, when modern Jewish historical work rendered complete the shift from religious to cultural, the Hasmonean story became iconic of ancient cultural tensions, although the Zionist Movement preserved a more colorful account of the Hasmonean accomplishments.

Although each rendition of the Hasmoneans was unique, they shared a common purpose. Behind each revision of the Hasmonean story lay an effort by Jews to understand their identity that was precipitated by a period of upheaval within the Jewish community. In each instance, Jewish scholars returned to the Hasmonean story and crafted a version that reflected the concerns of their own times. Thus, while the Hasmonean story survived from antiquity to the present day, the nature of its preservation has depended on the interests of the Jewish thinkers who revived the Hasmonean legacy.

It is fitting that the Hasmonean story has resurfaced in times of upheaval, given the turbulence of its original context. The story began at Modein in 167 B.C.E,<sup>1</sup> when a Judean priest named Mattathias 'Hasmoneus' killed both a Judean sacrificing to pagan gods on the altar at Modein and the Seleucid officer, a

---

<sup>1</sup> Harold W. Attridge, ed., *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), 1479.

representative of King Antiochus Epiphanes IV, who was enforcing the sacrifice.<sup>2</sup> Mattathias's actions were a response to the increased meddling in Judean affairs by King Antiochus IV, the ruler of the Seleucid Empire. When Mattathias made his stand in Modein, he was reacting to Antiochus's attempt to Hellenize Judeans and to force them to adopt pagan religious customs.<sup>3</sup> Mattathias's deeds sparked a Judean uprising against the Seleucid Empire that became known as the Maccabean – or Hasmonean – Revolt. After Mattathias's death, leadership of the revolt passed to his son, Judas Maccabeus, whose apparent military prowess led him to successive victories over a string of armies sent to crush the insurgents,<sup>4</sup> and to the rededication of the temple in Jerusalem in 164 B.C.E.<sup>5</sup> Not long after this victory, the Hasmoneans entered into an alliance with Rome to help with the fight against the Seleucids.<sup>6</sup> This alliance would become a source of trouble in the decades to come, because it drew Rome's attention to Judea, which Rome ultimately annexed as a client kingdom in 63 B.C.E.

During the Maccabean uprising, Judas fell in battle in 160 B.C.E., and his brother Jonathan took command.<sup>7</sup> Under Jonathan's leadership, the Judeans won further victories. Jonathan was a skilled diplomat, and, when caught between two rivals for the Seleucid throne, King Demetrius and Alexander Epiphanes, Jonathan's

---

<sup>2</sup> I Macc. 2. 23-25 New Revised Standard Version.

<sup>3</sup> I Macc. 1. 41-53 NRSV.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed account of the exploits of Judas Maccabeus while he was the leader of the Hasmoneans, see I Macc. 3-9.22 NRSV.

<sup>5</sup> *Harper Collins Study Bible*, 1479. For a description of the cleansing and rededication of the Jerusalem Temple, see I Macc. 4. 36-58 NRSV.

<sup>6</sup> For an account Judas's dealings with Rome, see I Macc. 8 NRSV.

<sup>7</sup> I Macc. 9.18 NRSV. For date of Judas's death, see *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, 1479.

tact won concessions from the Seleucids that granted Jonathan the high priesthood and the Judeans increasing levels of independence within the Seleucid kingdom.<sup>8</sup> A third Hasmonean brother, Simon, took over when Jonathan was captured and killed in 143 or 142 B.C.E.<sup>9</sup> It was under Simon's watch, which lasted from Jonathan's death until 134 B.C.E, that Judea won independence from the Seleucids, who were then ruled by Demetrius II.<sup>10</sup> Simon was murdered in 134 B.C.E. and his son, John Hyrcanus, became the Judean ruler.<sup>11</sup> Over the following century, a string of Hasmonean descendants ruled over an independent Judean state, until internal strife and civil war led to Roman intervention and the conquest of Jerusalem by the Roman general Pompey in 63 B.C.E.

The tumultuous events of this hundred-year period in Jewish history informed centuries of intellectual debate on the Hasmonean legacy, and left as a legacy the festival of Hanukkah that is celebrated to this day. Before the establishment of Israel in the twentieth century, the Hasmonean era marked the last time that the Jews – or Judeans, as they were called at the time – had enjoyed political independence. And although each retelling of the Hasmonean story has altered its meaning, something about the original version, as told in Maccabees I and II, kept attracting Jewish interest. Perhaps that was because the Hasmoneans themselves, like each generation of Jewish thinkers who helped preserve their memory, were searching for an understanding of their identity.

---

<sup>8</sup> I Macc. 10. 1-66 NRSV; I Macc. 11. 20-37 NRSV.

<sup>9</sup> I Macc. 13. 1-6 NRSV. For date of Jonathan's death see *Harper Collins Study Bible*, 1479.

<sup>10</sup> I Macc. 13. 31-42 NRSV.

<sup>11</sup> *Harper Collins Study Bible*, 1479. For the ascension of John Hyrcanus, see: I Macc. 16. 24 NRSV.

## A Bit Of Context: Scriptural Differences, ‘Hellenization,’ And A Word On Terminology

The Hasmonean uprising was described in what came to be known as the Books of Maccabees I and II, which were preserved in Greek as part of the Septuagint and included in the Catholic Bible.<sup>12</sup> The two texts documented essentially the same record of events –although II Maccabees covers a smaller time period than I Maccabees. And yet, there are significant differences in the texts’ treatments of the struggle. Underlying their differences was the fact that their respective authors had different goals. While the author of I Maccabees seemingly strove to emphasize the accomplishments and religious zeal of the Hasmoneans, the author of II Maccabees focused on the importance of the temple and its protectors, especially God.

In his introduction to I Maccabees, biblical scholar Daniel J. Harrington analyzed the role of the Hasmoneans in I Maccabees. He noted that I Maccabees primarily depicted the Hasmonean family, presenting them as the saviors of Israel. According to Harrington, the author emphasized “their military and political exploits as well as their religious observance.”<sup>13</sup> In the introduction to his edition of I Maccabees for the *Anchor Bible Series*, translator Jonathan Goldstein described I Maccabees as “a history of the rise of the Hasmonean dynasty, from the daring deeds of the zealous priest Mattathias to the reign of John Hyrcanus, high priest and prince

---

<sup>12</sup> Daniel J. Harrington, “Introduction to I Maccabees,” in *Harper Collins Study Bible*, 1477.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 1479.

of the Jews by dynastic heredity.”<sup>14</sup> The author’s mission seems to have been to justify the Hasmonean’s rise to power and to defend both their legacy and their claim to Judean leadership. He achieved this by highlighting their personal involvement in the struggle against Antiochus’s armies. For example, in his description of the cleansing and rededication of the temple in Jerusalem after Judas defeated the Seleucid general Lysias, the author gave Judas and his brothers full credit for the accomplishment:

Then Judas and his brothers said, ‘See, our enemies are crushed; let us go up to cleanse the sanctuary and dedicate it.’ So all the army assembled and went up to Mount Zion.<sup>15</sup>

This cleansing and rededication would come to be celebrated by the festival of Hanukkah. This passage demonstrates the image that the audience would find throughout the text- that of Judas and the Hasmonean leaders single-handedly entering Jerusalem and restoring the temple’s sanctity. This image strengthened the Hasmonean legacy by establishing them both as Judean protectors and as defenders of Judean religious custom. The explicit merit and authority awarded to the Hasmoneans in I Maccabees contributed to an ethno-political interpretation of the Hasmonean revolt.

In his analysis of II Maccabees, Daniel J. Harrington wrote: “the major theme of 2 Maccabees is the Jerusalem temple and its Defender, the God of Israel, who is at work in angelic figures and especially in Judas Maccabeus.”<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Goldstein argued that the surviving text is an abridged version of a lost original –as evidenced

---

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan A. Goldstein, *I Maccabees: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible Series vol. 41 (New York: Doubleday, 1976), 4.

<sup>15</sup> I Macc. 4.36-37 NRSV.

<sup>16</sup> *Harper Collins Study Bible*, 1519.

by the ‘compiler’s preface,’ which was the work of a man named Jason of Cyrene.<sup>17</sup>

Like Harrington, Goldstein noted II Maccabees's emphasis on the temple, with an important addition:

Jason takes great pains to illustrate the sanctity of the temple, a point taken for granted in First Maccabees. Though Jason has heroes other than Judas, Judas’ brothers are not among them. Particularly prominent is the figure of the high priest Onias III, a man passed over in silence in First Maccabees. The abridged history, indeed, begins (II 3:1-40) with a bold assertion of all these points of contrast: because of the merit of the high priest Onias III in enforcing the provisions of the Torah, miraculous divine intervention prevented Heliodorus, the minister of the Seleucid king Seleucus IV, from seizing for the royal treasury the money deposited in the temple.<sup>18</sup>

Harrington and Goldstein’s analyses of Maccabees I and II helped highlight important differences between the two texts. Although the authors of Maccabees I and II provided very similar accounts of the Hasmonean uprising, their different portrayals of individual elements of the struggle contributed to very different interpretations of the Hasmonean story. For instance, the choice by the author of II Maccabees to single out Judas and Onias III – the high priest described in II Maccabees as “the protector of his compatriots, and a zealot for the laws” – as heroes showed that the author of II Maccabees valued the revolt for its defense of the temple, not for its military victories.<sup>19</sup> This author did not emphasize the accomplishments of Judas’s brothers Jonathan and Simon, because they were less involved in defending the temple. As a result, II Maccabees did not glorify the Hasmonean dynasty like I Maccabees did. In the estimation of the author of II Maccabees, God was the actual

---

<sup>17</sup> Goldstein, *I Maccabees*, 28. For the compiler’s preface, see II Macc. 2.19-31 NRSV.

<sup>18</sup> Goldstein, *I Maccabees*, 28.

<sup>19</sup> For description of Onias, see II Macc. 4. 2 NRSV.

savior of the Judeans and the Jerusalem temple was the primary point of interest, as opposed to Judean territorial holdings. Thus, the Hasmonean political achievements –and Hasmonean lineage itself – became less relevant. The impact of this distinction from I Maccabees is manifest in II Maccabees’s rendition of the cleansing and rededication of the temple:

Now Maccabeus and his followers, the Lord leading them on, recovered the temple and the city; they tore down the altars that had been built in the public square by the foreigners, and also destroyed the sacred precincts. They purified the sanctuary, and made another altar of sacrifice...they fell prostrate and implored the Lord that they might never again fall into such misfortunes, but that if they should ever sin, they might be disciplined by him with forbearance and not be handed over to blasphemous and barbarous nations.<sup>20</sup>

Unlike in I Maccabees, which credited “Judas and his brothers” with the purification of the temple, in II Maccabees Judas and all of his followers became mere executors of God’s will. This passage helped explain why the author praised Judas more than his brothers. It was Judas who defended the temple, and Judas who led the purification –with divine guidance. Judas’s brothers became political leaders, and extended and protected a Judean state, which was of little importance to the temple-minded author of II Maccabees. Since the ultimate authority lay with God, the temple was the object of true value because it was the cultural and religious center of the Judean community. Furthermore, the prayers for divine protection reflected the opinion that the persecution by “barbarous nations” was a result of the Judeans’ own shortcomings, which weakened the Hasmonean claim to power based on their success against foreign armies. The focus on God and the temple in II Maccabees led to a more religious and cultural understanding of the Hasmonean revolt than in I

---

<sup>20</sup> II Macc. 10.1-5 NRSV.

Maccabees.

Although the thematic overlap between the texts makes it easy to group Maccabees I and II into a collective interpretation, their differences are significant. The divergent intentions of each author – illustrated by their respective depictions of the cleansing and rededication of the temple – not only led to different accounts of the revolt but also left each text with a unique tone and message regarding the Hasmoneans and the revolt against the Greeks. Both texts addressed religious custom, but granted religion different levels of prominence. Ultimately, the texts forced their audiences to choose between religion for the sake of power or religion for its own sake, just as the audiences had to choose between remembering the Hasmoneans as powerful leaders or divine instruments.

The Books of Maccabees I and II and the events they described were, in part, a response to the Hellenization process Judea was undergoing at the time. While a cursory reading of Maccabees I and II leaves one with the impression that the Hasmoneans were engaged in a struggle against the spread of Greek culture among Judean communities, more thorough analysis suggests a subtler cultural tension. Maccabees I and II portrayed the Hasmonean response to Hellenization less as a rejection of ‘all things Greek’ than as a defense against those elements of ‘Greek’ culture that directly conflicted with Judean religious practices. Ultimately, the corruption of Judean religion, which the author of Maccabees I and II blamed on ‘Hellenization,’ led to the authors’ intense criticism of Hellenization and provided a basis for their support of Judean exclusivity.

Although there is no one definition of a ‘Hellenizer,’ those referred to as

‘Hellenizers’ universally endured sharp criticism from the authors of Maccabees I and II. For example, II Maccabees vilified the characters of Jason and Menelaus, two individuals who were said to have bought the high priesthood from Antiochus IV Epiphanes, for their role in the Hellenization of Jerusalem.<sup>21</sup> As religious historian Lester Grabbe noted, “What emerges from careful study is that there were clear differences between the activities of Jason and those of Menelaus; nor was the reaction of the common people identical to each.”<sup>22</sup> According to II Maccabees, Jason bought not only the priesthood from Antiochus Epiphanes, but also the right to found a Greek community in Jerusalem:

Jason...obtained the high priesthood by corruption, promising the king at an interview three hundred sixty talents of silver, and from another source of revenue eighty talents. In addition to this he promised to pay one hundred fifty more if permission were given to establish by his authority a gymnasium and a body of youth for it, and to enroll the people of Jerusalem as citizens of Antioch. When the king assented and Jason came to office, he at once shifted his compatriots over to the Greek way of life.<sup>23</sup>

According to this description, Jason sought favor from the king so he could bring Greek culture to Jerusalem, not just so he could become high priest. On the other hand, Menelaus’s rise to power, though similar to Jason’s, evidently amounted to nothing beyond a grasp for authority:

After a period of three years Jason sent Menelaus...to carry the money to the king and to complete the records of essential business. But he, when presented to the king, extolled him with an air of authority, and secured the high priesthood for himself, outbidding Jason by three hundred talents of silver. After receiving the king’s orders he returned, possessing no qualification for the high priesthood, but

---

<sup>21</sup> II Macc. 4. 7-24 NRSV.

<sup>22</sup> Lester Grabbe, *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 1: 257.

<sup>23</sup> II Macc. 4. 7-10 NRSV.

having the hot temper of a cruel tyrant and the rage of a savage wild beast.<sup>24</sup>

Unlike Jason, Menelaus apparently had no interest in pursuing any sort of cultural program. Perhaps Menelaus did not seek Hellenizing privileges because Jason had already instituted Greek culture in Jerusalem, but the author suggested that Menelaus was only interested in power. He considered Jason ‘corrupt,’ but did not question Jason’s qualifications for the high priesthood to the same extent that he did for Menelaus. Furthermore, regardless of what he may have thought of Jason’s policies he did not attack Jason’s character to the same extent as he did Menelaus’s. Though both were ‘Hellenizers’, Jason and Menelaus remained distinct individuals, and their actions raised different concerns.

It became clear from the account of II Maccabees that Jason and Menelaus had very different impacts on Jerusalem and the Judean community. Jason’s establishment of the gymnasium evidently led to a decline in ritual observance because it created competition between entertainment and service to God:

He took delight in establishing a gymnasium right under the citadel, and he induced the noblest of the young men to wear the Greek hat. There was such an extreme of Hellenization and increase in the adoption of foreign ways because of the surpassing wickedness of Jason, who was ungodly and no true high priest, that the priests were no longer intent upon their service at the altar.<sup>25</sup>

This description suggested that Jason’s actions were not directly harmful, but rather that they had a negative impact on ritual observance, which resulted from “an extreme of Hellenization,” suggesting that what was really harmful was not the reforms themselves, but the extent of their application. The case was different with Menelaus,

---

<sup>24</sup> II Macc. 4. 23-25 NRSV.

<sup>25</sup> II Macc. 4. 12-14.

whose sale of the temple vessels amounted to a direct assault on the temple and Judean religious observance:

Although Menelaus continued to hold the office, he did not pay regularly any of the money promised to the king. When Sostratus the captain of the citadel kept requesting payment...the two of them were summoned by the king on account of this issue...While such was the state of affairs, it happened that the people of Tarsus and of Mallus revolted because their cities had been given as a present to Antiochis, the king's concubine. So the king went hurriedly to settle the trouble, leaving Andronicus, a man of high rank, to act as his deputy. But Menelaus, thinking he had obtained a suitable opportunity, stole some of the gold vessels of the temple and gave them to Andronicus; other vessels, as it happened, he had sold to Tyre and the neighboring cities.<sup>26</sup>

Menelaus's actions, which defiled the Jerusalem temple and the Judean religion, were motivated by a thirst for power. Attempting to differentiate between Jason and Menelaus, Grabbe argued that while both figures came to power by purchasing their office, Jason wanted to make Jerusalem into a "Greek polis," while Menelaus simply wanted the power associated with the high priesthood.<sup>27</sup> The differences between Jason and Menelaus reflected varying degrees of Hellenization.

Although the Hasmonean response to Hellenization suggests otherwise, the actual reaction by Judeans to Jason was not, altogether, a negative one. The author of II Maccabees documented a generally positive reaction to Jason's reforms:

...The priests were no longer intent upon their service at the altar. Despising the sanctuary and neglecting the sacrifices, they hurried to take part in the unlawful proceedings in the wrestling arena after the signal for the discus-throwing, disdainingly the honors prized by their ancestors and putting the highest value upon Greek forms of prestige. For this reason heavy disaster overtook them, and those whose ways of living they admired and wished to imitate completely became their enemies and punished them. It is no light thing to show irreverence to

---

<sup>26</sup> II Macc. 4. 27-32.

<sup>27</sup> Grabbe, 257.

the divine laws- a fact that later events will make clear.<sup>28</sup>

There is a clear dichotomy between the author's opinion of Jason and the public reaction. The problem, it seems, was that Jason's "Hellenistic" reform was so popular that Judeans forgot about their own customs and ritual observances. In order to condemn the changes Jason brought about, the author defined the calamities to come – such as the oppression by King Antiochus IV – as a sort of divine punishment for the abandonment of Judean custom. Additionally, it was unclear to what extent Jason's reforms directly attacked any aspect of Judean ritual. As Lester Grabbe noted, "Judaism as a religion was not impaired under Jason... There was no devotion to pagan deities or any blatant breach of Jewish law."<sup>29</sup> Although it is easy to assume that Maccabees I and II told the story of a complete fight against Hellenization, the descriptions of Jason and Menelaus suggested otherwise. The Judean public, it seems, met Jason's initial reforms, with great enthusiasm. The reforms went too far when priests began neglecting their duties in favor of entertainment, and Menelaus furthered the decline when he stole temple goods to pay for his high priesthood. In his analysis of the Judean response to Hellenization, Grabbe wrote, "in accommodation to Hellenistic culture the Jews always maintained one area that could not be compromised without affecting their Judaism, that of religion."<sup>30</sup> Keeping in mind that the author of II Maccabees, who sought to promote loyalty to the temple and to Judean religious customs as essential to securing God's favor, was writing his account of Jason and Menelaus after the fact, it seems that he blamed Hellenizers like

---

<sup>28</sup> II Macc. 4. 14-17 NRSV.

<sup>29</sup> Grabbe, 256.

<sup>30</sup> Grabbe, 170.

Jason and Menelaus for bringing about future hardships, because their actions- especially Menelaus's- arguably contributed to a compromising of Judean religious practice. However, the details of his account suggest that Hellenization itself was not the problem, but rather the extent to which Hellenization began to interfere with religious ritual and observance.

One final point regarding Hellenization is that its diverse origins suggest that the Hasmonean revolt – as portrayed in Maccabees I and II – was not simply about a conflict between Judeans and Greeks, but about tensions between Judeans and non-Judeans in general. Although the gymnasium built by Jason was clearly Greek in origin, Maccabees I and II mention other reforms that did not originate in Greek culture. For instance, the temple to Zeus which Antiochus created in Jerusalem was, according to Grabbe (II Mac 6.2 NRSV), part of a Canaanite-Syrian cult.<sup>31</sup> While it is fair to refer to all of these reforms as 'Hellenization' because they came to Judea through Greek kings, perhaps the term 'Gentile' is a more accurate label for the customs considered foreign to Judeans. More importantly, Grabbe's argument changes the scope of the response to 'Hellenization' in Maccabees I and II, and the Hasmonean revolt becomes a push to liberate Judeans not just from Greeks, but from all foreign influence.

Ultimately, it is clear that to understand Maccabees I and II as anti-Hellenist distorts the reality perceived through the texts. Clearly, the authors of Maccabees I and II blamed the influence of Hellenization for the hardships Judeans would endure. Each author, however, had a potential motive. For I Maccabees, condemning Greeks

---

<sup>31</sup> Grabbe, 257.

helped elevate the Hasmoneans who fought against them, and for II Maccabees, criticizing the influence of ‘Greek’ customs was consistent with promoting loyalty to the temple and to religious custom. Furthermore, the texts themselves stated that Judeans were not fundamentally opposed to Greek culture. In this light, the elements of Greek culture that these authors –and the Hasmoneans, according to their portrayal in these texts – fight against reflected a desire to maintain a cultural boundary between Judeans and the outside world.

The New Revised Standard Version of Maccabees I and II makes frequent use of the term “Jew.” In *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, Shaye Cohen evaluated different meanings of the Hebrew word *Yehudi* and the Greek term *Ioudaios*, which are usually translated as “Jew” in the NRSV.<sup>32</sup> Cohen identified three meanings for the words contemporary to the Hasmonean revolt: A Judean (an ethnic and geographic label), a Jew (a religious and cultural marker), or an ally of the Judean state (a political identifier).<sup>33</sup> Thus, the use of the term “Jew” in the NRSV and other translations often distorts the author’s intended meaning.

The emphasis in I Maccabees on the political achievements of the Hasmoneans depends, in part, on the translation of *Ioudaios* as “Judean.” Cohen noted that “First Maccabees uses the plural *Ioudaioi* many times, and in all of these occurrences the meaning is “Judaeans...either the men of Judaea living in Judaea or the men of Judaea living in exile.”<sup>34</sup> The author of I Maccabees emphasized the ethnic and political elements of the Hasmonean revolt because he was writing about

---

<sup>32</sup> Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 69.

<sup>33</sup> Cohen, 70.

<sup>34</sup> Cohen, 87.

Judeans as an ethnic group, not a religious one. As an ethnic body, the Judeans shared cultural ties –for instance, traditional laws and customs – that the Hasmoneans sought to defend. His understanding of the Judeans as a people united by ancestry and geography (at least originally) allows a powerful role for the Hasmoneans. For example, Cohen cited the passage where Mattathias confronted and killed both the king’s officer who had urged him to adopt gentile customs and the Judean who came forward to conduct a gentile sacrifice. In the passage, Mattathias refused to adopt gentile practices, saying, “We will not obey the king’s words by turning aside from our religion to the right hand or to the left.”<sup>35</sup> Mattathias then killed “a Jew” who began to sacrifice on the altar “at the king’s command.”<sup>36</sup> Mattathias vowed to remain loyal to his “religion,” not to God. While Mattathias’s religious loyalties would have implied a loyalty to God, the language of his refusal emphasized adherence to customs over loyalty to the divine. Cohen argued that the use of the word “Jew” in the New Revised Standard Version was a mistranslation, and that ‘Judean’ would have been more appropriate. He suggested that this Judean, likely from Jerusalem, would have angered Mattathias not only by making a covenant with a gentile king, but also by intruding in the affairs of the town of Modein where this incident occurred.<sup>37</sup> Taken together with the tone of Mattathias’s refusal, I Maccabees appeared to have an ethno-political bias that interpreted the Hasmonean revolt as a defense of Judean custom.

According to Cohen, while in II Maccabees the Greek word *Ioudaioi* often

---

<sup>35</sup> I Macc. 2.22 NRSV, as cited in Cohen, footnote 57, 88.

<sup>36</sup> I Macc. 2.23 NRSV, as cited in Cohen, footnote 57, 88.

<sup>37</sup> Cohen, 88-89.

still meant “Judeans,” in some instances, it began to mean “Jews.”<sup>38</sup> An example of the new meaning was the command of King Antiochus IV that “People could neither keep the Sabbath, nor observe the festivals of their ancestors, nor so much as confess themselves to be Jews.”<sup>39</sup> In this context, “Jews,” Cohen wrote, was an accurate translation because Antiochus would not have cared if his subjects identified themselves as “Judeans.” Rather, Antiochus’s concern stemmed from the ancestral laws themselves.<sup>40</sup> In Cohen’s argument, to be a Jew meant to follow these laws, which included the belief that God was the creator of heaven and earth, and that the Jews were living on God’s land as God’s chosen people.<sup>41</sup> A gentile king like Antiochus would have seen the Jewish allegiance to God as a threat to his own political influence over his subjects. Cohen’s arguments drew an important distinction between Maccabees I and II. Where the author of I Maccabees seemed to interpret Mattathias’s outrage – and the ensuing revolt- as a reaction to gentile interference, first in Jerusalem and then in rural Judea, the author of II Maccabees, in casting Antiochus’s persecution as anti-Jewish, seemed to imply that the revolt was a defense of the laws of God. This is why the author of II Maccabees emphasized the role of God in the struggle.

Shaye Cohen’s argument is significant because it offered linguistic guidance. Thus, “Jews” in Maccabees I and II will always be referred to as “Judeans.” This choice not only allows for consistency, but also appreciates that, apart from II Maccabees’s approach towards the idea of “the Jew,” “Judean” more closely reflects

---

<sup>38</sup> Cohen, 89-90.

<sup>39</sup> II Macc. 6.6, as cited in Cohen, footnote 67, 90.

<sup>40</sup> Cohen, 91.

<sup>41</sup> Cohen, 91-92.

the historical and cultural context. Second, the distinction between I Maccabees and II Maccabees that follows from Cohen's discussion reflects the thematic differences between the texts that this paper will explore. Ultimately, the distinction between "Judean" and "Jew" is reflected in the debate within Maccabees I and II regarding God's role in the revolt.

## The Exploration of Judean Culture in Maccabees I and II

The Books of Maccabees I and II were not only a window into the historical reality of an ancient struggle between Judeans and Seleucids but also a literary justification for Judean unity and autonomy. While it is important to recognize the differences between the two texts and the distinct goals of their authors, it is certainly possible to read them together in order to consider what messages their authors intended to pass on. Both texts explore three general themes: the importance of preserving Judean laws and customs, the character traits of gentiles and acculturated Judeans, and the qualities of good and bad leadership. For both authors, the Hasmonean struggle was an attempt to protect ancestral laws and customs against gentile persecutions and Judean assimilation. They used the sacrifices of the Judean fighters to demonstrate the paramount importance of protecting those practices that defined Judeans as a 'chosen people.' Along with the importance of tradition, they projected a unanimous distrust of gentile communities and their leaders, and used repeated instances of treachery by gentiles to advocate Judean isolation. In addition, they scorned any Judeans who chose to associate with gentiles, suggested that the actions of those Judeans were motivated by Hellenistic values, and argued that their sins incurred God's punishment of all Judeans. Lastly, the authors looked to the Hasmonean leadership to unite loyal Judeans in defense of God's laws and the practices of their ancestors, suggesting that their efforts would restore God's favor, and that with God's strength, the Judeans would repel Greek incursion. Collectively,

these themes provided a foundation for the vision of a united and autonomous Judean community presented in Maccabees I and II. However, despite their unanimous support of Judean cultural unity and autonomy, the two texts were not completely supportive of Hasmonean efforts to create a politically independent Judean state.

### ***Judean Tradition in Maccabees I and II***

The importance of preserving Judean law and custom lay behind the entire discourse of Maccabees I and II. While both authors defined the Hasmonean struggle as a movement to defend these traditions, they focused on different threats. The author of I Maccabees emphasized the threat of neighboring gentile communities, which elevated the importance of Hasmonean attempts to create and govern a politically autonomous Judean state. The argument regarding defense of custom in I Maccabees was also the strongest argument in favor of Judean political autonomy found in either text. Alternatively, the author of II Maccabees targeted acculturated Judeans, suggesting that the biggest threat to Judean custom was defection to Greek culture. This argument emphasized the need for Judean cultural unity without an explicit support for Hasmonean political efforts.

Throughout both I and II Maccabees it was made clear that the uprising stemmed from a response to a variety of threats to Judean custom and law. The texts provided a valuable literary model for how their authors wanted future readers to understand the struggle. In I Maccabees, the emphasis lay primarily on threats from surrounding Greek rulers, while the compiler of II Maccabees focused not only on the Greeks but also on the divine punishment of disloyal Judeans. While there are important differences between these two approaches, both fostered an emphatic

connection between the force used by Judas and his brothers and the determination of those loyal to the Hasmoneans to protect Judean law and custom. This focus pointed to an attempt to place preservation of these traditions at the center of the lasting message of the Hasmonean story.

Although the author of I Maccabees focused primarily on the attacks by gentile Greeks, he first discussed those Judeans whom he identified as “renegades” for seeking an alliance with a Greek ruler:

In those days certain renegades came out from Israel and misled many, saying, ‘Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles around us, for since we separated from them many disasters have come upon us.’ This proposal pleased them, and some of the people eagerly went to the king, who authorized them to observe the ordinances of the Gentiles. So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, and removed the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil.<sup>42</sup>

It is significant that the author of I Maccabees chose to begin with a reference to ‘renegade’ Judeans rather than the gentiles because it identified the grounds on which gentiles posed a threat. The author identified those Judeans as “renegades” both because they turned to the authority of the king –a gentile authority figure- and because they disgraced the Judean community by adopting gentile values. The author’s mention of a “covenant” with the gentiles underscored the notion that their actions were a betrayal of the covenant made between God and Abraham.

Additionally, the gymnasium, a physical testament to Greek culture, could have been seen as a rival to the temple. Finally, their apparent efforts to disguise the marks of circumcision, a physical difference between Judeans and their neighbors, could have

---

<sup>42</sup> I Macc. 1. 11-15, NRSV.

solidified the portrayal of their determination to destroy both the tangible and intangible cultural barriers between Judeans and their neighbors. The author used the “renegades” betrayal to demonstrate the harmful effects gentiles could have on Judean communities. In his translation and commentary of I Maccabees, Jonathan Goldstein noted that the Book of Deuteronomy commanded Judeans to isolate themselves from their surrounding nations:<sup>43</sup>

When the Lord your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, you must utterly destroy them. Make no covenant with them and show them no mercy. Do not intermarry with them...for that would turn away your children from following me, to serve other gods.<sup>44</sup>

According to Goldstein, this command for Jews to isolate themselves from the nations native to the Promised Land was interpreted to include all pagan neighbors, long after the nations alluded to in God’s original command had disappeared.<sup>45</sup> Given the prescription in the Book of Deuteronomy that prohibited Israelites from mixing with gentiles and adopting their customs, the efforts made by the Greeks to prevent the practices that set Judeans apart from their neighbors become increasingly significant. From the beginning of I Maccabees, its author portrayed the Hasmoneans’ actions as defensive measures against the intrusion of gentile practices.

Despite the initial criticism of “renegade Jews”, the author of I Maccabees focused heavily on the persecution by gentile adversaries. Of particular significance was the Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanes, who, according to I Maccabees, entered Jerusalem after conquering Egypt and plundered the temple, taking the tools of ritual

---

<sup>43</sup> See Goldstein, *I Maccabees*, 199. Goldstein cites Ex. 23.32, 34.12-16, and Deut. 7.1-4.

<sup>44</sup> Deut. 7. 2-4 NRSV.

<sup>45</sup> Goldstein, *I Maccabees*, 199.

observance as treasure.<sup>46</sup> A brief poem included in the text of I Maccabees recounts the event:

He shed much blood, and spoke with great arrogance. Israel mourned deeply in every community, rulers and elders groaned, young women and young men became faint, the beauty of the women faded. Every bridegroom took up the lament, she who sat in the bridal chamber was mourning. Even the land trembled for its inhabitants, and all the house of Jacob was clothed with shame.<sup>47</sup>

The desecration of the temple aroused both anger and shame. This expression of shame made protection of Judean customs, laws, and sacred spaces more important than anger alone could have done, because the resulting was about restoring honor, not simply about retaliation or self-defense. The author of the poem seemed to suggest that all Judeans should take pride in, and remain loyal to, the traditions of their ancestors. In light of the betrayals of this tradition already documented in I Maccabees, it seems likely that the author included this poem to target the attention of any Judeans who chose to adopt gentile practices.

Another significant difference between I and II Maccabees was that in I Maccabees it was Mattathias, not Judas, who began the revolt. This supported the dynastic focus of I Maccabees, because Mattathias left a legacy of zealous leadership for his successors to follow, and his position as an elder in the community placed Mattathias closer to the ancestral traditions the Hasmoneans claim as their own. He was first presented while grieving the plundering of the Jerusalem temple:

‘Alas! Why was I ever born to see this, the ruin of my people, the ruin of the holy city, and to live there when it was given over to the enemy, the sanctuary given over to aliens? Her temple has become like a person without honor; her glorious vessels have been carried

---

<sup>46</sup> I Macc. 1. 20-24 NRSV.

<sup>47</sup> I Macc. 1. 24-28 NRSV.

into exile. Her infants have been killed in her streets, her youth by the sword of the foe. What nation has not inherited her palaces and has not seized her spoils? All her adornment has been taken away; and no longer free; she has become a slave. And see, our holy place, our beauty, and our glory have been laid waste; the Gentile have profaned them. Why should we live any longer?' Then Mattathias and his sons tore their clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourned greatly.<sup>48</sup>

According to the author, Mattathias's lament centered on the twofold destruction of Judean culture: the killing of its children and the defiling of the temple. Considering that the temple was a space where religious leaders passed on customs from one generation to the next, and that the slaughtered youths represented the future generation of Jewish leaders, the text presented Mattathias's mourning as a lament of the death of the future of Judean culture. His remarks placed the blame heavily on outsiders, and one can perceive an almost xenophobic quality in Mattathias's outcry. It was also possible to see his remarks as a further rebuke of the disloyal Judeans, those who 'shamed' the temple and Judean customs by embracing Hellenistic acculturation. The author's outrage, voiced through Mattathias, stemmed from his fear of an impending destruction of Judean cultural identity and from the shame brought to the temple.

The author also used Mattathias to make a concrete connection between the Maccabean revolt and the defense of traditional law and custom. He emphasized both Mattathias's personal role in the inception of the struggle and also the tension between Jewish and gentile cultural values. According to the text, Mattathias began active protest by refusing bribes from the king's messengers in order to protect ancestral customs. Mattathias's refusal of their enticements, according to the author,

---

<sup>48</sup> I Macc. 2. 7-14 NRSV.

highlighted his zeal:

‘Even if all the nations that live under the rule of the king obey him, and have chosen to obey his commandments, every one of them abandoning the religion of their ancestors, I and my sons and my brothers will continue to live by the covenant of our ancestors. Far be it from us to desert the law and the ordinances. We will not obey the king’s words by turning aside from our religion to the right hand or to the left.’ When he had finished speaking these words, a Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice on the altar in Modein, according to the king’s command. When Mattathias saw it, he burned with zeal and his heart was stirred. He gave vent to righteous anger; he ran and killed him on the altar. At the same time he killed the king’s officer who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar. Thus he burned with zeal for the law, just as Phinehas did against Zimri son of Salu. Then Mattathias cried out in the town with a loud voice, saying: ‘Let every one who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!’<sup>49</sup>

Mattathias’ speech simultaneously established three lenses through which the revolt could be evaluated in I Maccabees. First, Mattathias associated the movement with his family. He, as a community leader, and his sons would bear the torch of their ancestors. Noticeably absent was a mention of God. While the references to religious zeal imply a connection to God, Mattathias assumes primary authority. Second, Mattathias emphasized the relation between the preservation of ancestral traditions and Judean autonomy. Through Mattathias, the author suggested that Judeans must adhere to their own laws even when everyone else chose to answer to a different set of laws –and, inherently, a different voice of authority. In addition, Mattathias’s call for supporters to leave the town with him created an image of Judean isolation that underscored his desire for autonomy. By connecting autonomy with a defense of traditional law and custom, the author of I Maccabees suggested the need for cohesion among Judeans that preceded – and in some cases negated – any

---

<sup>49</sup> I Macc. 2. 19-27 NRSV.

relationship with the outside world. The third and most important lens through which to view this passage was the literal emphasis Mattathias placed on the law. The speech cited above was his response to requests from the king that Judeans stop conducting their traditional religious practices and adopt pagan worship.<sup>50</sup> In his violent outburst – justified as ‘religious zeal’ – he killed a Judean, who had betrayed their law by sacrificing to a gentile god, and the gentile official enforcing the sacrifice. Through documentation of this incident, the author sought to define the revolt as an active attempt to preserve Judean heritage in the face of gentile persecution and Judean Hellenization.

Previous research on I Maccabees suggested that the author included Mattathias as a connection to ancestral Judean leadership. For example, Jonathan Goldstein identified links between the story of Mattathias and those of Phinehas and David.<sup>51</sup> Phinehas appeared in Numbers, at a time when Israelites apparently had begun “to have sexual relations” with non-Jews, which led to adoption of their gods and religious practices and thus incurred the wrath of God.<sup>52</sup> At the command of God through Moses, Phinehas killed an Israelite man and his Midianite lover who entered into the sight of the Jewish congregation.<sup>53</sup> As a reward for his zeal, Phinehas and his descendants received a “covenant of perpetual priesthood” from God.<sup>54</sup> David, as Goldstein explained, operated as a fugitive outlaw, escaping into the wilderness after a massacre of innocents. He went on to fight for Israel and pass laws

---

<sup>50</sup> See I Macc. 1. 41-50 NRSV: The king commands that “all should be one people, and that all should give up their particular customs.”

<sup>51</sup> Goldstein, *I Maccabees*, 6-7.

<sup>52</sup> Num. 25. 1-3 NRSV.

<sup>53</sup> Num. 25. 6-8 NRSV.

<sup>54</sup> Num. 25 10-13 NRSV.

promoting Israel's well-being.<sup>55</sup> Like Phinehas, Mattathias punished Jews for betraying God's covenant by accepting other forms of worship and intermixing with foreign society. Like David, Mattathias fled to the wilderness to lead a group of outlaws to fight for Israel. Through these parallels, the author of I Maccabees established precedence for Mattathias's actions and supported a Hasmonean claim to authority by implying that Mattathias's actions should merit similar rewards.

The opening of I Maccabees portrayed Mattathias's revolt as an attempt to protect the corruption and loss of Jewish customs. The author used Mattathias as the inception of a dynastic lineage, a connection to the past for Judas and his successors. Of greater importance is the author's use of Mattathias as a symbol for the revolt. He highlighted Mattathias's unyielding focus on the preservation of law and of custom, and his determination to unite Judeans and prevent their assimilation into an alien society.

II Maccabees began with two letters: One letter, written to Judeans in Egypt from Judeans in Jerusalem, urged them to read the account of the revolt in II Maccabees and to begin to practice the Hanukkah festival. The second letter, possibly written by Judas Maccabeus, was to Aristobulus, Judean teacher of Ptolemy VI. It defended the creation of the Hanukkah festival and the actions preceding it.<sup>56</sup> After these letters came a preface written by the compiler of Second Maccabees, who described the rationale behind his work:

...All this, which has been set forth by Jason of Cyrene in five volumes, we shall attempt to condense into a single book. For considering the flood of statistics involved and the difficulty there is

---

<sup>55</sup> Goldstein, *I Maccabees*, 7.

<sup>56</sup> See note to II Macc. 1. 10 in *Harper Collins Study Bible*, p. 1521.

for those who wish to enter upon the narratives of history because of the mass of material, we have aimed to please those who wish to read, to make it easy for those who are inclined to memorize, and to profit all readers.<sup>57</sup>

I Maccabees may not have had an authorial preface, but the heavy focus on the minutia of specific deeds by Mattathias, Judas, and their successors suggested an attempt to glorify – or, perhaps, legitimize – the Hasmonean leadership as much as any religious motive. The letters that appear at the beginning of II Maccabees shifted the focus to the importance of Judean unity through deference to traditional law and custom. The compiler’s preface reflected his attempt to create a concise document with a clear message, a commentary on tradition that could be passed on easily. The letters and the larger understanding of heritage in II Maccabees would depict unity under the law as the foundation of a strong Judean community.

The letters placed before the actual account of II Maccabees were prominent examples of the deference to heritage and emphasis on unity in this text. The first letter indicated that, at the time of its writing, the Judeans were not unified. According to Jonathan Goldstein, the Judeans in Egypt that this letter was sent to had decided that God no longer favored the temple in Jerusalem after its destruction by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E., and, accordingly, had built their own.<sup>58</sup> While the primary purpose of the letter may have been to discuss the Hanukkah celebration, the letter also seemed to contain a thinly veiled criticism of the Egyptian temple:

The Jews in Jerusalem and those in the land of Judea, to their Jewish kindred in Egypt, greetings and true peace. May God do good to you, and may he remember his covenant with Abraham and Isaac and

---

<sup>57</sup> II Macc. 2.23-25 NRSV.

<sup>58</sup> Goldstein, *II Maccabees, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Series vol. 41a (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 138.

Jacob, his faithful servants. May he give you all a heart to worship him and to do his will with a strong heart and a willing spirit. May he open your heart to his law and his commandments, and may he bring peace. May he hear your prayers and be reconciled to you, and may he not forsake you in time of evil. We are now praying for you here. In the reign of Demetrius, in the one hundred sixty-ninth year, we Jews wrote to you, in the critical distress that came upon us in those years after Jason and his company revolted from the holy land and the kingdom and burned the gate and shed innocent blood. We prayed to the Lord and were heard, and we offered sacrifice and grain offering, and we lit the lamps and set out the loaves. And now see that you keep the festival of booths in the month of Chislev, in the one hundred eighty-eighth year.<sup>59</sup>

From the opening of the passage, the authors reminded the Egyptian Judeans of the identity all Judeans shared: the covenant made between God and Abraham. Next, the senders reminded the Egyptian Judeans of the struggle they underwent during the Hasmonean revolts. They did not mention Antiochus Epiphanes, but rather Jason, a ‘renegade’ Judean priest. According to Goldstein, Jason was from the Oniad clan, which is the same family that founded the temple in Egypt.<sup>60</sup> While Judeans in Jerusalem did not want to alienate the Egyptians – hence no direct mention of the Egyptian Oniads – there seems to have been a clear intent to connect the calamities that sparked the Hasmonean revolts with betrayal of the Egyptians. After all, why else would the Palestinian Judeans insist that Judeans everywhere celebrate Hanukkah, which commemorated the cleansing of the temple by Judas and thus constitutes a victory celebration for the Judeans in Palestine? The implication is that the answering of their prayer proved that the Jerusalem temple remained the true center of Judean culture.

While the letter to the Egyptian Judeans represented a call for a unification of

---

<sup>59</sup> II Macc. 1.1-9 NRSV.

<sup>60</sup> Goldstein, *II Maccabees*, 138.

Judeans under the Jerusalem temple, the letter to Aristobulus reflected deference to tradition. The author –perhaps Judas Maccabeus himself<sup>61</sup>– seemed determined to prove that there was precedent for the Hanukkah celebration. He did so by connecting Judas to Solomon and Moses:

It was also made clear that being possessed of wisdom Solomon offered sacrifice for the dedication and completion of the temple. Just as Moses prayed to the Lord, and fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifices, so also Solomon prayed, and the fire came down and consumed the whole burnt offerings. And Moses said, 'They were consumed because the sin offering had not been eaten.' Likewise Solomon also kept the eight days.<sup>62</sup>

The writer's argument was that celebrations like those at Hanukkah, which was also an eight-day festival, were not new, because Solomon and Moses celebrated in similar manners. By connecting Judas to these figures, the author gave authority not only to Judas but also to the celebration. The letter reflected the author's recognition of the need to legitimize Hanukkah as an extension of older traditions. The Hasmoneans would not have been able simply to invent a new festival. Since his movement was said to be based on a defense of tradition, inventing a new custom would have been contradictory to his efforts. By seeking to establish Hanukkah not as a new festival but rather as a new chapter in a preexisting story, the author of this letter asserted that Hanukkah was a celebration of tradition.

Like I Maccabees, II Maccabees defined the revolt as a defense against threats to the survival of Judean customs and law. However, the author of II Maccabees evidently did not agree with the author of I Maccabees about the primary source of the threat, focusing less on the aggressions of gentiles – featured prominently in I

---

<sup>61</sup> See note to II Macc. 1.10, *Harper Collins Study Bible*, 1521.

<sup>62</sup> II Macc. 2. 9-12 NRSV.

Maccabees – and more on the transgressions of Hellenistic Judeans. After recounting how Antiochus sent in an official to “compel the Jews to forsake the laws of their ancestors and no longer to live by the laws of God,”<sup>63</sup> he encouraged readers to maintain their optimism, asserting that this persecution was actually a blessing:

Now I urge those who read this book not to be depressed by such calamities, but to recognize that these punishments were designed not to destroy but to discipline our people. In fact, it is a sign of great kindness not to let the impious alone for long, but to punish them immediately. For in the case of the other nations the Lord waits patiently to punish them until they have reached the full measure of their sins; but he does not deal in this way with us, in order that he may not take vengeance on us afterward when our sins have reached their height.<sup>64</sup>

The author’s suggestion that Judeans should take heart from God’s swift punishment of their sins implied that his view was that Judeans were responsible for the hardships they endured. Although he did not articulate any specific sins directly in this passage, it can be assumed, given the general tone of the text, that the transgressions involved the adoption of gentile customs. The blame could not be placed directly on gentiles like Antiochus Epihanes, because they were instruments of divine retribution. The ultimate message the author conveyed with this passage was that those who dwelled on “calamities” overlooked the paramount importance of obeying God’s law.

The author of II Maccabees used stories of martyrdom to demonstrate the virtue of those who remained faithful to God and to Judean precepts. The documentation of martyrs’ sacrifice enabled the authors to urge readers to honor the heritage the martyrs died to protect. The story of the scribe Eleazar provided an excellent model for the role of martyrs in these texts. The author of II Maccabees

---

<sup>63</sup> II Macc. 6.1 NRSV.

<sup>64</sup> II Macc. 6.12-15 NRSV.

introduced Eleazar as “one of the scribes in high position, a man now advanced in age and of noble presence.”<sup>65</sup> As an elder, he was closer to the ancestors than the younger generations he inspired, and as a scribe, he presumably played some sort of active role in the preservation of tradition. According to the author, Eleazar was willing to give his life rather than violate God’s law:

Eleazar...was being forced to open his mouth to eat swine’s flesh. But he, welcoming death with honor rather than life with pollution, went up to the rack of his own accord, spitting out the flesh, as all ought to do who have the courage to refuse things that it is not right to taste, even for the natural love of life.<sup>66</sup>

Eleazar’s willingness to die bolstered the author’s call for Judeans to remain faithful. In casting the scribe’s decision as “honorable” and “courageous,” the author implied that loyal Judeans must take pride in their laws and traditions, and be prepared to defend them to the end. According to the author, Eleazar’s devotion was intended to set a good example for others:

Those who were in charge of that unlawful sacrifice...privately urged him to bring meat of his own...and to pretend that he was eating the flesh of the sacrificial animal that had been commanded by the king...But making a high resolve...he declared himself quickly, telling them to send him to Hades. ‘Such pretense is not worthy of our time of life,’ he said, ‘for many of the young might suppose that Eleazar in his ninetieth year had gone over to an alien religion, and through my pretense, for the sake of living a brief moment longer, they would be led astray because of me, while I defile and disgrace my old age.’<sup>67</sup>

For Eleazar, private loyalty was not enough. His decision to risk death by adhering to God’s law was not only to maintain personal dignity but also to publically encourage fellow Judeans to do the same. Furthermore, his fear that younger Judeans might

---

<sup>65</sup> II Macc. 6.18 NRSV.

<sup>66</sup> II Macc. 6. 18-20 NRSV.

<sup>67</sup> II Macc. 6. 21-25 NRSV.

betray God because they believe that he had underscored the importance of generational legacy. Eleazar did not want to leave Judeans with the memory of his sin. Furthermore, Eleazar's assertion that the benefit of living longer would not be worth the disgrace of betraying God implied that God's law –and, presumably, the Judean customs built around that law – were the most important thing for Judeans to hold on to. At the end of his speech, Eleazar discussed the significance of his martyrdom for the Judean community:

Even if for the present I would avoid the punishment of mortals, yet whether I live or die I will not escape the hands of the Almighty. Therefore, by bravely giving up my life now, I will show myself worthy of my old age and leave to the young a noble example of how to die a good death willingly and nobly for the revered and holy laws.<sup>68</sup>

In including the story of Eleazar, the author sent a clear message to the Judean community: above all else, even life itself, obedience to God was paramount. Furthermore, this obedience was necessary not only to maintain personal honor, but also to set an example for others. The true value of martyrs like Eleazar was the example they set, inspiring Judeans to follow their lead and remain loyal to their God and their way of life.

As the letters introducing II Maccabees indicated, Hanukkah originated from the rededication of the Jerusalem temple by Judas and his followers. Although it was possible to view Hanukkah as a purely human celebration of military victory, thereby supporting the Hasmonean claim to power, the author of II Maccabees made a clear effort to downplay the Hasmoneans' role and emphasize a religious meaning, one centered around the purification of the temple:

---

<sup>68</sup> II Macc. 6. 26-28 NRSV.

Now Maccabeus and his followers, the Lord leading them on, recovered the temple and the city; they tore down the altars that had been built in the public square by the foreigners, and also destroyed the sacred precincts. They purified the sanctuary, and made another altar of sacrifice; then, striking fire out of flint, they offered sacrifices, after a lapse of two years, and they offered incense, and lighted lamps and set out the bread of the Presence. When they had done this, they fell prostrate and implored the Lord that they might never again fall into such misfortunes, but that, if they should ever sin, they might be disciplined by him with forbearance and not be handed over to blasphemous and barbarous nations...They celebrated it for eight days with rejoicing, in the manner of the festival of booths, remembering how not long before, during the festival of booths, they had been wandering in the mountains and caves like wild animals.<sup>69</sup>

Not only did the writer explicitly state that God led the Jews to victory, he also reminded readers that the hardships endured were the result of shortcomings within the Jewish community. The rededication of the temple represented a return to the foundation of law and to tradition. Furthermore, the author suggested that their celebration resembled a biblical festival, one that occurred while Judas and his followers were in the wilderness, thus giving Hanukkah legitimacy through connection to a preexisting tradition while making Hanukkah an enduring reminder of the Hasmonean struggle. The author directed the reader to envision Hanukkah as a solemn commemoration of tradition restored, and as a reminder of the law.

By defining the revolt as a defense of God's law and of Judean custom, the authors of Maccabees I and II provided thorough evidence for the need for Judean unity in support of their heritage. Each author's depiction of the struggle, however, placed different emphasis on the role of the Hasmonean leadership. The author of I Maccabees offered stronger support for Hasmonean political ambitions through his emphasis on Hasmoneans' role in repelling aggression from gentile leaders, while the

---

<sup>69</sup> II Macc. 10. 1-6 NRSV.

author of II Maccabees focused on the importance of unifying Judeans in adherence to God's law. Ultimately, however, the two authors' united call for Judean loyalty bolstered the creation of a Judean identity centered around the laws of God.

### ***Portrayal of Gentiles and Hellenizing Judeans in Maccabees I and II***

Although ancestral rituals and laws such as the dietary laws Eleazar gave his life to obey held a dominant presence in the texts of Maccabees I and II, the two texts also presented an overwhelmingly negative image of gentiles and their Judean allies. In I Maccabees, condemnation of gentiles allowed the author to elevate the importance of the Hasmonean movement that resisted external meddling. In II Maccabees, the same criticisms supported the author's call for a loyalty among Judeans to their shared customs and laws. In both texts, it was clear that the negative portrayal of gentiles and Judean traitors was not just a criticism of their actions, but a condemnation of any attempt at Hellenization. In their attacks, the authors focused on two major traits: they portrayed the gentiles as treacherous and as an obstacle to the celebration of ancestral rites and laws particular to Judean communities.

From the beginning of I Maccabees, there is a clear concern over gentile presence in and around Jerusalem. Although much of this concern seems to have stemmed from an attempt to advocate against Judean Hellenization, the authors of both texts also revealed a determination to cast gentiles themselves in a negative light. They frequently portrayed gentiles as treacherous. For instance, the author of I Maccabees recounted the arrival of a tax collector from the king who tricked Judeans into allowing him to occupy Jerusalem:

Two years later the king sent to the cities of Judah a chief collector of

tribute, and he came to Jerusalem with a large force. Deceitfully he spoke peaceable words to them, and they believed him; but he suddenly fell upon the city, dealt it a severe blow, and destroyed many people of Israel. He plundered the city, burned it with fire, and tore down its houses and its surrounding walls. They took captive the women and children, and seized the livestock. Then they fortified the city of David with a great strong wall and strong towers, and it became their citadel. They stationed there a sinful people, men who were renegades.<sup>70</sup>

The concept of a deceptive peace was a theme that the authors of Maccabees I and II emphasized heavily. In addition, the author's focus on the fortification of Jerusalem – which implied that the city, although it had walls before, was not militarily fortified – underscored the military focus of the gentile presence. While it is true that the Judeans responded with military force under the Hasmoneans, this passage suggested that the author saw the Greek fortification of Jerusalem as violation of a sacred space that was the symbolic center of the Judean world. The fortifications served as a symbol of Greek aggression and their militaristic tradition, a reminder of the treachery of the gentiles. Furthermore, the author noted that the gentiles armed their citadel with a group of “renegade” Judeans, connecting their disloyalty with the tribute collector's deceit.

The author of I Maccabees was clear in his assertion that Judean associates of gentile authorities played a major role in the gentiles' treacherous actions. The author used the example of Alcimus, a Judean high priest appointed by the king who accompanied the king's emissary Bacchiades. According to the author, the presence of the Israelite priest aided in the entrapment and slaughter of other Judeans:

Then a group of scribes appeared in a body for Alcimus and Bacchiades to ask for just terms. The Hasideans were first among the

---

<sup>70</sup> I Macc.1. 29-34 NRSV.

Israelites to seek peace from them, for they said, ‘A priest from the line of Aaron has come with the army, and he will not harm us.’ Alcimus spoke peaceable words to them and swore this oath to them, ‘We will not seek to injure you or your friends.’ So they trusted him; but he seized sixty of them and killed them in one day, in accordance with the word that was written, ‘The flesh of your faithful ones and their blood they poured out all around Jerusalem, and there was no one to bury them.’<sup>71</sup>

As with the account of the tribute collector’s assault on Jerusalem, the author’s use of the words “peaceable” and “trust” suggested an attempt to highlight the particular nature of the gentile’s treachery and of Alcimus’s betrayal. The Judeans believed in the promise of peace, and, in this instance, saw comfort in the seemingly friendly face of a fellow Judean. Furthermore, in allying with the king, Alcimus served as a symbol of the corruption of the priesthood wrought by gentiles and the Hellenistic Judeans. It is also important to consider the implication of the slaughter. Perhaps the author wanted to show that the Hasideans suffered a heavy punishment for their willingness to make peace with the Greeks – putting Alcimus’s treachery aside – which essentially would have amounted to an abandonment of Judeans. Nonetheless, the most important aspect of the story of Alcimus was the author’s emphasis on the deceitful and treacherous nature of the gentiles and their Judean allies.

Relationships between the Hasmoneans and neighboring political leaders generally came to involve betrayal at some point. Essentially, the Hasmoneans found themselves caught between opposing rulers, who are willing to make peace with them only so long as it is convenient. The author of I Maccabees captured this aspect of the relationship between the Hasmoneans and the Greeks with the inclusion of offers of peace from Demetrius and Alexander, rival heirs to the Seleucid throne.

---

<sup>71</sup> I Macc. 7.12-17 NRSV.

According to the author, Alexander Epiphanes challenged the rule of King Demetrius.<sup>72</sup> Evidently, Alexander claimed to be the son of Antiochus IV Epiphanes.<sup>73</sup> In order to respond to this threat, Demetrius decided to seek the support from the Hasmoneans, who were, at this time, under the leadership of Jonathan:

Demetrius sent Jonathan a letter in peaceable words to honor him; for he said to himself, 'Let us act first to make peace with him before he makes peace with Alexander against us, for he will remember all the wrongs that we did to him and to his brothers and his nation.' So Demetrius gave him authority to recruit troops, to equip them with arms, and to become his ally; and he commanded that the hostages in the citadel should be released to him. Then Jonathan came to Jerusalem and read the letter in the hearing of all the people and of those in the citadel. They were greatly alarmed when they heard that the king had given him authority to recruit troops. But those in the citadel released the hostages to Jonathan, and he returned them to their parents.<sup>74</sup>

Then, upon learning about Jonathan and the offers made by King Demetrius, Alexander sent the following letter:

King Alexander to his brother Jonathan, greetings. We have heard about you, that you are a might warrior and worthy to be our friend. And so we have appointed you today to be the high priest of your nation; you are to be called the king's Friend and you are to take our side and keep friendship with us.<sup>75</sup>

The author added that Jonathan seized this opportunity as well, taking both the priesthood and the power to recruit troops.<sup>76</sup> Evidently, Demetrius learned of Alexander's offering, and, determined to win over the Hasmoneans, sent yet another letter with a supposedly more enticing offer:

King Demetrius to the nation of the Jews, greetings. Since you have

---

<sup>72</sup> I Macc. 10.1 NRSV

<sup>73</sup> See note to I Macc. 10. 1, *Harper Collins Study Bible*, 1502.

<sup>74</sup> I Macc. 10.3-9 NRSV.

<sup>75</sup> I Macc. 10.18-20 NRSV.

<sup>76</sup> I Macc. 10.21 NRSV.

kept your agreement with us and have continued your friendship with us, and have not sided with our enemies, we have heard of it and rejoiced. Now continue still to keep faith with us, and we will repay you with good for what you do for us. We will grant you many immunities and give you gifts. I now free you and exempt all the Jews from payment of tribute and salt tax and crown levies, and instead of collecting the third of the grain and the half of the fruit of the trees that I should receive, I release them from this day and henceforth...all the festivals and sabbaths and new moons and appointed days, and the three days before a festival and the three after a festival -- let them all be days of immunity and release for all the Jews who are in my kingdom. No one shall have authority to exact anything from them or annoy of them about any matter. Let Jews be enrolled in the king's forces to the number of thirty thousand men, and let the maintenance be given them that is due to all the forces of the king...<sup>77</sup>

According to the author, Jonathan and the Judeans ultimately chose to side with Alexander because they did not trust in the promises of Demetrius, given his prior aggression, and because Alexander had been “the first to speak peaceable words to them.”<sup>78</sup> In terms of the dynastic history of the Hasmoneans, the letters granted a basis for Jonathan’s two-fold seizure of power – he could claim political authority from Demetrius and the high priesthood from Alexander. Additionally, the author recycled linguistic elements from the earlier passages regarding gentiles, and a reader who saw the word “peaceable” here might well have remembered that both the tribute collector and Alcimus had come to the Judeans with offerings of peace. Most important, the author’s portrayals of the relationships between Judean and gentiles showed that the gentile kings addressed the Judeans out of need, not respect. This became particularly clear in the increasingly lavish peace offerings of Demetrius,

---

<sup>77</sup> I Macc. 10. 22-37 NRSV.

<sup>78</sup> I Macc. 10. 46-47 NRSV.

which were likely seen as unrealistic given his track record.<sup>79</sup>

One theory put forth regarding King Demetrius's more generous letter which, unlike his previous letter –and the letter from Alexander –was addressed to “the nation of the Jews” instead of Jonathan directly, and which seemed to willfully ignore Jonathan's acceptance of the high priesthood from Alexander, was that Demetrius wrote the second letter in an attempt to win Judeans away from Jonathan.<sup>80</sup> The fact that the author noted that the king's second letter as addressed “to the nation of the Jews” seemed intended to show that the subsequent rejection of Demetrius by Judeans was universal. Their refusal to trust him underscores the author's attempt to portray the Greek king as a treacherous figure, and their willingness to side with Jonathan.

While the author made it clear that the Judeans sided with Alexander based on their distrust of Demetrius, he identified a second reason that, on the surface, appears to be untrue. The author wrote that the Judeans “favoured Alexander, because he had been the first to speak peaceable words to them.”<sup>81</sup> According to the text, Demetrius was the first to write to Jonathan. Why then, when the author deliberately placed Demetrius's letter before Alexander's, did he write that Alexander was the first to offer peace? The content of the offerings may be the answer. Demetrius initially offered Jonathan the power to recruit and arm troops, and promised the release of hostages. He made Jonathan into a recognized military ally, but offered no promise of cultural autonomy or toleration of Judean ancestral law, the very things the

---

<sup>79</sup> See I Macc. 7. 8-9 NRSV: King Demetrius sends Bacchides “to take vengeance on the Israelites.”

<sup>80</sup> See note to I Macc. 10. 25-28, *Harper Collins Study Bible*, 1503.

<sup>81</sup> I Macc. 10. 47 NRSV.

Hasmoneans were fighting for. Alexander, on the other hand, offered Jonathan the high priesthood, thus allowing Judeans to preserve their culture on their own terms.

These representations of treacherous gentiles all appear in I Maccabees. II Maccabees focused on the danger from within, suggesting that disloyal Judeans posed a greater threat than the gentiles did. Among the most prominent examples of treachery in II Maccabees were the various betrayals against Onias, high priest of Jerusalem. From the outset, the author of II Maccabees established Onias as an ideal leader of the temple and a champion of ancestral law:

While the holy city was inhabited in unbroken peace and the laws were strictly observed because of the piety of the high priest Onias and his hatred of wickedness, it came about that the kings themselves honored the place and glorified the temple with the finest presents, even to the extent that King Seleucus of Asia defrayed from his own revenues all the expenses connected with the service of the sacrifices.<sup>82</sup>

Onias was an epitome of piety. His zeal, according to the text, commanded the respect of foreign kings, the very leaders who, in other instances, interfered with Judean worship. Onias's impeccable leadership made him the perfect victim for betrayal. The first instance occurred when one of Onias's subordinates at the temple, a man named Simon, sought to circumvent Onias's authority following a dispute over the operation of the city market:

But a man named Simon, of the tribe of Benjamin, who had been made captain of the temple, had a disagreement with the high priest about the administration of the city market. Since he could not prevail over Onias, he went to Apollonius of Tarsus, who at that time was governor of Coelesyria and Phoenicia, and reported to him that the treasury in Jerusalem was full of untold sums of money, so that the amount of the funds could not be reckoned, and that they did not belong to the account of the sacrifices, but that it was possible for them to fall under

---

<sup>82</sup> II Macc. 3.1-3 NRSV.

the control of the king.<sup>83</sup>

Simon was not a gentile; he was an officer of the temple. His betrayal of Onias, a result of a dispute over authority between Simon and Onias, gave the gentiles – who constantly sought to profit from Judea- an opportunity to rob the temple.<sup>84</sup>

Onias repeatedly suffered at the hands of fellow Judeans, which underscored the threat from within. Simon's betrayal was followed when Onias was overthrown by his own brother, Jason:

Jason, the brother of Onias, obtained the high priesthood by corruption, promising the king at an interview three hundred sixty talents of silver, and from another source of revenue eight talents. In addition to this he promised to pay one hundred fifty more if permission were given to establish by his authority a gymnasium and a body of youth for it, and to enroll the people of Jerusalem as citizens of Antioch. When the king assented and Jason came to office, he at once shifted his compatriots over to the Greek way of life.<sup>85</sup>

Jason's treachery extended beyond betrayal and corruption. Jason's determination to Hellenize the citizens of Jerusalem and his goal to assimilate Judeans into Greek culture made his treachery particularly dangerous. The author of II Maccabees, who consistently warned against threats to Judean culture from disloyal Judeans, extended this message by comparing Hellenistic Judeans like Jason to treacherous gentiles.

Onias's final return to the narrative came on the heels of Jason's overthrow by Menelaus, the brother of Simon. Jason had sent Menelaus to take money to the king, only to have Menelaus take the opportunity, as Jason had before him, to buy the priesthood and remove Jason from power, even though, according to the author,

---

<sup>83</sup> II Macc. 3.4-6 NRSV.

<sup>84</sup> II Macc. 3.7-8 NRSV.

<sup>85</sup> II Macc. 4.7-10 NRSV.

Menelaus had “no qualification for the high priesthood.”<sup>86</sup> But after Menelaus stole “gold vessels” from the temple, Onias, having withdrawn to a safe location, exposed Menelaus’s crime. Menelaus then approached the king’s deputy Andronicus to respond to Onias’s accusations:

Therefore Menelaus, taking Andronicus aside, urged him to kill Onias. Andronicus came to Onias, and resorting to treachery, offered him sworn pledges and gave him his right hand; he persuaded him, though still suspicious, to come out from the place of sanctuary; then, with no regard for justice, he immediately put him out of the way.<sup>87</sup>

With each successive example of treachery in II Maccabees, the author’s language became more harsh, and his accusations more specific. In recounting the murder of Onias, for example, he supported the element of conspiracy when Menelaus took Andronicus “aside.” This passage was also the first in which the author explicitly called the action a work of treachery.

Names of the actors were also critical in constructing the tale of treachery and disloyalty. Apart from Simon, the villains in the Onias saga – Jason, Menelaus, and Andronicus – all had Greek names, which perhaps connected their actions to those betrayals committed by Gentiles. This author also developed the thread of false peace seen in I Maccabees. His examples of gentiles offering false peace could further harden a Jewish or Judean audience against outsiders. Lastly, the Onias story as a whole developed as a progression of betrayal. Simon’s disclosure of the temple’s wealth was followed by Jason’s overthrow of Onias. Jason then became a victim of his own treachery as Menelaus overthrew him, suggesting that the Judean leadership in the priesthood had become entirely corrupt. And when Onias, the standard bearer

---

<sup>86</sup> II Macc. 4. 23-25 NRSV.

<sup>87</sup> II Macc. 4. 34 NRSV.

of virtue, tried to combat the wickedness of the Hellenized priesthood, he became a victim of treachery. Onias was not exactly a martyr – the author did not suggest that he willingly gave up his life – but he was portrayed as a defender of piety and righteousness.

The portrayal of gentiles in Maccabees I and II was much more than a warning against trusting foreigners. Indeed, the authors' language carried with it a xenophobic quality beyond a simple distrust of outsiders. The Hasmonean revolts were presented as an attempt to protect ancestral customs, out of a 'zeal for the law,' and thus it seems likely that the real goal underlying the portrayal of gentiles was to depict them and their cultures as antithetical to Judean-Jewish culture. Given the lofty place enjoyed by covenants within the ancestral tradition the Hasmoneans sought to defend, it would have been clear to readers that there was no such place for such gentiles within Judean society. The meddling and contrivance of Greek kings described in I Maccabees suggested an attempt by the author to advocate for a more self-determined, autonomous Judean community. Furthermore, the actions of those Judeans who choose to ally with the Greeks heightened the divide between Judeans and gentiles by condemning the treachery and corruption that inevitably came with their betrayal. The authors also undermined the legitimacy of all who were deceitful, as if to suggest that the need to use treachery in order to attain power was a sign of weakness. For example, Andronicus was only able to kill Onias –who was wary of potential danger – by tricking him into leaving his safe haven. Ultimately, the authors of both texts cast the gentiles in such a negative light that it was challenging to imagine any unity between Judean and Greek communities, and, by leaving such a

lasting message of distrust and contempt, further strengthened the argument for Judean cultural autonomy.

### ***Leadership and Authority in Maccabees I and II: Heaven-Sent or Human-Led?***

A third essential thread within both Maccabees I and II was the issue of leadership in the struggle. Leadership, of course, can take many forms, but in this context, two major sources emerged. On the one hand, there were the Hasmoneans – Judas and his brothers – who physically led the Judeans against their enemies on the battlefield. On the other hand, there was God. While God was present at some level throughout both texts, only II Maccabees attributed primary responsibility to the divine.

The attitude towards leadership in I Maccabees seemed somewhat mixed. The human leaders were the primary actors, and God assumed a more passive role. While the author strongly suggested that the revolt began in order to protect tradition, there are moments in the narrative where he portrayed the Hasmoneans more as military leaders in pursuit of victory and glory than as protectors of Judean religious heritage. Although the primary emphasis was on the ‘pious’ motivations of Judas and his successors, the text highlighted the questionable role of military glory in a nominally religious, or cultural, struggle.

The most useful tool in reading I Maccabees as a commentary on leadership was the frequent description of the revolt’s leadership, particularly of Judas Maccabeus. As a dynastic history of – and, largely, tribute to – the Hasmoneans, there was little focus on any characters but the leaders themselves, and these leaders

essentially became symbols for the Judeans. The first of these leaders, Judas Maccabeus, who had assumed command from his father, is said to have “extended the glory of his people”:

He extended the glory of his people. Like a giant he put on his breastplate; he bound on his armor of war and waged battles, protecting the camp by his sword. He was like a lion in his deeds, like a lion’s cub roaring for prey. He searched out and pursued those who broke the law; he burned those who troubled his people. Lawbreakers shrank back for fear of him; all the evildoers were confounded; and deliverance prospered by his hand. He embittered many kings, but he made Jacob glad by his deeds, and his memory is blessed forever. He went through the cities of Judah; he destroyed the ungodly out of the land; thus he turned away wrath from Israel. He was renowned to the ends of the earth; he gathered in those who were perishing.<sup>88</sup>

The specific attributes of Judas’s leadership the author chose to commemorate demonstrated the tension in leadership that defines I Maccabees. The author commended Judas for his forceful and spirited defense of the law, and for his success at unifying and protecting loyal and virtuous Judeans. His depiction of Judas as “a hungry lion” and “a giant” in armor served to emphasize his military might. According to this description, Judas was not unlike the classic heroes of Greek mythology, who were motivated by the desire for glory and honor, not by pious zeal. The question that readers had to grapple with was whether the legacy of Judas – and the rest of the Hasmoneans – was one of ancestral pride and religious zeal or of political power and military might.

Despite these tensions, the author made a clear effort to focus more heavily on Judas’s defense of tradition than his military achievements. For example, he frequently included speeches that Judas used to rally the Judeans prior to battle.

---

<sup>88</sup> I Macc. 3. 3-9 NRSV.

These speeches reflected deference to Judean heritage. When Judas's army expressed fear at the sight of a large Syrian army, Judas reassured them with an appeal to their cause rather than their strength:

It is easy for many to be hemmed in by few, for in the sight of Heaven there is no difference between saving by many or by few. It is not on the size of the army that victory in battle depends, but strength comes from Heaven. They come against us in great insolence and lawlessness to destroy us and our wives and our children, and to despoil us; but we fight for our lives and our laws. He himself will crush them before us; as for you, do not be afraid of them.<sup>89</sup>

Absent from his remarks was any mention of military power or aspiration to glory or influence. Through Judas, the author identified authority in the justice of their cause and in God's power. Similarly, when Judas led his army against Gorgias at Emmaus, he offered as inspiration an appeal to history:

Do not fear their numbers or be afraid when they charge. Remember how our ancestors were saved at the Red Sea, when Pharaoh with his forces pursued them. And now, let us cry to Heaven, to see whether he will favor us, and remember his covenant with our ancestors and crush this army before us today. Then all the Gentiles will know that there is one who redeems and saves Israel.<sup>90</sup>

The impact of this speech extended beyond the encouragement based on divine aid in the past. It not only empowers God in the struggle by establishing God, not Judas, as the true protector of the Judeans, it also demonstrated a culture of remembrance that drove the effort for Judean autonomy. The reference to the flight from Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea was yet another example of the author's attempt to place Judas – and the revolt – within accepted cultural tradition. The perceived oppression at the hands of the Greeks became another trial in a line of ancestral tribulations dating back

---

<sup>89</sup> I Macc. 3. 18-22 NRSV.

<sup>90</sup> I Macc. 4. 9-11 NRSV.

to enslavement by the Egyptians. The attitude the author conveyed in Judas's speech was one of defiance against external threats based not on Judean physical stature, but on divine protection and cultural inspiration.

The event that, more than any other, complicated Judas's image as a cultural and religious advocate was his decision to ally with Rome. While one could argue that Judas was attracted to Rome because they could help protect against the Greeks without exerting their own cultural influence over the Judeans, the author's discussion – and praise- of Rome's power points to a different ambition:

Now Judas heard of the fame of the Romans, that they were very strong and were well-disposed toward all who made an alliance with them, that they pledged friendship to those who came to them, and that they were very strong. He had been told of their wars and of the brave deeds that they were doing among the Gauls, how they had defeated them and forced them to pay tribute, and what they had done in the land of Spain to get control of the silver and gold mines there, and how they had gained control of the whole region by their planning and patience, even though the place was far distant from them...So Judas chose Eupolemus son of John son of Accos, and Jason of Eleazar, and sent them to Rome to establish friendship and alliance, and to free themselves from the yoke; for they saw that the kingdom of the Greeks was enslaving Israel completely.<sup>91</sup>

The focus here was so completely on Roman political and military prowess that it was hard to envision any other motivation for Judas in allying with Rome than political gain. Although the last line of the passage suggested that Judas sought aid from Rome out of desperation, the emphasis on Rome's strength cast doubt on the piety of Judas's actual aspirations.

In I Maccabees, Judas was described like a Greek hero, but constant reference was made to the piety of his leadership. In order to explore the relationship between

---

<sup>91</sup> I Macc. 8.1-18 NRSV.

these elements of Judas's character, the author included vignettes about other fighters.

The first was the story of Joseph and Azariah. Left by Judas in command of a part of his army, they decided – against Judas's orders – to seek fame through battle:

So they said, 'Let us also make a name for ourselves; let us go and make war on the Gentiles around us.' So they issued orders to the men of the forces that were with them and marched against Jamnia. Gorgias and his men came out of the town to meet them in battle. Then Joseph and Azariah were routed, and were pursued to the borders of Judea; as many as two thousand of the people of Israel fell that day. Thus, the people suffered a great rout because, thinking to do a brave deed, they did not listen to Judas and his brothers. But they did not belong to the family of those men through whom deliverance was given to Israel.<sup>92</sup>

Alternatively, the author described Eleazar, who gave his life in battle attempting to kill the Greek king:

All who heard the noise made by their multitude, by the marching of the multitude, and the clanking of their arms, trembled, for the army was very large and strong. But Judas and his army advanced to the battle, and six hundred of the king's army fell. Now Eleazar, called Avaran, saw that one of the animals was equipped with royal armor. It was taller than all the others, and he supposed that the king was on it. So he gave his life to save his people and to win for himself an everlasting name. He courageously ran into the midst of the phalanx to reach it; he killed men right and left, and they parted before him on both sides. He got under the elephant, stabbed it from beneath, and killed it; but it fell to the ground upon him and he died.<sup>93</sup>

According to the author, Eleazar sought glory like Joseph and Azariah. The difference was that he did so in the service of his people, of his commander, and, ultimately, of God, while Joseph and Azariah's ill-fated assault was solely for personal gain. In including these stories, the author was able to demonstrate the importance of proper motivation and to address the issue of military glory. In a

---

<sup>92</sup> I Macc. 5.57-62 NRSV.

<sup>93</sup> I Macc. 6.40-46 NRSV.

society based on reverence of tradition and the honoring of ancestors, glory would undoubtedly play a role. In seeking to be the leader of an autonomous Judean state, Judas was allowed to win glory for himself. However, the story of Eleazar suggested that glory was only legitimate if won in the defense of Judean principles. Thus, while the portrayal of Judas in I Maccabees raised concerns about the reality of Hasmonean aspirations, the underlying message advocated leadership based on tradition, with authority drawn from God's favor rather than military might.

From the outset, the author of II Maccabees granted God a prominent role in the Hasmonean struggle. The first acknowledgement of God's power in the surviving version of II Maccabees appears in the aforementioned letter to Aristobulus.

Sometime after the return to Jerusalem and cleansing of the temple, the authors of this letter wrote that, "Having been saved by God out of grave dangers we thank him greatly for taking our side against the king, for he drove out those who fought against the holy city."<sup>94</sup> In describing Heliodorus's attempted seizure of deposits from the temple (following their betrayal by Simon), the author of II Maccabees elaborated on their letter's praise of the protector God:

The priests prostrated themselves before the altar in their priestly vestments and called toward heaven upon him who had given the law about deposits, that he should keep them safe for those who had deposited them...But when [Heliodorus] arrived at the treasury with his bodyguard, then and there the Sovereign of spirits and of all authority caused so great a manifestation that all who had been so bold as to accompany his were astounded by the power of God, and became faint with terror. For there appeared to them a magnificently caparisoned horse, with a rider of frightening mien; it rushed furiously at Heliodorus and struck at him with its front hoofs. Its rider was seen to have armor and weapons of gold...When he suddenly fell to the ground and deep darkness came over him, his men took him up, put

---

<sup>94</sup> II Macc. 1. 11-12 NRSV.

him on a stretcher, and carried him away...They recognized clearly the sovereign power of God.<sup>95</sup>

In this description of the priests' supplication for aid and the miraculous defense of the temple, the author put forth the belief that the Judean success in fending off Greek aggression came from God. The priests prayed that God would come defend the practice of God's law, and God answered their prayers by sending an armed horseman. While God's particular method here, the use of combative force, could be read as a justification of Judas's military response to the Greek threat, the agency given to God is unmistakable. By crediting the "sovereign power of God" with the temple's defense, the author directly – although perhaps unintentionally – countered any claim to Hasmonean sovereignty based on Judean protection.

Since the author of II Maccabees attributed as much, or perhaps greater responsibility for the threat to Judean culture to disloyal, Hellenizing Judeans as he does to gentiles, he similarly cast the oppression of Judeans by Antiochus IV and the gentiles as God's punishment for transgressions, most notably in his explanation of Antiochus's successful plundering of the temple:

Antiochus dared to enter the most holy temple in all the world, guided by Menelaus, who had become a traitor both to the laws and to his country. He took the holy vessels with his polluted hands, and swept away with profane hands the votive offerings that other kings had made to enhance the glory and honor of the place. Antiochus was elated in spirit, and did not perceive that the Lord was angered for a little while because of the sins of those who lived in the city, and that this was the reason he was disregarding the holy place. But if it had not happened that they were involved in many sins, this man would have been flogged and turned back from his rash act as soon as he came forward, just as Heliodorus had been...But the Lord did not choose the nation for the sake of the holy place, but the place for the sake of the nation. Therefore the place itself shared in the misfortunes

---

<sup>95</sup> II Macc. 3.15, 24-28 NRSV.

that befell the nation and afterward participated in its benefits.<sup>96</sup>

Consider also the author's previously mentioned attempt to reassure readers following his graphic descriptions of the desecration of Judean communities and suppression of Judean religious practices. In addition to serving as a reminder of the Judean betrayal that was a source of strife, this passage underscored divine agency:

Now I urge those who read this book not to be depressed by such calamities, but to recognize that these punishments were designed not to destroy but to discipline our people. In fact, it is a sign of great kindness not to let the impious alone for long, but to punish them immediately. For in the case of the other nations the Lord waits patiently to punish them until they have reached the full measure of their sins; but he does not deal in this way with us, in order that he may not take vengeance on us afterward when our sins have reached their height.<sup>97</sup>

The author's suggestion that God would have protected the temple a second time had the Judeans not been sinful supported the argument that the fate of Judeans lay in God's hands. His assurance that God's swift punishment was actually a blessing in disguise – awakening Judeans to their sinful behavior before it was too late – further affirmed this author's insistence upon God's power as protector and arbiter. The passage did grant Judeans some authority, not over their defense but over their ability to achieve God's support through proper worship. As it turned out, it is in this aspect of the struggle that the author granted Judas particular power.

Because of the heavy emphasis on God's power in II Maccabees, Judas enjoyed a different role than that of military protector. The author of II Maccabees demonstrated an appreciation of Judas's leadership without emphasizing his success as a military commander or as a political figure. According to this author, Judas was

---

<sup>96</sup> II Macc. 5.15-20 NRSV.

<sup>97</sup> II Macc. 6.12-15 NRSV.

valuable as a figure Judeans could rally behind:

Meanwhile Judas, who was also called Maccabeus, and his companions secretly entered the villages and summoned their kindred and enlisted those who had continued in the Jewish faith, and so they gathered about six thousand. They implored the Lord to look upon the people who were oppressed by all; and to have pity on the temple that had been profaned by the godless; to have mercy on the city that was being destroyed and about to be leveled to the ground; to hearken to the blood that cried out to him; to remember also the lawless destruction of the innocent babies and the blasphemies committed against his name; and to show his hatred of evil. As soon as Maccabeus got his army organized, the Gentiles could not withstand him, for the wrath of the Lord had turned to mercy. Coming without warning, he would set fire to towns and villages. He captured strategic positions and put to flight not a few of the enemy. He found the nights most advantageous for such attacks. And talk of his valor spread everywhere.<sup>98</sup>

Although the final part of this excerpt cited Judas's military capability and rise to glory, the author continued to attribute this strength to God. What Judas did achieve, however, was the gathering of loyal Judeans to fight for the principles established by their ancestors and to rally around the Jerusalem temple – the epicenter of their culture. The author argued that in doing so, Judas assuaged God's anger at previous Judean betrayal. The implication of these remarks was that the Hasmonean revolt had a lasting value as an exercise of principle, not as an expansion of influence. Thus, the author of II Maccabees gave Judeans a role while maintaining ultimate divine authority, thereby endowing the struggle with some sense of legitimacy.

Although the authors of Maccabees I and II approached leadership from very different angles, there was some continuity between their arguments. While the author of I Maccabees focused on Judas and his successors, and the author of II Maccabees on God, both authors advocated the protection of what gradually became

---

<sup>98</sup> II Macc. 8. 1-7 NRSV.

Jewish tradition as a foundation of leadership. The largest difference between the two texts was their authors' approaches to the role of the military, and the division seemed to reflect the two authors' distinct goals. Taken together, the lasting message of the two texts, at least through their descriptions of Judas, was that if Judeans united behind a leader who would provide a spirited defense of law and custom, God would provide the necessary strength.

### ***Conclusion***

Maccabees I and II presented a wide array of arguments that advocated Judean unity and cultural autonomy as the means of preserving ancestral tradition and retaining God's favor. The 'chosen people' could only remain in favor if they preserved God's laws. In order to do this, they needed to remain unified, protect the Jerusalem temple as a symbol of their strength, protect their communities against gentile incursions, and prevent their own from straying out of the fold. Apart from the broadest acknowledgments of the importance of protecting tradition and law from Greek assimilation, little about these texts was definitive. The debate between the authors over the role and legacy of Judas and his successors left readers unsure of the legitimacy of the Hasmonean rise to power, and whether creating a politically autonomous and physically distinct Judean state was an appropriate way to serve God's will.

### 3

## The Hasmonean Story in Rabbinic Literature and in the Writings of European Jews in the Era of Expulsion

### *The Hasmoneans in Rabbinic Literature*

Tracing the course of the Hasmonean story through rabbinic literature in the early centuries of the Common Era poses three significant challenges. First, rabbinic sources like the Mishnah, the Tosefta, the Palestinian Talmud, and the Babylonian Talmud scarcely mentioned the Hasmoneans directly, and many of the references were to the kings of the latter part of the Hasmonean dynasty.<sup>99</sup> Second, these texts represented the voices of a specific section of Jewish society –the rabbis – meaning that the opinions voiced could not be said to reflect general views or knowledge. Third, since the major texts of rabbinic literature were composed over the span of several centuries, their authors did not speak with one voice. Nonetheless, it is possible to glean some understanding of the relationship(s) that the rabbis had with the version Hasmonean story told in Maccabees I and II from the brief discussions of the Hasmoneans that were scattered throughout rabbinic literature. Despite the hesitation by rabbis to discuss the Hasmoneans or grant them much prestige, the continued celebration of Hanukkah helped their legend survive beyond the end of the Hasmonean dynasty and persist in some form throughout the rabbinic period, while

---

<sup>99</sup> The mentions of Hasmoneans in rabbinic literature cited in this chapter are: bShabbat 21b, bBerakhot 48a, bMenahot 64b, bQiddushin 70a-b, and yTaanit 2:12. For a more extensive list, please see the notes to Richard Kalmin's *The Sage in Jewish Society of Late Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), chapter 3, entitled "Hasmonean royalty."

increased contact with Christian theology in the later rabbinic period helped reintroduce the accounts of Maccabees I and II.

The relative silence on the Hasmoneans during the rabbinic period has, naturally, generated a debate over the motivations of the rabbis in largely ignoring the Hasmonean legacy. The most prevalent argument has been that the scribes, sages, and, eventually, the rabbis attempted to erase the Hasmoneans from their collective memory. Gedaliah Alon, a central figure in Israeli historiography of the rabbinic period, however, offered a critique of this theory. In his article, “Did The Jewish People And Its Sages Cause The Hasmoneans To Be Forgotten?” Alon outlined the set of arguments that he felt were central to arguing for diminished rabbinic interest in the Hasmoneans: that there is no tractate in the Mishnah, or major commentary elsewhere, devoted to Hanukkah, I Maccabees was not preserved by the Jews, and, in its most noteworthy treatment of the festival, the Talmud asks ‘What is Hanukkah?’ (implying that its authors did not know), and, lastly, that the miracle of the oil was made the focal point of the Hanukkah celebration.<sup>100</sup>

Alon rejected all of these arguments. Regarding the suppression of I Maccabees, Alon suggested that the text took on cultural significance despite having little sacred value; he also cited a fourth-century record from the Christian theologian Jerome of the text’s existence as proof that it had not been erased.<sup>101</sup> His argument, however, did not provide a satisfactory explanation for the general absence of I Maccabees from rabbinic literature. Additionally, the idea of ‘national significance’

---

<sup>100</sup> Gedaliah Alon, *Did the Jewish People and Its Sages Cause the Hasmoneans to be Forgotten?*, in Alon, *Jews and Judaism in the Classical World*, trans. Israel Abrahams. (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1977), 1-2.

<sup>101</sup> Alon, 8.

is a modern one, and Alon's use of it here is somewhat anachronistic. The issue of sanctity was nonetheless important to the fate of the Hasmonean legacy, because rabbis were primarily concerned with sacred laws and sacred texts, which did not include I Maccabees or the Hasmonean story. The issue of sanctity might also help explain the infrequent treatment of Hanukkah in rabbinic literature – particularly its absence from the Torah-centric Mishnah – because Hanukkah was not a biblical holiday derived from scripture, but rather a celebration with cultural and historical significance. Alon's explanation was that Hanukkah was not the only significant aspect of Jewish culture left out of the Mishnah, and he cited the Babylonian Talmud's engagement with Hanukkah as an important rabbinic treatment of the subject.<sup>102</sup> Again, it is worth noting that Alon's reliance on the Babylonian Talmud was something of an oversimplification of the extensive history of rabbinic texts.<sup>103</sup>

The discussion of Hanukkah in the Babylonian Talmud provided facts that help to trace the passage of Hanukkah through time. Hanukkah entered the Bavli in the midst of a discussion about the Sabbath lights in Tractate Shabbat:

- A. *What's the point of Hanukkah?*
- B. *It is in line with what our rabbis have taught on Tannaite authority:*
- C. *On the twenty-fifth of Kislev the days of Hanukkah, which are eight, begin. On these days it is forbidden to lament the dead and to fast.*
- D. For when the Greeks entered the sanctuary, they made all of the oil that was in the sanctuary unclean. But when the rule of the Hasmonean house took hold and they conquered them, they

---

<sup>102</sup> Alon, 10-11.

<sup>103</sup> For a good introduction to the Babylonian Talmud, see Richard Kalmin's "The Formation and Character of the Babylonian Talmud" in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, ed. Steven T. Katz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4: 840-876. Kalmin discusses the composition of the Babylonian Talmud and elaborates on the differences between it and earlier rabbinic texts.

searched but found only a single jar of oil, lying with the seal of the high priest. But that jar had enough oil only for a single day. But there was a miracle done with it, and they lit the lamp with it for eight days. The next year they assigned these days and made them festival days for the recitation of Hallel psalms [Ps. 113-118] and for thanksgiving.<sup>104</sup>

The argument regarding this passage cited the initial question, “What’s the point of Hanukkah?” as proof that the sages did not know, or were perhaps willfully ignorant of, the festival’s origins. Alon countered this by pointing to the text as an example of standard Talmudic format, not of ignorance.<sup>105</sup> More important than Alon’s argument, however, is the language of the passage itself. The anonymous voice of the Talmud cited “Tannaite authority” as the source of knowledge about Hanukkah, a reference to a period in rabbinic literature that spanned the century prior to the period in which the Talmud were composed, during which time the Mishnah and its successor, the Tosefta, appeared. Alon also noted that the passage from the Babylonian Talmud included a passage from the Jewish chronicle *Megillat Ta’anit*, which offered both the miracle of the oil and a story of eight – or, in the original translation, seven – iron spits found in the Jerusalem Temple as another explanation for the length of the festival. Alon cited both as examples of an attempt to justify the length of the festival, not to rewrite its origins.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, the very mention of Hanukkah in the Babylonian Talmud showed that the holiday was being celebrated, regardless of the rabbis’ opinion of it. The rabbis would not have bothered to address the laws regarding Hanukkah if they were not a relevant issue. This information

---

<sup>104</sup> b. *Shabbat 21b*, in Jacob Neusner, *The Talmud of Babylonia, An American Translation*, Brown Judaic Studies, vol. IIa, *Shabbat ch. 1-2* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 76.

<sup>105</sup> Alon, 13-14.

<sup>106</sup> Alon, 14.

clearly showed that Hanukkah did not disappear after the Hasmonean dynasty collapsed, or, at least, after the Roman conquest. If Hanukkah survived, then some memory of the Hasmoneans survived with it.

The Hanukkah festival preserved in the Talmud was far removed from its Hasmonean roots. The miracle of the oil was not mentioned in Maccabees I or II, which both focused on the Hasmonean cleansing and rededication.<sup>107</sup> Alon's explanation for the addition of the miracle was that the rabbis, like the authors of Maccabees I and II, had to explain why Hanukkah lasted for eight days. The author of II Maccabees linked Hanukkah to the Festival of the Tabernacle, which the Judeans had been unable to properly observe during Antiochus Epiphanes's persecution.<sup>108</sup> Alon suggested that the story of the oil that lasted for eight days was a renewed attempt to justify the length of the Hanukkah celebration rather than an attempt to erase the memory of the Hasmoneans.<sup>109</sup> Although it may be impossible to define the rabbis' intentions towards the Hasmoneans, their interpretation of Hanukkah, which emphasized the religious over the historical, diminished the prestige Hasmoneans could derive from Hanukkah because it marginalized their military victory and piety. Thus, Hanukkah preserved a memory of the Hasmoneans, but not in their full glory.

While Alon's detailed arguments provide a helpful record of the Hasmoneans and Hanukkah in rabbinic literature, they are also somewhat problematic. In an essay discussing Alon's contributions to Talmudic historiography, Jewish scholar Seth

---

<sup>107</sup> See I Macc. 4. 36-61 NRSV and II Macc. 10. 1-9 NRSV for accounts of the cleansing and rededication of the temple on which Hanukkah was based.

<sup>108</sup> Alon, 14.

<sup>109</sup> Alon, 14-15.

Schwartz noted that Alon's writings "convey a fiercely combative nationalism" that led him to attribute historical developments predominantly to political causes rather than theological ones.<sup>110</sup> Schwartz argued that Alon inherited his view of Jewish history in part from a writer named Ben Zion Dinur, who put forth the view that Jewish national and political history ended not in 70 C.E. –with the Roman conquest of Judea– but in 640 C.E., with the Arab conquest of Palestine.<sup>111</sup> These dates are important to understanding Alon's treatment of rabbinic sources, because Alon's arguments relied on the notion that the rabbis who composed the Mishnah, Tosefta, and the Talmud were operating within a Jewish society that still had a political organization, and that the rabbis inherited the political power of the Judean kings.<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, Alon's conception of Jewish national history allowed him to depict a continuous lineage from the Pharisees and Sages of the Hasmonean era through the rabbis who wrote the Talmud, which blurred important distinctions between the treatment of Hasmoneans in different time periods. Thus, when Alon argued against the suppression of I Maccabees by citing a fourth-century record, he ignored, at the very least, the nearly three centuries that would have elapsed between the Roman conquest and the appearance of that record. Similarly, Alon's discussion of the passage on Hanukkah in *Bavli Shabbat* ignored the fact that the Babylonian Talmud was compiled between the third and sixth –or maybe even seventh – centuries C.E.,<sup>113</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> Seth Schwartz, "Historiography on the 'Talmudic Period'" in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, ed. Martin Goodman. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 85.

<sup>111</sup> Schwartz, "Historiography," 82-83.

<sup>112</sup> For Alon's politicization of rabbis, see Schwartz, "Historiography," 89.

<sup>113</sup> Richard Kalmin, "The Formation and Character of the Babylonian Talmud," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, 4: 840.

thus placing it after the Palestinian Talmud –compiled in the third and fourth centuries C.E.<sup>114</sup>. – and as much as six or seven centuries after the fall of the Hasmonean dynasty. During that time, where were the Hasmoneans in Jewish, or, at least, in rabbinic, memories?

The writing of Richard Kalmin, an American scholar of Jewish literature, on the tensions between the rabbis and the later Hasmoneans sheds some light on the intricate relationship between rabbis of the Talmudic era and the Hasmoneans. His particular focus is on the contrast between the overwhelmingly negative impression given in the Babylonian Talmud and the somewhat less negative, sometimes even positive rendition in the Palestinian Talmud. Kalmin elaborates on the details of the struggle between Jannai and the Pharisees, a theme that ran throughout many of the rabbinic discussions of the Hasmoneans. Perhaps the biggest grievance the Pharisees had against Jannai stemmed from Jannai’s alleged massacre of rabbis. Kalmin recounted a story in the Babylonian Talmud that told of King Jannai and his queen not having anyone to bless their food because Jannai had killed all the rabbis.<sup>115</sup> Kalmin noted that the Palestinian story did not accuse Jannai of killing rabbis, but rather of clashing with a religious leader over providing for sacrifices.<sup>116</sup> Either way, however, Jannai and the Pharisees were pitted against one another almost immediately.

The larger source of tension between Jannai and the Pharisees, however,

---

<sup>114</sup> Leib Moscovitz, “The Formation and Character of the Jerusalem Talmud,” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, 4: 663.

<sup>115</sup> B. Berakhot 48a, cited in Richard Kalmin, *The Sage in Jewish Society of Late Antiquity*, 61.

<sup>116</sup> Kalmin, *Sage*, 62.

seems to have stemmed from the Pharisaic concern about Jannai holding both political and religious power. Kalmin cited another version of the same Jannai massacre story, this one from the Palestinian Talmud, about a banquet Jannai held to celebrate sizeable conquests. As the king and sages shared a meal, one of the king's advisors warned him that the Pharisees were opposed to Jannai, and suggested that the king should confront them about his assumption of the high priesthood. After one of the Pharisees exhorted the king to be satisfied with the crown alone, the adviser suggested that the king "destroy them entirely." The king expressed concern for the fate of the Torah, but the adviser assured him that if they kept it safe, interested students could come and learn. The sages then met their deaths.<sup>117</sup> Kalmin argued that unlike the Babylonians, the Palestinians avoided placing direct responsibility on the king, choosing instead to blame the king's advisers.<sup>118</sup> However, while the king did express concern for the Torah, even the Palestinians blamed him for allowing the massacre to happen, which resulted in the loss of those best equipped to protect and teach the Law.<sup>119</sup>

Though particularly despised by rabbinic authors, Alexander Jannai was not the only Hasmonean ruler who faced their criticism. His sons, Hyrcanus and Aristobulus, fought a civil war for the throne. The Babylonian Talmud provided the following report of their struggle:

- B. *Our rabbis have taught on Tannaite authority:*
- C. When the kings of the Hasmonean house fought one another, Hyrcanus was outside and Aristobulus was inside [Jerusalem]. Every day [the people inside] would lower a basket of *denars*,

---

<sup>117</sup> Kalmin, *Sage*, 63.

<sup>118</sup> Kalmin, *Sage*, 64.

<sup>119</sup> Kalmin, *Sage*, 64.

and those outside would raise up animals for the daily whole-offering. There was there [among the besieging forces] an elder, who was familiar with Greek learning. He spoke with them concerning Greek learning, saying to them, ‘So long as you carry out the Temple service, they will not be given over into your hands.

- D. The next day when the insiders lowered a basket of *denars*, the outsiders sent up a pig,
- E. When the pig got half way up the wall, it dug its hoof into the wall. The land of Israel quaked and moved four hundred square *parasangs*.<sup>120</sup>

While this passage acknowledged that at least some of the Hasmoneans might have attended to religious rituals, it also revealed the troubling impact of civil war. As Kalmin notes, this passage suggested that the Hasmoneans were willing to sacrifice the laws of the Torah and the sanctity of their holy spaces in order for military or political gain.<sup>121</sup> Additionally, the reference to “Greek learning” implied a criticism of the corruption of the later Hasmonean dynasty, whose predecessors had fought against the Hellenization of Judea. This passage also made reference to “Tannaite authority,” implying that this story was passed down from an earlier generation of rabbis, but likely shaped by later Talmudic redactions to the original content.

Though Kalmin’s evidence is in itself certainly a useful resource for evaluating tensions between the Hasmoneans and the rabbis, the actual thrust of his argument is especially valuable in approaching an understanding of the reality of the Hasmonean fate during the rabbinic period. Kalmin notes that the Babylonian rabbis were more socially secure than their Palestinian counterparts, and thus less concerned

---

<sup>120</sup> b. Menahot 64b, in Neusner, *The Talmud of Babylonia*, Brown Judaic Studies, vol. XXIXb: *Menahot Ch. 4-7* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 119.

<sup>121</sup> Kalmin, *Sage*, 64.

about tackling prominent rivals to power.<sup>122</sup> The decision of the Babylonian rabbis to take on the Hasmoneans was also, according to Kalmin, somewhat political. He cites a story in which a litigant confronted a Rabbi Judah, saying, “You called me a slave, I, who descend from the royal house of the Hasmoneans!”; to which Rabbi Judah replied, “This is what Samuel said, ‘Whoever says that he comes from the house of the Hasmoneans is in fact a slave.’”<sup>123</sup> According to Kalmin, there was also evidence that the Babylonian rabbis accepted the legitimacy of claims to Davidic descent, from which he concluded that the Babylonian rabbis chose to favor the Davidic line over the Hasmonean dynasty.<sup>124</sup> The Palestinian rabbis never challenged the Hasmoneans in this manner, which placed the rabbinic rejection of the Hasmoneans at a later date, and in a specific location, Babylonia. Furthermore, Kalmin’s work reveals an important element of the relationship between the rabbis and the Jewish people. The conflict between Rabbi Judah and the litigant regarding Hasmonean descent shows that while the Babylonian rabbis may have rejected the Hasmoneans, at least some elements of the Jewish population did not. Thus, the relative silence and lack of praise for the Hasmoneans in rabbinic literature was, at most, indicative of the opinion of the rabbis themselves.

Kalmin’s writing illuminates an important point about the relationship between the rabbis and the Hasmoneans. It is clear from his evidence that some of the rabbis disliked certain elements of the Hasmonean dynasty. They accused the Hasmonean kings of sacrificing the Torah in favor of political power during the civil

---

<sup>122</sup> Kalmin, *Sage*, 61.

<sup>123</sup> b. Qiddushin 70a-b, in Neusner, *The Talmud of Babylonia*, Brown Judaic Studies, vol. XIXb: *Qiddushin Ch. 2-4*. Cited in Kalmin, *Sage*, 65.

<sup>124</sup> Kalmin, *Sage*, 65.

war between the rival Hasmonean leaders Hyrcanus and Aristobulus. The story in the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmud about Alexander Jannai's murder of the Pharisees, which, according to the Palestinian Talmud's version, was over the Pharisees' request that Jannai not hold both the crown and the high priesthood - underscored rabbinic concerns about Hasmonean lack of respect for the laws of the Torah. Furthermore, the possibility that the Babylonian rabbis chose to favor the Davidic line over the Hasmonean adds another dimension to the rabbinic opposition to the Hasmoneans.

Kalmin's point – that the Palestinian Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud treated the Hasmoneans differently, and that the Babylonians felt more secure in criticizing the Hasmoneans directly – is an important one, not only because it provides a clearer picture of the subtleties of rabbinic treatment of the Hasmoneans, but also because it suggests that the passage of time and the physical removal from Judea helped solidify rabbinic misgivings about the Hasmonean kings. At the same time, though, it is clear from the texts that the rabbis could not avoid talking about the Hasmoneans altogether, which indicated that the Hasmoneans remained popular among some element(s) of Jewish society. The rabbinic commentary cited by Alon and Kalmin suggested that the continued celebration of Hanukkah may have helped preserve the Hasmonean story, to the extent that, centuries after their disappearance, some Jews thought that Hasmonean descent could still be a positive status symbol.

The rabbinic commentary regarding the early Hasmoneans – Judas and his brothers – did not share the negativity of their descriptions of the later Hasmonean rulers. The aforementioned explanation of Hanukkah in the Babylonian Talmud's

Tractate Shabbat, for instance, did not describe the Hasmoneans as heroes, but certainly gave them credit for regaining control of the temple. Additionally, the Palestinian Talmud credited the Hasmoneans with the defeat of the Seleucid Nicanor:

What is Nicanor's Day? The ruler of the Kingdom of Greece was passing by [the land of Israel] en route to Alexandria. He saw Jerusalem and broke out into cursing, execration, and insult, saying, 'When I come back whole, I shall break down that tower.' One of the members of the Hasmonean household went forth and did battle with his troops and killed them until they came to those nearest the king. When they reached the troops nearest the king, they cut off the hand [of the king] and chopped off his head and stuck them on a pole, and wrote underneath them: '[Here is] the mouth that spoke shamefully and the hand that stretched out arrogantly.' These he set up on a pike in sight of Jerusalem.<sup>125</sup>

This was a rather flattering description of the early Hasmoneans, particularly for a Talmudic source. It clearly credited the Hasmoneans for their defense of the honor of Jerusalem and the Judeans. Additionally, the appearance of this passage in the Palestinian Talmud marked an earlier reference to the Hasmoneans than those seen in the Babylonian text. Ultimately, the positive references in both Talmud suggest that, despite hesitancy of rabbis to discuss the early Hasmoneans, some positive memory still remained.

The murkiness of the rabbinic testimony regarding the Hasmoneans left neither a decisive judgment of the Hasmoneans nor a clear path by which the Hasmonean story travelled forward during this period. Flavius Josephus, a historian of antiquity, preserved some memory of the Hasmoneans in his texts *The Jewish Antiquities* and *The Jewish War*. In *The Jewish War*, which told of the struggle

---

<sup>125</sup> y. Taanit 2:12 in Neusner, *The Talmud of the Land of Israel*, Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism, vol. XVIII: *Besah and Taanit*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987,) 202, cited in Kalmin, *Sage*, 64.

between the Jews and the Romans, Josephus referred to the overthrow of Antiochus Epiphanes by the Hasmoneans, noting also that their subsequent quarrel over the throne dragged Pompey and the Romans into Judea.<sup>126</sup> Although not directly relevant to rabbinic literature, Josephus's reference provided a practical explanation for why rabbinic authors may have been hesitant to frequently discuss the Hasmoneans, as there can be no doubt that the turmoil within the Hasmonean dynasty was at least partly responsible for the Roman conquest. More relevant to the discussion of rabbinic literature, however, was Günter Stemberger's argument that as the rabbis became more influential in the fourth century, they came in closer contact with popular Jewish tradition and with the Christian community, both of which were interested in the Hasmonean tradition and might have resurrected deeper awareness of the Hasmoneans within the rabbinic community.<sup>127</sup> Stemberger's point underscores an essential element of the rabbinic discussion. Since Maccabees I and II were not preserved in the Jewish canon, the earlier rabbis, at least, did not have the texts available to use as a resource or to respond to. Even those writing the Babylonian Talmud may not have seen them. It was the Church that preserved them. Jews would eventually rediscover them, but only through increased contact with Christian neighbors.

While the challenges to analyzing rabbinic literature impede a universal

---

<sup>126</sup> Josephus *The Jewish War* I.7, in *The Jewish War and Other Selections*, ed. Moses I. Finley, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray and Ralph Marcus (New York: Washington Square Press, 1965), 82. (Note: This edition published by Twayne Publishers)

<sup>127</sup> Günter Stemberger, "The Maccabees in Rabbinic Tradition," in *The Scriptures and the Scrolls: Studies in Honour of A.S. Van Der Woude On The Occasion of His 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, ed. F. García Martínez, A. Hilhorst and C.J. Labuschagne (New York: E.J. Brill, 1992), 203.

understanding to the development of the Hasmonean story during this time period, a few elements seem relatively certain. Rabbis – at least those of the Talmudic era – were hesitant to address the Hasmonean legacy, primarily, it seems, because of their perceived objections to the treatment of the Torah by later Hasmoneans. However, rabbis viewed the situation in different ways, as evidenced by the harsher critique in the Babylonian Talmud, which may have hinted at an additional element to those rabbis’ dislike of the Hasmoneans –their choice to favor the David line. Despite what rabbis thought, however, continued celebration of the festival of Hanukkah preserved some memory – albeit a much diminished one – of the accomplishments of the Hasmonean brothers, and the reference to claims of Hasmonean descent in the Babylonian Talmud shows that the Hasmoneans remained popular outside of rabbinic circles. Furthermore, it seems that even the rabbis had to acknowledge the contribution made by the Hasmonean brothers, despite what the later Hasmonean kings like Alexander Jannai did to tarnish the legacy. Finally, it is important to remember that the Hasmonean memory that was preserved by the rabbis was created without Maccabees I and II. The loss of those texts – itself a potentially significant marker of rabbinic disapproval – also contributed to the creation of a largely unique Hasmonean memory.

### ***Samuel Usque and the Era of Expulsion***

During the Medieval Period, few Jewish authors addressed Hanukkah or the Hasmoneans in significant detail. However the growing influence of the Catholic Church Maccabees I and II, preserved in the Catholic Bible, became more widespread, so that, by the sixteenth century, Jewish authors had access to the texts.

One example of a text from the centuries between the rabbinic period and the Early Modern Era that discussed the Hasmoneans reflected the absence of the Books of Maccabees I and II. Twelfth-century Spanish-Jewish philosopher and historian Abraham Ibn Daud wrote about the Hasmoneans in his *Book of Tradition*. Although, according to translator Gerson Cohen, Ibn Daud was familiar with a Christian translation of the Bible<sup>128</sup> – which would have made him aware of Maccabees I and II– his account of the Hasmoneans did not suggest that he used the texts as a resource. The following was Ibn Daud’s account of the Hasmonean revolt, Mattathias, and his sons:

In the 212<sup>th</sup> year after the building of the Second Temple, corresponding to the year 3621, Mattathias b. Johanan the high priest, called Hasmonean, rebelled against Antiochus king of Greece. He and his sons rose up against the viceroy of the king of Greece, [then] ruling over Jerusalem, and killed him and all his army. [The Hasmonean ruled one year and died. After him, his son Judah, the mighty warrior, ruled 6 years and died. After him, his brother Jonathan, son of [the Hasmonean, ruled 6 years and died. After him, his brother Simeon ruled 18 years and died.]<sup>129</sup>

Ibn Daud followed this account with a brief record of the succeeding Hasmonean kings, which generally echoed the critical accounts from the rabbinic sources.<sup>130</sup> In his account of the revolt, however, Ibn Daud ignored nearly every detail of the Hasmonean accomplishments. He praised Judas as “the mighty warrior,” but overlooked all of his accomplishments, including, most notably, the rededication of the Jerusalem Temple. Ibn Daud’s account was nothing more than a chronology.

---

<sup>128</sup> Gerson D. Cohen, “Introduction,” in Abraham Ibn Daud, *The Book of Tradition*, trans. Gerson D. Cohen (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1967), xxiii.

<sup>129</sup> Ibn Daud, 18-19.

<sup>130</sup> Ibn Daud, 19-21.

According to Cohen, Ibn Daud took his account of the Hasmoneans from the writings of the Jewish historian Josephus and rabbinic sources.<sup>131</sup> Thus, although evidently aware of Maccabees I and II, Ibn Daud chose to reiterate other secondary accounts of the Hasmonean story, which stripped the Hasmoneans of nearly all their glory.

In the sixteenth century, nearly a thousand years after rabbinic authors wrote of the Hasmoneans and Hanukkah in the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmud, a Portuguese ‘New Christian’ – a forced convert to Christianity from Judaism<sup>132</sup> – named Samuel Usque added a new chapter to the recreation of the Hasmonean legacy in a work entitled *The Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*. In the period immediately preceding Usque’s writing, Jews had been expelled from all the major countries of Western Europe, culminating with the Jewish expulsion from Spain in 1492 and the forced conversion to Christianity of Portuguese Jews in 1497.<sup>133</sup> Although at first the ‘New Christians’ were Christians in name only, the arrival of the Inquisition in the middle of the sixteenth century meant that the New Christians of Portugal were faced with a grim choice: either adopt Christianity in earnest, or face the dangers of persecution.<sup>134</sup> According to Jewish scholar Jacob Marcus, it was to the Portuguese New Christians facing this crisis that Usque addressed *The Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*.<sup>135</sup> Attempting to place the calamity that

---

<sup>131</sup> See Gerson D. Cohen, “Note to lines 54-82,” in Ibn Daud, 19.

<sup>132</sup> Martin Cohen, “Introduction,” in Samuel Usque, *Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*, trans. Martin Cohen (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964), 3.

<sup>133</sup> Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, “Exile and Expulsion in Jewish History,” in *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World 1391-1648*, ed. Benjamin R. Gampel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 20.

<sup>134</sup> Cohen, “Introduction” in Usque, 3.

<sup>135</sup> Jacob Marcus, “Foreword,” in Usque, viii.

faced the New Christians in a broader context of Jewish suffering, Usque turned to the story of the Hasmoneans for inspiration.

As a Jew living in a thoroughly Catholic Europe, Usque would have had access to Christian scripture, and thus, unlike the rabbis of the Tannaitic and Amoraic (Talmudic) eras, he was familiar with Maccabees I and II. Furthermore, unlike those rabbis, Usque displayed no hesitation towards discussing the Hasmoneans, whom he saw as heroic proof of God's favor for the people of Israel. Additionally, Usque wrote about the martyrs who preceded the Hasmoneans, whom he saw as evidence that God would deliver those among his chosen who remained loyal in the face of the most severe obstacles. Usque's retelling of the Hasmonean story revived the prestige granted the Hasmoneans by the authors of Maccabees I and II.

Usque's focus on the Hasmoneans and the Maccabean martyrs reflected his concerns about the faith of New Christians in the face of the Inquisition. Usque was concerned that New Christians would give in to the threat of persecution and relinquish their Judaism altogether. In this context, the tales of martyrdom included in II Maccabees served to warn the New Christians against assimilation and to inspire loyalty in the face of persecution. Usque recalled the tale of Eleazar, the elderly priest who, upon being ordered to eat swine, chose to die so as not to set a bad example for younger generations.<sup>136</sup> Usque also wrote about the martyrdom of Hannah and her seven sons, whose consecutive slaughters she witnessed and encouraged, as each of her children refused to let their oppressors turn them away

---

<sup>136</sup> Usque, 119-120. For the martyrdom of Eleazar, see II Macc. 6. 18-31 NRSV.

from their ancestral laws.<sup>137</sup> After describing both stories in gruesome detail, Usque offered the following explanation of their significance:

This was the role of these worthies – the holy priest Eleazar, the remarkable woman Hannah and her seven sons. The Lord showed them mercy by taking them in the state of their perfection and removing them from the danger of falling from that state if they continued in this life on earth.<sup>138</sup>

In depicting the deaths of the Maccabean martyrs as a type of divine mercy, Usque conveyed a clear message about religious loyalty: it was better to submit to persecution and death than to live a corrupt life. Since the New Christians of Usque's era were themselves facing the persecution of a gentile authority, Usque's inclusion of these stories of martyrdom implied that he felt that the martyrs' experience could apply to Jews in his own time. Usque's use of the tales of Eleazar, Hannah, and her sons revived the anti-assimilation stance of Maccabees I and II and brought the texts to Jews of Usque's own era.

Although Usque clearly relied on Maccabees I and II as resources in his discussion of the Hasmonean revolt, his arguments took a different course than theirs had. The change was, largely, a reflection of the markedly different circumstances in which Usque was writing. Both I Maccabees and II Maccabees were written during the tenure of the Hasmonean dynasty, before its eventual collapse led to the destruction of the Judean state. The authors of Maccabees I and II focused on the actions of the Hasmoneans more than the significance of their ultimate accomplishment – the creation of an independent Judean state – because they did not

---

<sup>137</sup> Usque, 120-123. For the martyrdom of Hannah and her sons, see II Macc. 7 NRSV.

<sup>138</sup> Usque, 123.

have to address the loss of independence that occurred with the Roman conquests. Additionally, although the threats to Judean autonomy did not entirely cease upon winning independence, the authors of Maccabees I and II wrote of past persecution at a time when they were likely to have been largely free of similar threats. Usque, on the other hand, was writing after centuries of Jewish dispersion at a time when some European Jews faced persecution. Accordingly, his treatment of the Hasmoneans, meant to inspire a persecuted people rather than to glorify a dynasty or praise the law, focused on what he saw as the lasting significance of the independence won by the Hasmonean brothers. Responding to the eventual collapse of the Hasmonean kingdom, Usque argued that the significance of their achievement, and of God's aid in their undertaking, lasted beyond the tangible existence of the Hasmonean state:

He who defended your Temple and city against Alexander the Macedonian clearly did not intend to rebuild it merely order to destroy it.

And He who dealt so ill with Heliodorus, Seleuchus' general, because he had come to attack the holy house, did not wish to strip it of its wealth and treasure.

And He who so cruelly killed Antiochus to avenge your righteous children and to ward off the threat which Antiochus had made and the determination with which he was marching against Jerusalem, clearly did not plan to injure your limbs or to lay waste the holy city in which you dwelt.

And He who subjected so many nations to Israel's yoke and service in this Second Temple did not desire to put you into the captivity of the Romans. Rather, He wished to preserve the Temple's structure, to prosper the city of Jerusalem, and to defend your children's lives from their enemies. But you with your evil deeds brought the Assyrians and the Babylonians to destroy your first Temple and now the Romans to level this second one.<sup>139</sup>

---

<sup>139</sup> Usque, 157-8.

Usque's argument was both an encouragement and a warning. He pointed to successive victories of Judeans against their oppressors as a reminder that the Jews of his day, like their Judean ancestors, were God's chosen. His conclusion, however, blamed the Judeans for their own demise, suggesting that their sins led to God's scorn. Although Usque did not cite the sins specifically, his remarks seemed to parallel the objections of the rabbis to the later Hasmoneans, who cited those rulers' lack of respect for the laws of the Torah during the turmoil that preceded their downfall.<sup>140</sup> Similarly, the author of II Maccabees had attributed the sufferings of Judeans to their impious Hellenization.<sup>141</sup> However, Usque reached beyond the criticisms of II Maccabees and the rabbinic texts to include an optimistic note, that the Hasmonean victory was proof that Jewish loyalty in his era would also merit divine favor, just like it had for the Hasmoneans.

Usque's writing might have shared some elements with Maccabees I and II and with rabbinic texts, but his overall product marked a significant departure from his predecessors. Like Abraham Ibn Daud in the twelfth century, Usque had knowledge of the Books of Maccabees I and II from Christian sources, but, unlike Ibn Daud, Usque actually used Maccabees I and II as a resource. In this regard, Usque even differed from some of his contemporaries, like sixteenth-century Italian-Jewish scholar Azariah de-Rossi, who referred to the Hasmoneans in his text, *The Light of the Eyes*. Like the rabbinic authors, de Rossi did not grant the Hasmoneans much

---

<sup>140</sup> See Kalmin, *Sage*, 64.

<sup>141</sup> II Macc. 6. 12-17 NRSV.

prestige, and only discussed the Hasmonean revolt in the context of Hanukkah.<sup>142</sup> Although he mentioned the Books of Maccabees I and II, it was only to express his surprise that they did not include the miracle of the oil in their account of the rededication of the Jerusalem temple.<sup>143</sup> He offered no real account of the Hasmonean revolt, and wrote that the accounts of the rededication in Maccabees I and II were nothing but stories of “God’s great act of salvation by which He delivered them from the enemy.”<sup>144</sup> As with Abraham Ibn Daud, there was no mention of the glorious battles the Hasmoneans won, no mention of Mattathias’s firm opposition to the corruption of Judean law, and no mention of the achievement of Judean independence. Abraham Ibn Daud and Azariah de Rossi were both writing in times when the widespread popularity of Christianity meant that they would likely have had some familiarity with Christian texts such as Maccabees I and II. Certainly this was true for de Rossi, who mentioned the account of Hanukkah in the Books of the Maccabees. And yet, both of their accounts of the Hasmoneans were brief chronologies, with none of the details or the glory the authors of Maccabees I and II included. In passing over the Hasmoneans in this fashion, and, in the case of de Rossi, in choosing to focus on the miracle of Hanukkah rather than the Hasmoneans themselves, neither author strayed far from the rabbinic versions of the Hasmonean story. In choosing to use Maccabees I and II, Usque’s account redirected the focus of the Hasmonean story back onto the Hasmoneans themselves.

Usque’s intense focus on the Hasmoneans in a vein similar to Maccabees I

---

<sup>142</sup> Azariah de’ Rossi, *The Light of the Eyes*, trans. Joanna Weinberg (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 636.

<sup>143</sup> De’ Rossi, 637.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

and II set him apart from both the rabbis and his European Jewish predecessors and contemporaries. His decision to focus on the Hasmoneans in a Maccabean fashion reflected his apparent goal in referring to them at all- to compare their situation to that faced by the New Christians in Portugal, and to inspire similar degrees of piety and willingness to sacrifice personal security in favor of loyalty to God and to Jewish law. However, Usque's reemphasis of the Maccabean version of the Hasmonean story did not mean that he echoed those authors' focus or message. Again, his particular context – the recent and immediate threats of persecution towards New Christians in Portugal- set him apart from the authors of Maccabees I and II, who wrote from within the relative security of the Hasmonean kingdom. While Usque discussed tradition and the law, and advocated loyalty as fiercely as the authors of Maccabees I and II, he added to their commentary an increased emphasis on the martyrs who preceded the Hasmoneans, perhaps because the calamities they faced and the actions they took were more relevant to the situation in sixteenth century Portugal than the Hasmonean revolt. Additionally, Usque had an appreciation for the lasting significance of God's deliverance of the Hasmoneans, which he saw as a reward for their piety and as proof that God would not scorn his chosen people, so long as they remained loyal. Thus, Usque departed from the rabbinic discussion of the Hasmoneans while simultaneously reshaping the message of Maccabees I and II.

## Chapter Four: *Wissenschaft* and the ‘Modern’ Jewish Historical Perspective

Following the writings of Medieval Jewish thinkers like Abraham Ibn Daud, and of sixteenth century figures like Azariah de Rossi and Samuel Usque, the next major juncture where the Hasmonean story was retold occurred in the nineteenth century. During the intervening years, the Enlightenment had transformed the historical field. In nineteenth-century Germany, one product of Enlightenment transformation was the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement. In his introduction to a collection of essays by nineteenth-century German *Wissenschaft* historian Heinrich Graetz, Jewish historian Ismar Schorsch wrote that *Wissenschaft* radicalized Jewish studies both through its emphasis on a historical understanding of Judaism and through its willingness to examine both sacred texts and long-accepted ideas with a critical eye, while also drawing on a wider range of sources.<sup>145</sup>

The results of this movement were quite disparate. Reform Judaism emerged as a liberal product of *Wissenschaft*. Its theorists chose to draw a message of liberation from the ‘calamities’ of the Jewish past –such as the loss of political independence in Judea and the subsequent exile of Jews from their homeland – seeing both as summons for Jews to enter the world around them. Additionally, Reformists spoke critically of the rabbis in power in the wake of the Roman conquests, saying

---

<sup>145</sup> Ismar Schorsch, “Introduction,” in Heinrich Graetz, *The Structure of Jewish History and Other Essays*, trans. Ismar Schorsch (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1975), 2-3.

that these leaders had failed to understand “the verdict of history,” and had tried to cling to the political relics of the former Jewish state.<sup>146</sup> In the eyes of Reformists, true emancipation required Jews to relinquish conceptions of a national Jewish identity, and saw assimilation as a key step in the process of becoming full-fledged citizens of Europe.

In Germany, however, a fierce opposition to the Reform movement emerged from the likes of *Wissenschaft* historian Heinrich Graetz, who saw Reform Judaism as a threat to Jewish existence. Graetz vowed to use the tools of *Wissenschaft* to fight “the Christianization of Judaism” and to invalidate the Reform Movement.<sup>147</sup> In his highly influential *History of the Jews*, Graetz discussed the Hasmoneans in great detail as a part of his anti-Reform argument. Other historians, seeking either to modify or respond to both the Reformists and to Graetz also drew upon the Hasmonean story as a resource. Especially prominent were Simon Dubnow, an Eastern-European Jewish historian of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and Salo Baron, a twentieth-century American Jewish historian. Dubnow’s work on the Hasmoneans built on Graetz’s theory, but reflected a less extreme view of Jewish nationalism than Graetz’s writing. Baron, removed both physically and temporally from Graetz, Dubnow, and *Wissenschaft* history, approached the Hasmoneans from what could be called a ‘modern historical perspective’; he analyzed the Hasmonean revolt and other momentous events in Jewish history contextually rather than collectively.

Despite significant differences in their discussions on the Hasmoneans,

---

<sup>146</sup> Schorsch, “Introduction,” in Graetz, *Structure*, 16.

<sup>147</sup> Schorsch, “Introduction,” in Graetz, *Structure*, 31-32.

Graetz, Dubnow, and Baron all demonstrate the defining characteristics of the retelling of the Hasmonean story by nineteenth-century and twentieth-century historians. In the wake of both the Enlightenment and the birth of Reason, God largely lost its place in the historical setting. This had a significant impact on Jewish intellectual writing on the Hasmonean revolt, since, in all of the periods covered previously, the ‘histories’ of the Hasmoneans came from decidedly religious perspectives. The historical accounts of the Hasmoneans by Graetz, Dubnow, and Baron differed from the accounts in Maccabees I and II because they portrayed the Hasmoneans as human actors defending Judean interests, while the authors of Maccabees I and II emphasized the relationship between the Hasmoneans and the divine in the defense of God’s chosen people and God’s laws. Graetz, Dubnow, and Baron were also different from their rabbinic predecessors, both in their willingness to discuss the Hasmoneans in detail and, more importantly, in their focus on political and social forces rather than the divine.

### ***Heinrich Graetz and Jewish Nationalism***

To counter the Reform Movement, Graetz offered a nationalist definition of Judaism, one that incorporated both religious and political dimensions.<sup>148</sup> As Ismar Schorsch wrote, “The Torah was the soul and the land of Israel the body of a unique political organism.”<sup>149</sup> Graetz’s ideology and his opposition to the Reform Movement colored his retelling of the Hasmonean revolt. Graetz drew a parallel between the Hasmonean era and the modern, based in part on the ties he made

---

<sup>148</sup> Schorsch, “Introduction,” in Graetz, *Structure*, 41.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

between the Hellenized Jews who ‘betrayed’ Jewish survival in antiquity and Reform Jews who similarly imperiled Judaism in the nineteenth century.<sup>150</sup> For Graetz, the Hasmoneans were important because they represented ‘national revival’; thus, Graetz used the Hasmoneans to make *national* recovery a modern ideal and condemn his contemporary ‘assimilationist’ Jews, whom he saw as the contemporary equivalent of the Hellenizers. Furthermore, Graetz applied Usque’s encouragements to his own theory: the suffering of Jews was not an excuse for acculturation, but instead a rallying cry.<sup>151</sup> In *History of the Jews*, Graetz’s connection between the nineteenth-century Reform Movement and the Hasmonean era imposed a nationalist perspective onto the Hasmonean story.

In Graetz’s *History of the Jews*, gentiles and Hellenists received scathing condemnation. For example, Graetz saw Antiochus Epiphanes as seeking to bring about Judaism’s destruction:

There now appeared on the scene a royal personage who seemed destined to increase the hopeless disorders in Judaea, and to bring greater misery upon the House of Israel than it had ever known before. This man was Antiochus Epiphanes, whom history has justly branded. He belonged to a class of men who have a double nature. He was a mixture of malice and noble impulses; he was cunning and calculating, yet capricious, petty in great enterprises, and great in trivialities.<sup>152</sup>

Graetz’s portrayal of Antiochus evoked the tone of Maccabees I and II, whose authors portrayed gentiles – including Antiochus Epiphanes – as cruel, scheming, and treacherous. Throughout his narrative of the struggle, Graetz emphasized

---

<sup>150</sup> Schorsch, “Introduction,” in Graetz, *Structure*, 52.

<sup>151</sup> Schorsch, “Introduction,” in Graetz, *Structure*, 57.

<sup>152</sup> Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews*, ed. and trans. Bella Löwy, vol. 1, *From the Earliest Period to the Death of Simon the Maccabee (135 B.C.E)*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1891), 442.

Antiochus's antagonism not just towards Jews, but towards Judaism itself. His banning of Judean practices, for example, was intended to make Jews indistinguishable from the "heathen."<sup>153</sup> Ultimately, he wrote about how Antiochus resolved to destroy Judaism out of frustration for their continued resistance to his Hellenization policy.<sup>154</sup> In using Antiochus as a 'model gentile', Graetz effectively pitted Judaism –and, by extension, Jews – against the outside world. He also demonstrated how Jews could not trust their security to gentile political bodies. Perhaps this belief lay behind his criticism of the Hasmonean alliance with Rome, which he described as an act "of doubtful wisdom."<sup>155</sup> It was no accident that Graetz discussed Antiochus and Rome in the same section. He saw them as the two forces that posed the most serious threats to Judaism in this period, a period that ended with Rome's conquest of Jerusalem. Graetz's treatment of non-Jews was clearly separatist, encouraging Jewish cultural nationalism as a means of protecting Judaism.

While general content of Graetz's attacks on non-Jews did not differ from that in Maccabees I and II, the focus changed as a result of Graetz's separatist perspective. The authors of Maccabees I and II were conflicted on how to judge the actions of oppressors like Antiochus. I Maccabees certainly took a more 'earthly' perspective generally, pitting the struggle largely as one between the Hasmoneans and their oppressors, but II Maccabees portrayed Antiochus as God's punishment for Judean Hellenization. Focused on advocating a nation of Jews, one based on cultural ties, Graetz ignored the religious explanation altogether, and amplified the pro-Hasmonean

---

<sup>153</sup> Graetz, *History*, 455.

<sup>154</sup> Graetz, *History*, 464.

<sup>155</sup> Graetz, *History*, 485.

voice of I Maccabees. Furthermore, because Graetz drew a parallel between the nineteenth century and the Hasmonean era, his portrayal of Antiochus and other non-Jews seemed to reflect Graetz's suspicion of modern gentile political and social institutions, which, when coupled with the absence of a divine or religious explanation for the Hasmonean revolt, converted the Hasmonean story into a model for separatist Jewish nationalism.

For all his criticism of foreign powers, Graetz heaped even greater attacks on Hellenizers within the Judean community. Though focused on the Hellenizers, these attacks were, presumably, aimed at the Reform Jews of his day. In Graetz's opinion, Jason, the high priest who founded a gymnasium in Jerusalem and tried to turn the city into a Greek cult, and the Hellenists hoped to win Greek "citizenship" for Judeans, thinking that it might have helped prevent further persecution against them. However, Graetz wrote, it became clear that Judaism and Greek culture were completely incompatible.<sup>156</sup> For example, Graetz pointed out, the customary nudity during athletic competitions not only caused Judeans to feel shame for appearing naked in front of the Temple, but also made Judean men immediately identifiable, because of their practice of circumcision.<sup>157</sup> Thus, although Graetz presented a potential justification for Jason's actions, he immediately rejected it by demonstrating their incompatibility with Judean religious custom and their sheer impracticality.

Graetz's treatment of Hellenization also took on a somewhat patriotic tone, as evidenced by his treatment of the high priest Menelaus. Graetz cast Menelaus, who

---

<sup>156</sup> Graetz, *History*, 445.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.* **Note:** The issue of nudity in front of the Jerusalem Temple is not mentioned in Maccabees I and II.

replaced Jason as high priest by promising Antiochus sums of money so large that he ultimately was forced to use the treasures of the temple to pay his debt, as an enemy of Judaism, and made him responsible for much of the hardship that Judeans faced at the hands of Antiochus. He wrote that Menelaus maligned Judaism and said that the laws of Moses were full of hatred.<sup>158</sup> The result of Menelaus's slander, according to Graetz, was that Antiochus became increasingly distrustful of Judeans.<sup>159</sup>

Eventually, according to Graetz, Menelaus concluded that the laws and customs of Judaism had to be abolished, not only to reduce the Judeans to submit to his authority, but also to demonstrate the impotence of their God.<sup>160</sup> In this damning portrayal, Graetz demonstrated how Jewish assimilation could lead to a complete loss of Jewish identity, and a total betrayal of heritage. It was this loss and betrayal that Graetz feared most about the Reform movement, and his criticism of gentiles and Hellenists from antiquity reflected his own modern concerns.

Graetz also used the Hasmonean brothers to support his call for a resurgence of Jewish nationalism. He began with a retelling of how Mattathias, the father of the Hasmonean brothers, began the Hasmonean revolt. According to the author of I Maccabees, when officers of the king came to Modein to enforce the king's commanded pagan sacrifices, they asked Mattathias, as a community leader, to set a good example and conduct an unlawful pagan sacrifice. Mattathias publicly refused to comply, and then killed both the officer and a Judean who came forward to conduct

---

<sup>158</sup> Graetz, *History*, 449-50.

<sup>159</sup> Graetz, *History*, 450.

<sup>160</sup> Graetz, *History*, 454-455.

the sacrifice before leading his supporters into the wilderness<sup>161</sup> Graetz, on the other hand, endowed Mattathias with active agency in beginning the revolt, telling his readers that Mattathias and his sons *intentionally* went into Modein to confront unlawful sacrifices.<sup>162</sup> Graetz was firm in his attribution of proactive leadership to the Hasmoneans. The only mentions of God in connection with the beginning of the revolt occurred when a dying Mattathias instructed his sons “to sacrifice their lives for the Covenant of their forefathers, and to fight God’s battle,” and when Graetz, describing Judas, wrote that the warrior prayed to God for aid before taking action.<sup>163</sup> Graetz’s Hasmoneans were not messianic saviors; they are the spirited leaders of a people and defenders of a culture. Graetz noted that even “the more worldly-minded men among the Judeans” – perhaps those who had once leaned towards assimilation – saw the Hasmoneans as their only hope in the face of persecution.<sup>164</sup> His focus on the superiority of Judas’s military strategy further diminished any possibility for granting credit to God for their success. In his description of the battle at Emmaus, Graetz argued that the Judean army was “greater in number than the single division of Syrian troops, and fought with great enthusiasm.”<sup>165</sup> The victory was entirely that of the Hasmoneans and their followers, and, for Graetz, it served to inspire the Judeans with confidence in their own strength.<sup>166</sup> While Graetz’s portrayal of the Hasmoneans as proactive and militarily proficient reflected a diminished role for divine agency, it was, more importantly, another element of Graetz’s nationalist

---

<sup>161</sup> I Macc. 2. 19-28 NRSV.

<sup>162</sup> Graetz, *History*, 459.

<sup>163</sup> Graetz, *History*, 461.

<sup>164</sup> Graetz, *History*, 464.

<sup>165</sup> Graetz, *History*, 468.

<sup>166</sup> Graetz, *History*, 469.

perspective. The Hasmoneans served as a model for nationalist resistance because they actively resisted assimilation, both by fighting against Jewish assimilation and by physically removing themselves from a corrupted community.

Graetz's description of the rededication of the Jerusalem Temple further articulated his impression of the Hasmoneans. Just as previously, his words echoed the themes of Maccabees I and II, but in a more militant tone that focused on the Hasmonean defeat of assimilation:

The consecration of the Temple not only denoted the victory of the weak over the strong, the faithful over the sinner, but also, and especially, the victory of Judaism over Hellenic paganism, of the God of Israel over idols. People from every town of Judaea took part in the festival, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem lit bright lamps in front of their houses as a symbol of the Law, called "Light by the poets...From this custom the days derived their name of "Feast of Lights."<sup>167</sup>

Maccabees I and II described Hanukkah as a celebration of the Law, but to consider it as a "victory celebration" emphasized the military triumph of the Hasmonean brothers. Furthermore, Graetz's portrayal of Hanukkah underscored the polarization of loyal Judeans and Hellenized, pagan Judeans. Thus, Graetz presented Hanukkah to his nineteenth-century audience as a celebration of nationalist triumph.

Graetz's further portrayal of the Hasmonean accomplishments was highly aggrandizing. Graetz wrote that during the temporary interlude of peace following the death of Antiochus Epiphanes, "the warrior was able to lay aside his arms, the peasant to till his fields, and the scribe to devote himself to the study and the expounding of the Law; the bleeding wounds of the commonwealth began at length to

---

<sup>167</sup> Graetz, *History*, 472-473.

close and to heal.”<sup>168</sup> The Judeans had not yet won total independence, but Graetz anticipated that achievement with these remarks, tying the continuing success of the Hasmoneans to Judean liberty, with a mind toward statehood. Graetz argued that the Hasmoneans deemed political independence as a necessary step to secure religious freedom.<sup>169</sup> He praised Judas’s successors, Simon and Jonathan, for shrewdly fortifying their territory during times of peace, and portrayed Jonathan’s political opportunism when describing Jonathan’s ability to navigate between the rival Seleucid leaders, Demetrius and Alexander, in such a skillful manner as to enhance Judean political power.<sup>170</sup> Graetz wrote that Jonathan “had given his people power and importance.”<sup>171</sup> Graetz highlighted the Hasmonean creation of a Judean state not for its own sake, but rather to demonstrate what he saw as the ultimate virtue of the Hasmoneans, their protection of Judean identity. The Hasmonean dedication to the protection of Judean heritage served as a model for nineteenth-century opposition to assimilationist reform.

Graetz’s ideology and his opposition to Reform Judaism dominated his portrayal of the Hasmonean era, dictating his scathing depictions of non-Judeans and Judean Hellenizers as well as his grandiose portrait of Mattathias and his sons. Within the context of Judaism, identity, heritage, law, and piety are often intertwined; nonetheless, by imposing nationalism –a concept that did not exist in the Hasmonean era – onto the revolt, Graetz emphasized the issues of identity and heritage over law and piety. Additionally, his account reflected a post-Enlightenment attitude toward

---

<sup>168</sup> Graetz, *History*, 481.

<sup>169</sup> Graetz, *History*, 489.

<sup>170</sup> Graetz, *History*, 492-3.

<sup>171</sup> Graetz, *History*, 501.

the divine, reducing the role of God in the struggle, enhancing human contributions, thereby making the Hasmonean accomplishments more applicable to his nineteenth century context. In both regards, Graetz left previous accounts of the Hasmonean revolt behind – even the dynastic account of I Maccabees – and presented an image of the Hasmoneans suited to the nineteenth-century context.

### ***Simon Dubnow: From Isolationism to Autonomism***

Writing at the turn of the twentieth century, Eastern European Jewish historian Simon Dubnow published an essay entitled “Autonomism, the Basis of the National Program,” in which he reflected on the intellectual course of nineteenth-century Jewish culture. He wrote that the century was “ ‘the epoch of the antithesis,’ which had declared war upon the old thesis known as ‘isolation.’ ”<sup>172</sup> Dubnow was referring to the clash between traditional and Reform Judaism. The Reformists offered the antithesis to traditional Jewish isolationism by advocating assimilation on the heels of the Enlightenment, and Revolutionary calls for freedom.<sup>173</sup> However, as Dubnow noted, assimilation did little to better the existence of Judaism in nineteenth-century Europe, as revealed by the anti-Semitism of the late nineteenth century.<sup>174</sup> Like Graetz, Dubnow condemned assimilation, on the charge that it left Jews “alienated from our own people, without being able to become integrated into the nations around

---

<sup>172</sup> Simon Dubnow, “Autonomism, The Basis of the National Program,” in *Nationalism and History: Essays on Old and New Judaism by Simon Dubnow*, ed. Koppel S. Pinson (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1958), 132.

<sup>173</sup> Dubnow, “Autonomism,” 132-134.

<sup>174</sup> Dubnow, “Autonomism,” 134.

us.”<sup>175</sup> He also noted that although the theory of isolation was extreme, it endowed Jews with a much stronger sense of honor.<sup>176</sup> Dubnow called for a synthesis of thesis and antithesis, of isolation and assimilation, in a new theory, which he called “autonomism.”<sup>177</sup>

Dubnow and Graetz had much in common. Dubnow’s theory of autonomism was a response to what he saw as the dangers of reformist assimilation. In an essay entitled “Emphases in Jewish History,” twentieth-century Jewish historian Salo Baron wrote about Graetz and Dubnow’s work as byproducts of *Wissenschaft* history, which, in Baron’s view, saw “in Jewish history the gradual progression of the Jewish religious or national spirit.”<sup>178</sup> Baron noted that Graetz, who was often accused of over-emphasizing the biographies of rabbis and the story of anti-Jewish persecutions, tried to defend himself by arguing that these were mere instances in the broader scope of Jewish national history.<sup>179</sup> However, according to Baron, Graetz was unable to avoid one-sidedness in his own writing.<sup>180</sup> In considering Graetz’s *History of the Jews*, it is not difficult to see what Baron meant. Graetz’s idea of Jewish nationalism was based almost entirely on his portrayal of gentiles as aggressors, Hellenists as traitors, and the Hasmoneans as heroic defenders of a nationalist identity that was universally opposed to the meddling of the outside world. Turning to Dubnow, Baron wrote that, like Graetz, Dubnow accepted the idea of internal forces, and articulated

---

<sup>175</sup> Dubnow, “Autonomism,” 134.

<sup>176</sup> Dubnow, “Autonomism,” 135.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Salo W. Baron, “Emphases in Jewish History”, in *History and Jewish Historians: Essays and Addresses By Salo W. Baron*, comp. Arthur Hertzberg and Leon A. Feldman (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964), 76.

<sup>179</sup> Baron, “Emphases,” 76.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

the idea of “the autonomous national will” to demonstrate the internal spirit that shaped Jewish history. Dubnow’s “autonomism” borrowed from Graetz in its determination to protect Judaism against assimilation, but, unlike Graetz, Dubnow was motivated by the desire to protect the Jewish cultural rights, and not by a conservative religious ideology.<sup>181</sup> Accordingly, Dubnow’s retelling of the Hasmonean story was less militant than Graetz’s, and less focused on a defense of traditional religion than on cultural preservation.

In an essay comparing Graetz and Dubnow, American Jewish historian Robert M. Seltzer described the evolution of Dubnow’s nationalism as borrowing both from Graetz and from Russian humanism.<sup>182</sup> According to Seltzer, Dubnow “gradually accepted the naturalness and moral worth of nationalism as long as it was not militaristic or chauvinistic.”<sup>183</sup> In other words, Dubnow accepted a Jewish nationalism that sought to preserve Jewish cultural autonomy, but did not believe in a movement that sought to elevate Judaism above all other cultures and required Jews to isolate themselves completely. For this reason, Seltzer wrote, Dubnow rejected the Zionist approach –which embodied a Jewish nationalism centered around a return to the homeland – and even a less literal approach, which Seltzer described as a “spiritual turn eastward.”<sup>184</sup> Dubnow’s conception of nationalism was aimed at encouraging and protecting the rights of Jews as citizens of Europe, and while he believed that Jews should resist assimilation, he also accepted the inevitability of

---

<sup>181</sup> Baron, “Emphases,” 77.

<sup>182</sup> Robert M. Seltzer, “From Graetz to Dubnow,” in *The Legacy of Jewish Migration*, ed. David Berger. (New York: Brooklyn College Press (Distributed by Columbia University Press), 1983), 53.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Seltzer, 54.

some acculturation into European societies.<sup>185</sup> In this regard, Dubnow's nationalism was less forceful than Graetz's: it began from the same premise, but Dubnow's goals were focused on cultural rights rather than militant self-preservation. Accordingly, his retelling of the Hasmonean revolt, while praising the Hasmoneans for their defense of Judaism, did not offer a militant perspective.

Dubnow echoed Graetz's depiction of the Hasmoneans as heroic defenders of a nation. He began the chapter by describing the family as "well known for its great piety and ardent patriotism," projecting a modern concept into the Hasmonean past.<sup>186</sup> Describing the scene in Modein when Syrian officials arrived to force Judeans to adopt paganism, Dubnow wrote that those who submitted lacked "either faith or courage", but that others – such as the Hasmoneans – remained loyal.<sup>187</sup> The only discernible difference between Graetz and Dubnow in this section is that Dubnow's version of the story is more consistent with the scriptural versions of Maccabees I and II in that Mattathias only voiced his rebellion when approached by the Syrians. Graetz's version – that Mattathias intentionally appeared to confront the Syrian officials – gave the Hasmoneans more agency than Dubnow or the authors of Maccabees I and II. But this difference was minor, because Dubnow was consistent with Graetz on the union of piety and patriotism in the Hasmonean rebellion.

Dubnow articulated the same opinion as Graetz on the significance of Judas's initial victories: they inspired confidence and renewed courage in the hearts of

---

<sup>185</sup> Dubnow, 55.

<sup>186</sup> Simon Dubnow, *An Outline of Jewish History*, vol. 2, *The Maccabean and Talmudic Eras* (New York: Max N. Maisel, 1929), 33.

<sup>187</sup> Dubnow, *Outline*, 33.

Judeans, allowing the revolt to encompass all of Judea.<sup>188</sup> His account did differ in one important area, however. In his version of the Hanukkah story, Dubnow chose to include the legend of the miracle of the oil as his explanation for the customary lighting of candles in commemoration of the Hanukkah festival.<sup>189</sup> While Dubnow only offered the Hanukkah miracle as a ‘story,’ he did not offer any practical or worldly explanation like Graetz did. Dubnow’s approach, while largely the same as Graetz’s in tone, seemed determined to incorporate – or, at least, accommodate – a religious historical perspective. Dubnow’s account of Hanukkah demonstrated his opposition to Graetz’s militant Jewish nationalism by not treating Hanukkah as a victory celebration. With the militancy removed, Hanukkah became, according to Dubnow’s rendition, an expression and celebration of cultural autonomy.

An important feature of Dubnow’s work was his cautionary approach towards the history of the Hasmonean dynasty after the death of the last of Judas’s brothers, Simon. Initially, Dubnow seemed hesitant to criticize the Hasmonean rulers directly. In the case of Simon’s successor, John Hyrcanus, Dubnow blamed the Pharisees for creating political strife within the Hasmonean state when they insisted that Hyrcanus was not qualified to be high priest.<sup>190</sup> Dubnow was also critical of pseudo-religious advocates for causing unnecessary strife. For example, he included the legend of the final words of king Alexander Jannai, whom he described as saying to his wife, Salome Alexandra, “Fear neither the Pharisees nor the Sadducees...fear only the

---

<sup>188</sup> Dubnow, *Outline*, 36.

<sup>189</sup> Dubnow, *Outline*, 39-40.

<sup>190</sup> Dubnow, *Outline*, 65.

‘painted ones’ who are wicked behind their pretended righteousness.”<sup>191</sup> While Dubnow never defined “the painted ones” specifically, Jannai’s remark seemed to have been aimed at those who used religious justification for their opposition to the king in order to disguise purely political motives. Dubnow also criticized the advisors of King Judas Aristobulus –for whom Dubnow had few kind words – describing their scheme to convince Aristobulus that his brother Antigonus could not be trusted, which ultimately caused Antigonus to be put to death.<sup>192</sup>

Ultimately, Dubnow could not avoid criticizing the dynasty directly, as it grew worse with each successive ruler. For instance, although he began his section on Alexander Jannai with an apology for the ruler’s shortcomings – explaining that, sent away to Galilee as a child, Jannai had received good military training but no civil or spiritual education – Dubnow wrote, “the new king was more Greek than Hebrew in his tastes and inclinations; he had only one aim in life which was to extend the power of Judea over the whole of Palestine.”<sup>193</sup> As a result, Jannai was out of touch with the needs of his people, ignoring the opposition of the Judean people to continued war and their lack of approval for his new campaigns in Palestine.<sup>194</sup> Dubnow’s description of Jannai suggested that he felt that the later Hasmonean kings had come to embody some of the Hellenistic values that their predecessors had fought against. Furthermore, Dubnow pointed out that Jannai alienated the Pharisees through his friendship with the more aristocratic Sadducees, and because, at a religious ceremony, Jannai ignored a popular style of libation practiced by the

---

<sup>191</sup> Dubnow, *Outline*, 70.

<sup>192</sup> Dubnow, *Outline*, 66-67.

<sup>193</sup> Dubnow, *Outline*, 68.

<sup>194</sup> Dubnow, *Outline*, 69.

Pharisees in favor of the Sadducees' method.<sup>195</sup> When a mass of the assembled citizens responded in indignant protest, the king used foreign mercenaries to disperse them, and scores of Judeans were killed in the process.<sup>196</sup> Dubnow used the lethal conflict between Jannai and the Judean populace to show that the king was no longer serving the interests of his people. With such criticisms, Dubnow cast a shadow on the glory of the Hasmonean dynasty he had praised so vigorously in its early stages, the end result being a separation between the values Judas and his brothers fought for and the values of the state they had created.

Dubnow's discussion of the later Hasmonean rulers softened and redirected Graetz's fierce nationalism. Where Graetz focused heavily on the militant aspect of the Hasmonean defense of traditional Judean identity and championed the Hasmonean brothers' achievements in creating a politically independent Judean state, Dubnow instead interpreted the Hasmonean revolt as an expression of the right to have cultural autonomy. It is worth noting that, like Dubnow, Graetz had tried to establish what Baron would call "a middle ground between Orthodoxy and Reform."<sup>197</sup> To that end, Graetz's rendition of the Hasmonean brothers seemed to conclude that the religiously inclined body politic was the solution. However, Graetz's argument was part of his to Reform theory, using the Hasmonean state as a model for a separatist Jewish identity in nineteenth-century Europe. Dubnow, despite sharing much of Graetz's opposition to assimilation, saw the nation of the Jews as an important part of Europe who deserved, like all minority national groups, the

---

<sup>195</sup> Dubnow, *Outline*, 69.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> Salo W. Baron, "Heinrich (Hirsch) Graetz, 1817-1891," in *History and Jewish Historians*, 265.

opportunity to celebrate their own cultural practices.<sup>198</sup> In that vein, Dubnow emphasized cultural rights in his account of the Hasmonean story.

### ***Salo W. Baron: The Diaspora Perspective***

In the foreword to their collection of Salo Baron's essays, two of his students, Professor Leon Feldman and Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, attempted to describe Baron's historical theory. While they declared such a task to be largely impossible, they asserted that an essential component of Baron's outlook was his belief that Jewish history had not happened in isolation, that the Jews were always part of a larger world.<sup>199</sup> Addressing the work of Baron's predecessors, they wrote, "in some versions of Jewish history this world has been imagined as either non-existent, in any important sense, or as the unchanging enemy."<sup>200</sup> According to Feldman and Hertzberg, Baron believed that Jewish history could only be understood as a part of general human history, and, though Baron was of course aware of the tragic aspects of Jewish history, he sought to call attention to the periods of accord between Jews and gentiles.<sup>201</sup> This would seem to place Baron in direct confrontation with Graetz and Dubnow, who advocated a brand of nationalism that pitted Jews against outsiders. Baron was not, however, a Reformist. In an essay entitled *Who is a Jew?* Baron stated that the "extreme Reform" movement of the late nineteenth century was ineffectual because it seemed an illusion to the millions of Jews living in East-Central

---

<sup>198</sup> Seltzer, 55.

<sup>199</sup> Arthur Hertzberg and Leon A. Feldman, "Foreword," in *History and Jewish Historians*, viii.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Hertzberg and Feldman, ix.

Europe who spoke Yiddish and lived according to their own distinct culture.<sup>202</sup>

Baron's historical interest was to explore how Jews formed a sense of community without a geographical base; he argued that both Judea and Jewish communities outside the homeland were important to Jewish history, without granting importance to one or the other.<sup>203</sup> According to Hertzberg and Feldman, Baron viewed identity as historical rather than geographic.<sup>204</sup> Baron's views were reflected in his perspective on the Hasmonean Revolt. While he seemed to agree with Graetz and Dubnow on the general cause of the revolt and on its immediate impacts, Baron did not attempt to apply the Hasmonean revolt to a modern Jewish context.

In the first edition of his *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, Baron downplayed the agency of both God and Mattathias in starting the revolt, turning instead to the clash between the Hellenistic and Judean cultures that, in his view, made the conflict inevitable.<sup>205</sup> Additionally, Baron described the violent Hasmonean Revolt as the Judean solution, and pointed out that the Egyptian Jews had taken a non-violent approach.<sup>206</sup> By deeming the Hasmonean revolt as 'inevitable,' Baron placed the impetus behind the revolt in the hands of intangible social and cultural forces, which lessened the credit given to the Hasmoneans for their leadership. His observation that the Hasmonean Revolt was not the only method for resolving cultural tensions between Jews and non-Jews underscored Baron's belief that the Hasmonean revolt should only be considered within its specific context by

---

<sup>202</sup> Salo W. Baron, "Who is a Jew?," in *History and Jewish Historians*, 14.

<sup>203</sup> Hertzberg and Feldman, x.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), 1: 129

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

implying that something about the situation in Judea rendered violence necessary.

Baron's choice of title for this section, "Expansion of Judaism," reflected the contrast between him and historians like Graetz or Dubnow, because it did not pay tribute to the Hasmoneans. Baron was, in fact, generally pessimistic about the Hasmoneans, writing that their rule, although it enhanced the vitality of the Judean community and was "outwardly impressive," was short lived and unpopular.<sup>207</sup> He offered no real praise of the Hasmonean policy of expansion, pointing out that the rulers saw the need to protect their largely defenseless populace from Syrian retribution.<sup>208</sup> Baron's early judgments of the Hasmoneans were matter-of-fact, a characteristic that downplayed both the military glory Graetz had highlighted and the defense of cultural autonomy Dubnow had emphasized.

While Baron credited the revolt for its energy, he simultaneously warned against applying their situation to the modern context. He observed how the military exploits of the early Hasmoneans invigorated Jews in Palestine and around the world, and gave them a new sense of self-assertion.<sup>209</sup> Furthermore, he argued that, despite the Palestinian Jewish community being smaller than those of the Diaspora, it was the Jews in Palestine who "made Jewish history."<sup>210</sup> While noting that the analogies between the Hasmonean period and the present day had inspired other scholars – presumably he was referring to figures like Graetz and Dubnow – Baron questioned the validity of such comparisons.<sup>211</sup> He pointed out the concentration of Jews in two

---

<sup>207</sup> Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 1: 129.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid*, 1: 130.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid*, 1: 152.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid*, 1: 152-3.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid*, 1: 152.

regions –the eastern Mediterranean and modern-day Palestine – during the Hasmonean era as a significant difference from the present, where Jews were spread across continents. In Baron’s view, the “overemphasis of the power of the Jewish religion” relied on vigor of the Hasmoneans in Judea.<sup>212</sup> Given that Baron believed that the Hasmonean revolt was only relevant within its historical context, the fact that the Hasmonean structure no longer existed in the twentieth century suggested that Jews could not continue to justify the power of the Jewish religion, or a militant Jewish nationalism, based on the Hasmonean Revolt.

Baron’s views were most evident in his discussion of the social situation immediately preceding and following the Hasmonean Revolt. Perhaps in response to the nationalist argument articulated by Graetz, Baron explained that it made sense for nationalist religious conflicts to dominate foreign policy in the Hasmonean era, because the conquests of Alexander the Great triggered a whirlwind synthesis of eastern and western culture, which led to an abandonment of Jewish heritage.<sup>213</sup> Baron saw the Hasmonean Revolt as a resistance against the growing force of Hellenization in Judea. He blamed Antiochus Epiphanes for sparking the revolt because the king’s determination to accelerate the pace of Hellenization in his kingdom led to what Baron considered impatient and imprudent action.<sup>214</sup> Baron’s view was that Antiochus’s actions triggered a “patriotic” opposition, but that, once the threat of Antiochus’s measures had been removed, it became clear that Judeans had, in fact absorbed a great deal of Hellenistic culture, which contributed to the

---

<sup>212</sup> Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 1: 152.

<sup>213</sup> Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 1: 161.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid*, 1: 162.

internal strife of the later Hasmonean period.<sup>215</sup> Baron's focus on context in his retelling of the Hasmonean Revolt stripped the Hasmoneans of much of their glory. While Baron obviously could not remove them from the story entirely, for obvious reasons, he largely eliminated their lasting symbolic importance –nationalist or otherwise – by describing the conflict as one between cultures, a clash between a king and a dissident people.

Baron also weighed in on the Hanukkah festival, and the evidence it provided about the Hasmonean period. Baron saw the establishment of the Hanukkah celebration as evidence that the Palestinian Jewish community exercised hegemonic control over religious matters, and especially, over the religious calendar.<sup>216</sup> Earlier in his work, Baron had written that, due to the vast size of the Diaspora population in Egypt, despite the conquests of the Hasmonean revolts, the general balance of power within world Judaism shifted back to the Diaspora relatively quickly following the conflict.<sup>217</sup> This fact made it all the more impressive that the Hasmoneans were able to command that all Jews celebrate Hanukkah. However, Baron also pointed out that the Hanukkah celebration quickly took on a meaning that seemed quite different from what its creators intended as, over time, the focus of the festival shifted towards the miracle of the oil and away from the Hasmonean rededication. In his essay “Newer Emphases in Jewish History” Baron argued that stories of religious martyrdom were so inspiring that the martyrs mentioned in II Maccabees –Eleazar, Hannah, and Hannah's seven sons – eventually achieved a greater heroic status than the

---

<sup>215</sup> Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 1: 162.

<sup>216</sup> Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 1: 156.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid*, 1: 133.

Hasmonean brothers. As a result, according to Baron, the Hasmonean achievements originally captured in the Hanukkah festival receded into the background, and Hanukkah lost its meaning as a celebration of national liberation which resulted in a greater emphasis on the story of the miracle of the oil.<sup>218</sup> In the updated edition of *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, published after World War II, Baron wrote more about the Hasmoneans. He asserted that the revolt inspired such an exaltation of religious sacrifice that Judas and his brothers were largely forgotten, although Mattathias –who was famous for his piety rather than military strength – was remembered.<sup>219</sup> Furthermore, since later generations Jews overlooked the secular factors behind the revolt, it became an example of “intrinsically rewarding religious martyrdom.”<sup>220</sup> Baron’s different discussions of Hanukkah alternately acknowledge and dismissed the Hasmonean influence. He saw their ability to establish the Hanukkah festival’s celebration outside their own community as a testament to their strength, but viewed the reshaping of the Hanukkah story over time as evidence of their declining relevance.

Baron’s contextual approach to understanding Jewish history had profound implications for his retelling of the Hasmonean Revolt. Most significantly, Baron argued against the notion that the Revolt could be applied to his own era, thereby directly countering the opinions of Graetz and Dubnow. Additionally, Baron’s matter-of-fact analysis of the causes, events, and results of the Hasmonean Revolt

---

<sup>218</sup> Baron, “Newer Emphases in Jewish History,” in *History and Jewish Historians*, 94.

<sup>219</sup> Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, enl. and rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 1: 230-231.

<sup>220</sup> Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1: 231.

meant that he did not apply a modern cultural or political context to his interpretation of the Hasmonean story. In this regard, Baron embodied a truly modern historical ideal in his approach to the Jewish past. However, his ‘modern historical perspective’ meant that Baron viewed the context of the Hasmonean Revolt through a scientific and secular lens, emphasizing ‘cultural tensions’ rather than religious zeal. As a result, his account elaborated on the contributions of the Hasmoneans without sensationalizing them or extracting some lasting symbolic importance. For Baron, the revolt was a moment in history, one that had profound implications for its time, but had questionable relevance to the modern Jewish context.

### ***Conclusion***

The writings of Graetz, Dubnow, and Baron on the Hasmonean Revolt reflected a dramatic shift from their various predecessors’ approaches to discussing the Hasmoneans. Graetz and Dubnow sought to connect the Hasmonean revolt to what they viewed as a similar crisis: the rise of Reform Judaism and the threat of Jewish assimilation – and, in doing so, produced accounts of the Hasmonean Revolt that were shaped by their own political and cultural concepts like nationalism and autonomy. Baron avoided this approach by insisting that the Hasmonean Revolt could only be understood within its context, but, as a modern historian, he viewed the context through a scientific and secular lens, thereby emphasizing the cultural tensions behind the Hasmonean Revolt. All three historians, but Baron especially, also reflected the impact of the Enlightenment on the study of Jewish history. With the rise of reason and secular intellectual discourse, God could no longer have a physical presence in historical writing, existing instead as an abstract concept. And

although Baron's modern historical perspective argued against applying the Hasmonean story to modern contexts, Graetz and Dubnow demonstrated the extent to which the Hasmoneans could be used to energize modern Jewish cultural and political movements.

## Conclusion: Moving Onward With The Hasmonean Story

The story of the Hasmoneans survived even beyond the historical treatments of Graetz, Dubnow, and Baron. The Zionist Movement, founded by Theodor Herzl in the late nineteenth century, which combined Jewish nationalist energy with a movement for a Jewish state in Palestine, used the Hasmoneans as symbols of Jewish strength. Early Zionist writers, including Herzl and his fellow Zionist leader Max Nordau, sought to promote a newer, stronger Jewish people. In his 1902 utopia novel, *Old New Land*, Herzl outlined his vision for a physically fit Jewish community, contrasting his “New Society” with past generations of “Jewish children”:

Nothing on earth is perfect, not even our New Society. We have no state, like the Europeans of your time. We are merely a society of citizens seeking to enjoy life through work and culture. We content ourselves with making our younger people physically fit. We develop their bodies as well as their minds... We took tried and tested things, and tested them all over again. Jewish children used to be pale, weak, timid. Now look at them! The explanation of this miracle is the simplest in the world. We took our children out of damp cellars and hovels, and brought them into the sunlight. Plants cannot thrive without sun. No more can human beings. Plants can be saved by transplantation into congenial soil. Human beings as well. That is how it happened!<sup>221</sup>

Herzl’s vision was of a Jewish society that left behind a bleak and oppressed past. His reference to “damp cellars and hovels” symbolized what he saw as the decrepit state of some Jewish communities in his age, which Zionists saw as a component of a defeatist Jewish outlook that resulted from centuries of persecution and oppression. Herzl called for a ‘transplanting’ to “congenial soil” – likely a reference to the Jewish

---

<sup>221</sup> Theodor Herzl, *Old New Land*, trans. Lotta Levensohn (New York: M. Wiener, 1997), 79-80.

homeland in Palestine – as a solution that would save Jews and make them stronger. He used physical strength to distinguish between old and new Jews.

Max Nordau connected the call for a stronger Jewish people to heroes of the Jewish past. In a speech given in 1903 to a Zionist gymnastic club, Nordau discussed what he called the *Muskeljudentum*, the “Jewry of muscle”:

Two years ago...I said: ‘We must think again of creating a Jewry of muscle.’ Again! For history is our witness, that such once existed, but for long, all too long, we have engaged in the mortification of our flesh. I am expressing myself imprecisely. It was others who practiced mortification on our flesh, and with the greatest success, evidenced by the hundreds of thousands of Jewish corpses in the ghettos, church squares, and highways of medieval Europe. We ourselves would happily have renounced this ‘virtue.’ We would have rather cared for bodes than allowed them to be destroyed...But now, force no longer constrains us, we are given space for our bodies to live again. Let us take up our oldest traditions; let us once more become deep-chested, tightly muscled, courageous men.<sup>222</sup>

In this speech, Nordau appealed to the memory of Simon Bar Kochba, the leader of the ultimately unsuccessful Judean revolt against the Romans in the second century C.E. Nordau stated “Bar Kochba was the last embodiment in world history of a battle-hardened and bellicose Jewry.”<sup>223</sup> Although Nordau did not refer to the Hasmoneans directly, the spirit of his message, the praising of a militant and muscular Jewish people, could easily have included the Hasmonean fighters as well.

Like Graetz and Dubnow had before them, the Zionists made links between their era and the Hasmonean period, focusing on instances of European anti-Semitism, such as the pogroms that devastated Jewish communities in Eastern

---

<sup>222</sup> Max Nordau, “Muskeljudentum,” in Nordau, *Zionistische Schriften*, 379-381, quoted in Michael Stanislawski, *Zionism and the Fin de Siècle, Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 92-93.

<sup>223</sup> Nordau, “Muskeljudentum,” quoted in Stanislawski, 92.

Europe. In 1903, for instance, Ukrainian-born Jewish poet Chaim Nahman Bialik wrote a poem entitled “In The City of Slaughter,” – also translated as “City of the Killings” – a response to the Kishinev pogrom of that year.<sup>224</sup> Although Bialik certainly called attention to the cruelty of the pogrom’s perpetrators, he referenced the Hasmoneans to chastise the Jews of Kishinev for their weakness:

And now go and I’ll bring you to the places where they hid: / the outhouse, the pigpen and the other places smeared with shit, / and you’ll see with your own eyes where they were concealed – your brothers, your people, / the descendants of the Maccabees, the great grandchildren of lions / from “Merciful Father” and the seed of the great “martyrs” / were twenty souls in one hole and thirty upon thirty / and they have made great my place in the world and sanctified my name to the multitudes... / They fled the flight of mice and hid like tics / and died like dogs there where they were found / and tomorrow morning – when the fugitive son comes out / and finds the corpse of his father – smeared and despised - / and why do you weep, son of man, and why do you hide / your face in your hand? Gnash your teeth and dissolve.<sup>225</sup>

Bialik’s caustic tone condemned his Jewish contemporaries for their cowardice and weakness in the face of persecution. He compared them to their Hasmonean ancestors in order to show how weak and frail Jews had become by the twentieth century. Where the Hasmoneans had been “lions,” – a direct reference to a description of Judas in I Maccabees<sup>226</sup> – the Jews of Bialik’s day were nothing more than “mice” and “tics.” In the last words of this passage, Bialik exhorted twentieth-century Jews not to weep or hide, but to “gnash” their teeth, seemingly suggesting that they should harden their resolve and fight back. Bialik’s poem, with its reference

---

<sup>224</sup> David Aberbach, “Introduction,” in *C.N. Bialik: Selected Poems*, ed. and trans. David Aberbach (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2004), 12.

<sup>225</sup> C. N. Bialik, *City of the Killings* (1903),” in *Songs from Bialik: Selected Poems of Hayim Nahman Bialik*, ed. and trans. Atar Hadari (Syracuse University Press, 200), 3-4.

<sup>226</sup> I Macc. 3. 4 NRSV.

to the Hasmoneans longed for a resurgence of Jewish strength.

One place where the Hasmonean story exists today is rather different from the religious, literary, and historical accounts previously encountered, but reflects the impact of Nordau's call for a "muscular Jewry." In 1921<sup>227</sup>, the Twelfth World Jewish Congress created an international umbrella organization for all Jewish sports associations called "The Maccabi World Union," an organization that cites Max Nordau as a key element of its inspiration.<sup>228</sup> In describing its foundation, a representative of the Maccabi World Union wrote, "The very name Maccabi pointed the new Zionist orientation of the World Union. The saga of the ancient Maccabees celebrated at Chanukah signified the courageous fight for freedom of conscience and religion, for autonomy and sovereignty - the very goals toward which modern Zionism strove."<sup>229</sup> Today, Maccabi World Union operates on five continents and hosts a quadrennial international competition – "The Maccabiah Games" – in Israel.<sup>230</sup> The aims of the Maccabi World Union further demonstrate the thrust of Zionist usage of the Hasmonean story. The title "Maccabi" emphasizes the militaristic aspect of the Hasmonean Revolt because it is a direct reference to Hasmonean military hero Judas Maccabeus. In this Zionist reading, the Hasmoneans have become a group of Jewish militants, symbols of a literal and physical fight for the principles and existence of Judaism.

---

<sup>227</sup> Maccabi World Union, "Maccabi World Union," *A Brief History of Maccabi World Union*, <http://www.maccabiworld.org/nconfigout.asp?psn=306&tc=60>.

<sup>228</sup> Maccabi World Union, "Dr. Max Nordau," *A Brief History of Maccabi World Union*, <http://www.maccabiworld.org/nconfigout.asp?psn=306&tc=60>.

<sup>229</sup> Maccabi World Union, "Maccabi World Union," *A Brief History of Maccabi World Union*, <http://www.maccabiworld.org/nconfigout.asp?psn=306&tc=60>.

<sup>230</sup> Maccabi World Union, "About Us," <http://www.maccabiworld.org/nconfigout.asp?psn=255&tc=60>.

In the more than two millennia since the story of the Hasmoneans first appeared, the course of its development has not been a linear progression from ancient to modern, but rather an episodic series of editions and reinterpretations. Along the course of its development, the Hasmoneans have played many roles. In Maccabees I and II, they defended God's law, enacted God's deliverance of 'the chosen people,' and set an example for pious adherence to tradition. Despite a seeming lack of rabbinic interest, the Hasmoneans survived the Rabbinic Period largely on the strength of the Hanukkah festival that they had created. During those years, some of the Hasmoneans were remembered both as legendary, heroic, figures, and others as corrupt and power-hungry kings, and their glory was somewhat overshadowed by the incorporation of a the oil miracle into the Hanukkah story. With Samuel Usque, the Hasmoneans once again became valiant and heroic, proof of God's love for the nation of Israel, and a source of inspiration to persevere in the face of suffering. For Heinrich Graetz and Simon Dubnow, the Hasmoneans, as symbols for Jewish nationalism, led the fight against assimilation, while for modern historians like Salo Baron, they were emblems of an inevitable cultural clash. Early Zionists revived the Hasmoneans in the name of a new militant, courageous, and pious Jewish strength, and, to this day, the Jewish sports clubs of the Maccabi World Union preserve that image. With each addition or reformulation, the Hasmonean story has accumulated elements of the worldview of those who kept it relevant, while serving to remind successive audiences of a legendary past. The survival of the Hasmonean story has helped shape various generations of Jewish intellectual dialogue and, eventually, Jewish politics. Most important, the Hasmoneans have continued to help

writers define Jewish identity. Although their image today is quite different from how it began, the Hasmoneans still give a voice and a spirit to those who seek it, and their fighting spirit lives on.

## Works Cited

- Alon, Gedaliah. *Did the Jewish People and Its Sages Cause the Hasmoneans to be Forgotten?* In Alon, Gedaliah. *Jews and Judaism in the Classical World*. Translated by Israel Abrahams. Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1977.
- Attridge, Harold W., ed. *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, rev. ed. New York: Harper Collins, 2006.
- Baron, Salo W. *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*. 3 vols. New York: Columbia University Press, 1937.
- Baron, Salo W. *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, enl. and rev. ed. 18 vols. New York: Columbia University Press, 1952.
- Baron, Salo W. "Emphases in Jewish History." In *History and Jewish Historians: Essays and Addresses by Salo W. Baron*, compiled by Arthur Hertzberg and Leon A. Feldman, 65-89. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964.
- Baron, Salo W. "Heinrich (Hirsch) Graetz, 1817-1891." In *History and Jewish Historians: Essays and Addresses by Salo W. Baron*, 263-269.
- Baron, Salo W. "Newer Emphases in Jewish History." In *History and Jewish Historians: Essays and Addresses by Salo W. Baron*, 90-106.
- Baron, Salo W. "Who is a Jew?" In *History and Jewish Historians: Essays and Addresses by Salo W. Baron*, 5-22.
- C. N Bialik: *Selected Poems*, edited and translated by David Aberbach. New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2004.
- Bialik, C. N. *City of the Killings*. In *Songs From Bialik: Selected Poems of Hayim Nahman Bialik*, edited and translated by Atar Hadari. Syracuse University Press, 2000.
- Cohen, Shaye J. D. *The Beginnings of Jewishness*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- De' Rossi, Azariah. *The Light of the Eyes*. Translated by Joanna Weinberg. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.
- Dubnow, Simon. "Autonomism, The Basis of the National Program." In *Nationalism and History: Essays on Old and New Judaism by Simon Dubnow*,

edited by Koppel S. Pinson, 131-142. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1958.

- Dubnow, Simon. *An Outline of Jewish History*. Vol. 2, *The Maccabean and Talmudic Eras*. New York: Max. N. Maisel, 1929.
- Goldstein, Jonathan A. *I Maccabees: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. The Anchor Bible Series, vol. 41. New York: Doubleday, 1976.
- Goldstein, Jonathan A. *II Maccabees, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. The Anchor Bible Series, vol. 41a. New York: Doubleday, 1983.
- Grabbe, Lester. *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian*, 2 vols. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992.
- Graetz, Heinrich. *History of The Jews*. Edited and Translated in part by Bella Löwy. Vol. 1, *From the Earliest Period to the Death of Simon the Maccabee (135 B.C.E.)*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1891.
- Graetz, Heinrich. *The Structure of Jewish History and Other Essays*. Translated by Ismar Schorsch. New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1975.
- Herzl, Theodor. *Old New Land*. Translated by Lotta Levensohn. New York: M. Wiener, 1997.
- Ibn Daud, Abraham. *The Book of Tradition*. Translated by Gerson D. Cohen. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1967.
- Josephus. *The Jewish War*. In *The Jewish War and Other Selections*. Edited by Moses I Finley, translated by H. St. J Thackeray and Ralph Marcus. New York: Washington Square Press, 1965. (Edition Published by Twayne Publishers).
- Kalmin, Richard. *The Sage in Jewish Society of Late Antiquity*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Kalmin, Richard. "The Formation and Character of the Babylonian Talmud." In *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, edited by Steven T. Katz, 4: 840-876. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Maccabi World Union. "About Us."  
<http://www.maccabiworld.org/nconfigout.asp?psn=255&tcat=60>.

- Maccabi World Union. "A Brief History of Maccabi World Union."  
<http://www.maccabiworld.org/nconfigout.asp?psn=306&tc=60>
- Moscovitz, Leib. "The Formation and Character of the Jerusalem Talmud." In *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, edited by Steven T. Katz, 4: 663-677. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Neusner, Jacob. *The Talmud of Babylonia, An American Translation*. Brown Judaic Studies. Vol. IIA, *Shabbat ch. 1-2*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992.
- Neusner, Jacob. *The Talmud of Babylonia, An American Translation*. Brown Judaic Studies. Vol. XXIXb, *Menahot Ch. 4-7*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992.
- Neusner, Jacob. *The Talmud of Babylonia, An American Translation*. Brown Judaic Studies. Vol. XIXb, *Qiddushin, Ch. 2-4*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992.
- Neusner, Jacob. *The Talmud of the Land of Israel*. Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism. Vol. XVIII, *Besah and Taanit*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Nordau, Max. "Muskeljudentum." In Nordau, *Zionistische Schriften*, 379-381. Quoted in Michael Stanislawski, *Zionism and the Fin de Siècle, Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- Seltzer, Robert M. "From Graetz to Dubnow." In *The Legacy of Jewish Migration*, edited by David Berger, 49-60. New York: Brooklyn College Press (Distributed by Columbia University Press), 1983.
- Schwartz, Seth. "Historiography on the Talmudic Period." In *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, edited by Martin Goodman, 79-114. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Stemberger, Günter. "The Maccabees in Rabbinic Tradition." In *The Scriptures and the Scrolls: Studies in Honour of A.S. Van Der Woude On The Occasion of His 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday* edited by F. García Martínez, A. Hilhorst and C.J. Labuschagne, 193-203. New York: E.J. Brill, 1992.
- Usque, Samuel. *Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*. Translated by Martin Cohen. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964.
- Yerushalmi, Yosef Hayim. "Exile and Expulsion in Jewish History." In *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World 1391-1648*, edited by Benjamin R. Gampel, 1-22. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.