

# The Maccabean Revolt: The State of the Question

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## Sources

Let us begin with our sources. There are two major sources--1 and 2 Maccabees--for the background and progress of the revolt of the Maccabees, plus a third source of lesser value, Josephus' *Antiquities* (12.234-13.214), which is clearly, for the most part, dependent on 1 Maccabees. These sources exist in Greek; but the original language of 1 Maccabees was Hebrew, and Jerome knew it thus. A medieval account in Aramaic, the Scroll of Antiochus, which tells the story of the origin of the festival of Hanukkah and of the miracle connected with it and which was apparently read in the synagogue in the Middle Ages, as we see from a remark in the thirteenth-century Tosafot of Isaiah di Trani,<sup>6</sup> is of questionable historical value, as we see from the mention of the (fictitious) twenty-third year of the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes at the beginning of the text, whereas the reign lasted only eleven years. We might have expected that the rabbis, who elevated Hanukkah to the status of a holiday, would have instituted the practice of reading the story of the holiday by requiring an account of the Hasmoneans similar to their instituting an account, namely in the book of Esther, of the background of the holiday of Purim; but all that we have in the Talmud is the very brief reference (*Sabbath* 21b), which alludes to the miracle of the oil. If we ask why the rabbis did not endorse the first book of Maccabees as the text to be read on Hanukkah we may suggest that they found the story of the history of the Maccabees and their descendants embarrassing.

## The Roots of the Maccabean Revolt

A major new inscription, now on permanent loan in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, was published by Hannah M. Cotton and Michael Wöurle, "Seleukos IV to Heliodoros--A new Dossier of Royal Correspondence from Israel," *Zeitschrift für Philologica und Epigrafia* 159 (2007) 191-203. It sheds new light on the background of the Maccabean revolt. The stone stele on which an inscription in Greek is written is nearly 3 feet high. The bottom part of the stele has

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<sup>6</sup> Comments to *Sukkah* 44b.

broken off, but 23 full lines and a few partial lines have survived. It contains three letters, one from Seleucus IV (ruler of the Syrian kingdom) to his advisor Heliodorus (who three years later assassinated the king), a letter of transmittal from Heliodorus to Dorymenes (perhaps governor of the satrapy) and a final note from Dorymenes to his subordinate Diaphanes. The dates on the stele are quite precise, the summer of 178 B.C.E., ten years before the outbreak of the Maccabean uprising in 168 B.C.E. They are, in effect, political manifestos. Seleucus orders his predecessors to take charge of the sanctuaries in his newly-acquired territories of Coele-Syria (Palestine) and Phoenicia. His predecessor, Antiochus III, who reigned from 223 to 187 B.C.E., was constantly fighting with King Ptolemy IV of Egypt. By 198 B.C.E. the Jews of Palestine had become disenchanted with Ptolemaic rule, and they opened the gates of Jerusalem for Antiochus III. Antiochus rewarded the Jews by freeing them from taxes for three years and permitting them to have a form of government in accordance with the laws of their country and forbidding animals to be brought into Jerusalem that were forbidden for consumption for Jews.

The stele provides background for an episode involving a miracle that is recounted in 2 Maccabees 3.<sup>7</sup> Simon, the administrator of the Temple, quarreled with the high priest. Simon told an agent of the king, Seleucus IV, who ruled from 218 to 175 B.C.E., about the untold sums in the Temple treasury and said that it was possible for them to fall under the control of the king. King Seleucus chose Heliodorus to remove this wealth. When Heliodorus arrived, the high priest told him that the money belonged to widows and orphans. But Heliodorus had orders from the king that this money had to be confiscated. When Heliodorus arrived to seize the money, throngs of Jews were there calling for G-d's intervention. A magnificently decorated horse attacked Heliodorus with his hoofs and beat him mercilessly. Heliodorus' friends begged the high priest to intervene with G-d. Heliodorus recovered and offered sacrifices to G-d and reported all this to the king. He appointed someone to take charge of the sanctuaries in Palestine. Seleucus was murdered three years later (175 B.C.E.) and was succeeded by Antiochus IV. In 173 B.C.E. Onias III, the high priest, was replaced by Jason, who registered the Jerusalemites as citizens of Antioch. Jason was eventually outbid for the office of high priest by Menelaus, who sought to carry out the extreme Hellenization of Judea. Jason tried to reestablish his rule. On his return from Egypt in 168 B.C.E. Antiochus, convinced that a rebellion had broken out, stormed Jerusalem, killed thousands of Jews, sold thousands more into slavery, and walked off with the wealth in the Temple.

## The background of the revolt: Antiochus III

How shall we account for the persecution of the Jews during the reign of Antiochus IV (Epiphanes)? Shall we say that he inherited this attitude from his father, Antiochus III? The Syrians were incessantly involved in the struggle with the Ptolemies, the rulers of Egypt, and needed money to fight these wars. That money was to be found in the Temple in Jerusalem. But, after his conquest of the area (*Ant.* 12.138-146), Antiochus III issued proclamations that actually confirmed the rights of the Jews to practice their traditional customs and religion. Most scholars have accepted these decrees as authentic. Why is there such a contrast toward the Jews

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<sup>7</sup> For analysis of this story, see Elias Bickerman, *Studies in Greek and Christian History* (Leiden, 1980) 2.159-191; Jonathan Goldstein, *II Maccabees* (New York, 1983) 198-215.

in the attitude of his son, Antiochus IV (Epiphanes)? Shall we blame the Jews themselves and their leaders?

Seleucus IV gave financial support to the Temple. There was a whole complex of dichotomies at the time preceding the revolt: pro-Seleucid, that is, Syrian, and pro-Ptolemaic, that is, Egyptian, factions, namely, Tobiad (which brought about the displacement of the high priest Onias III and the appointment of the high priest Jason and later Menelaus) and Oniad families (though they were related through intermarriage).

## Antiochus IV's background

What caused Antiochus Epiphanes, who, we are told, was raised in an atmosphere, so typical of Greek and Roman culture, which was so permissive of minorities, to prohibit the practices of Judaism?<sup>8</sup> In his championing of Hellenism he reminded people of Alexander the Great. Yet, as Tcherikover<sup>9</sup> has stressed, the Seleucid rulers never intended to Hellenize the populations of the areas that they controlled but merely to transform them externally **politically** into Greek **poleis** (city-states) without abolishing the local religion or culture. Indeed, as Tcherikover<sup>10</sup> has remarked, after the defeat of Antiochus III in 189 B.C.E. by the Romans, his son, Antiochus Epiphanes, was sent to Rome as a hostage and remained there for thirteen years. That he was impressed by Roman (rather than Greek) culture may be seen in the fact that after he ascended to the throne he built a temple to Jupiter Capitolinus at Antioch, his capital, produced gladiatorial games on the Roman model, and introduced Roman political positions, actually seeking votes of the citizens for himself.

When he began his reign in 175 B.C.E., what did Antiochus do with regard to the Jews? He did nothing. Apparently, he was not particularly interested in the Jews. Soon, however, he was approached by Jason, brother of the high priest Onias III, who offered him 440 talents of silver if he would be named high priest in place of his brother. This would be supplemented by 150 silver talents, which would be used in establishing a gymnasium. This would put Jerusalem on the way to becoming a polis. It made no difference to Antiochus if the high priest was replaced by his brother, and so he accepted the offer. Troops were often hired, and it was important for rulers to offer mercenaries more than their rivals offered them. Schuerer<sup>11</sup> contends that Antiochus' Hellenizing policy explains his religious suppression. In the words of Tacitus, *Histories* 5.8.2: "After the Macedonians gained supremacy, King Antiochus endeavored to abolish Jewish superstition and to introduce Greek civilization." But, as Momigliano<sup>12</sup> has put it, "Such direct interference in the ancestral cults of a nation was unheard of in the Greek-speaking world from immemorial times." It would have contradicted the ideological, religious, social, and political principles of the Hellenistic world. In fact, as Uriel Rappaport<sup>13</sup> has stated, it would have

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<sup>8</sup> On Antiochus IV see O. Morkholm, *Antiochus IV of Syria* (Copenhagen, 1966).

<sup>9</sup> Victor Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1959) 180.

<sup>10</sup> Tcherikover, *op. cit.* 472 n. 10.

<sup>11</sup> Emil Schuerer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus*, rev. ed. (Edinburgh, 1973) Schuerer, 1.147-48

<sup>12</sup> Arnaldo Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization* (Cambridge, 1975) 100.

<sup>13</sup> Uriel Rappaport, "Maccabean Revolt," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), volume 4, p. 437.

contradicted the basic principles not only of the Hellenistic world but also of ancient Middle East and Roman civilization. There is no evidence that Antiochus IV was a greater Hellenizer than his predecessors or that he actively promoted Hellenization for idealistic reasons. The number of Greek poleis organized during his reign was actually fewer than under his predecessors. Antiochus' father, Antiochus III, had resumed the practice, but rather had made refoundations of previous poleis. More importantly, the initiative always came from the natives themselves. They considered this an important privilege for which they paid well into the king's coffers.

Jerusalem was a polis from 175 to 168 B.C.E. with no religious overtones. To force new religious measures on the Jews would have been unusual because the native cults of other sacred Oriental cities were not disturbed when allowed to incorporate.<sup>14</sup> To force Hellenization would have been suicidal.<sup>15</sup>

According to 1 Macc. 1.41-43, Antiochus sent a decree to all his subjects to abandon their native customs, but there is no corroborating evidence that such a decree was issued. There is no reason to think that the various peoples in the Seleucid Empire, such as the Phoenicians, would abandon their local gods and customs more easily than would the Jews.

There were many Jews in the Seleucid Empire outside Palestine; yet there is no evidence that they suffered infringement or persecution.

A further argument often advanced for Antiochus' suppression of Jewish religious customs is that he promoted the cult of Zeus Olympius. It is true that Antiochus favored Zeus over Apollo, the latter having been the traditional patron of the Seleucid dynasty. The frequent assertion that Antiochus issued coins with his own visage imposed on the image of Zeus is to be doubted.<sup>16</sup> The ruler cult was practiced under Antiochus, but he did not originate it; he simply continued the custom of his predecessors. It seems at times to be tacitly assumed that Antiochus was attempting to set up some sort of pagan monotheism, but such an idea is anachronistic.<sup>17</sup> Above all, the god worshipped in Jerusalem was not the Greek Zeus but a Syrian god.

Was Antiochus' alleged persecution of the Jews in Palestine motivated by his aim of unifying his state through introducing one culture or religion, namely the worship of himself, as seen in the legend of his coins, "King Antiochus G-d Manifest"<sup>18</sup>? Or was it the result of his mentally disabled mind? Polybius, the second-century B.C.E. critical Greek historian (ca. 200-ca. 118 B.C.E.) of Rome, was a direct contemporary of Antiochus Epiphanes, who was taken captive by the Romans. It was he who invented the term "pragmatic" history, basing himself, wherever possible, on first-hand knowledge of events, and broadening the scope to include not only political but also military, economic, religious, and social factors, though occasionally biased, in his search, like that of his predecessor Thucydides, whom he clearly admired, for reasons for events.

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<sup>14</sup> Tcherikover 471 n.9.

<sup>15</sup> K. Bringmann, *Hellenistische Reform und Religionsverfolgung in Judaea* (1983) 103, 146.

<sup>16</sup> Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974) 285-86.

<sup>17</sup> Tcherikover, 181-82.

<sup>18</sup> O. Morkholm, *Studies in the Coinage of Antiochus IV of Syria* (Copenhagen, 1963).

Polybius (26.1), who is generally regarded as a careful and fair-minded historian, has painted an extensive portrait of Antiochus as strange, unpredictable, tactless, and most unroyal-like in his behavior. He is said to have wandered through the streets and conversed with ordinary people. He poured perfumed ointment over the heads of ordinary people while they were taking baths and enjoyed the sight of people slipping. He was famous for the many gifts that he made to Greek cities and temples. He burst in on drinking parties. He participated as an actor in theater performances. Once he started dancing with performers on the stage. He was full of surprises, giving precious gifts to some and worthless objects to others. In his unpredictable bursts he behaved like the later Roman emperors Caligula and Nero. He campaigned openly for political offices, even though the offices carried little power in them, and struck some people as utterly insane, Epimanes ("insane"), as Polybius (26.10.6-8) termed him, rather than Epiphanes ("illustrious").

According to the first century B.C.E. historian Diodorus Siculus (34-35.1.1), in his universal history, when Antiochus was besieging Jerusalem, it was the majority of Antiochus' friends who advised him "to wipe out completely the race of the Jews, since they alone of all nations avoided dealings with any other people and looked upon all men as their enemies." It is the influence of these friends that impelled Antiochus upon defeating the Jews, to enter the temple in Jerusalem, where he found a statue of a bearded man, whom he supposed to be Moses, and whom he regarded as the person who had ordained for the Jews their misanthropic and lawless customs. Shocked by such hatred against all mankind and, again, at the instigation of his friends, he sacrificed before the image of the founder of the cult and compelled the high priest and the rest of the Jews to partake of the meat. Again, we are told that it was these friends who strongly urged Antiochus to make an end of the Jewish race completely or at least to force them to change their ways. Very significantly, however, according to Diodorus (34-35.1.5), Antiochus, being a magnanimous and mild-mannered person, took hostages but dismissed the charges against the Jews, once he had exacted the tribute that was due and had dismantled the walls of Jerusalem. Apparently, Antiochus himself did not succumb to this advice to unify his nation by imposing the practices of the Greek religion and thus to unify his state through one culture or religion.

Antiochus was no crusading ideologue but a practical politician who was beset by many problems and who was ambitious and who needed money.<sup>19</sup> He encouraged the rival bidding for the highpriesthood between Jason and Menelaus (2 Macc. 4:7-26) and allowed Jason's "Hellenistic reform" because it brought money for his expansionist plans<sup>20</sup> and because it seemed a way of resolving the intra-Jewish conflict between Onias III and Simon the Tobiad.

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<sup>19</sup> K. Bringmann, *Hellenistische Reform und Religionsverfolgung in Judäa* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983) 111-140.

<sup>20</sup> True, as E. S. Gruen, "Hellenism and Persecution: Antiochus IV and the Jews," in P. Green, ed., *Hellenistic History and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 253, has noted, Antiochus had paid off an installment on his indemnity to Rome in 173, four years before his assault on Jerusalem, but that was only for that year; and, moreover, he remained ambitious to expand territorially. But Antiochus had been humiliated in 168 B.C.E. when he was forced to withdraw his army from Egypt when Popillius Laenas, the Roman leader of an embassy, drew a

## The role of the Jewish Hellenizers and, in particular, Jason

We know from a cuneiform tablet that Antiochus IV Epiphanes began his reign in September, 175 B.C.E. When he took the throne, what did he do with regard to the Jews?<sup>21</sup> Answer: nothing. Antiochus, a product of Greek education and a pupil of the Epicureans, could not have initiated the persecution of the Jews, since it meant the imposition of a new religious law which implied religious fanaticism. In the entire ancient world, as Tcherikover<sup>22</sup> stresses, there is no example of religious fanaticism, with the exception of the Pharaoh Akhenaton and in drama the invasion of Dionysus as depicted in Euripides' *Bacchae*. It was apparently not Antiochus but the Hellenistic reformers of Jerusalem, the high priest Jason and his rival, Menelaus and his group, who were the real initiators of the decrees. Shortly after Antiochus came to the throne, Jason, brother of the high priest Onias III, approached Antiochus and made him an offer that he could not refuse, 440 talents of silver, which he badly needed for feeding and paying his mercenary troops, in return for giving Jason the high priesthood. Antiochus' function was merely the abolition of the rule of the Torah in Judaea. Jason and Menelaus and their followers sought to abolish Jewish particularism and to come to terms with the peoples around them. They were influenced by Greek views, since in Greek eyes all exclusiveness was barbarism. Jason sought to make Jerusalem a Greek city with a gymnasium. What was the reaction of the Jews in Jerusalem? There were no riots, no demonstrations against Jason's plan. Only a few years earlier, when Heliodorus, the prime minister of the Emperor Seleucus IV, who ruled from 187 to 176 B.C.E., attempted to seize 400 talents of silver and 200 of gold from the Temple in Jerusalem, we are told (2 Maccabees 3:18) "people came teeming out of the houses in crowds to join in communal supplication because the Place, that is, the Temple, was in danger of being defiled." A horse appeared...Charging at full speed ahead, it plunged wildly at Heliodorus....All around, however, men were praising G-d, who had so miraculously glorified His own sacred Place." Rumors began to be spread about the stolen temple vessels. What was the reaction of the crowd to the theft? They rioted in the streets. A certain Lysimachus, who was deputy to Menelaus (2 Maccabees 4:29), who was away, came out with a large band of armed soldiers to attack the crowd. The crowd drove off the soldiers and even killed Lysimachus (2 Maccabees 4:42).

Were the Jews in Palestine already a part of the Hellenistic world and not significantly different from other peoples of the ancient Near East in the general process of Hellenization, which had begun with Alexander?

Were Jason's initial Hellenistic reforms met with enthusiasm by a significant (if minority) portion of the Jews of Palestine and were not actively opposed by the rest?

Is it true that Judaism as a religion was not impaired under Jason? Is it true that 2 Maccabees was written in the aftermath of the religious persecutions and the Hasmonean successes? Is it true

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circle in the sand and demanded that he signal obedience to Rome's demand before stepping outside of it, and he surely was determined to show his military strength elsewhere.

<sup>21</sup> Lester L. Grabbe, "The Hellenistic City of Jerusalem," in John R. Bartlett, ed., *Jews in the Hellenistic and Roman Cities* (Florence, Kentucky; Routledge, 2002) 8.

<sup>22</sup> Tcherikover, *op. cit.*, 183.

that the basic Jewish observances in and out of the temple continued and that there was no devotion to pagan deities or any blatant breach of Jewish law?

Jason introduced a gymnasium and the ephebate in Jerusalem, and he arranged for the registration of persons as "Antiochenes" in the city (2 Macc. 4:9). The fact that Jason had to draw up a list of the citizens suggests that not everyone was included. One would guess that the wealthy and the aristocrats were the first to be chosen. None of these measures involved elimination or alteration of religious rites. The priests did not give up the daily *tamid* offering because when it ceased a few years later it was an extremely traumatic experience. Nothing in the Hebrew Scriptures forbids gymnasia, military training for youths, or enrollment as citizens of a polis or politeuma. To be sure, athletic exercises were generally conducted in the nude, but Thucydides (1.6) remarks that even in his day many foreigners, especially in Asia, wear loincloths for boxing and wrestling. Moreover, although the author of 2 Maccabees brands the innovation as unlawful, he also provides material for his own refutation: the priests themselves welcomed the gymnasium and were eager to participate in exercises in the palaestra, but they evidently did not consider it inconsistent with their sacerdotal functions.<sup>23</sup> To be sure, when the quadrennial games were held in Tyre, Jason sent envoys, chosen as Antiochian citizens from Jerusalem, to carry 300 silver drachmas to be used for a sacrifice to the hero-god Heracles, but in that case (2 Macc. 4:18-20), we are told, the envoys thought it best not to use it for such a sacrifice, since they deemed it inappropriate, but to apply it for the construction of triremes. To be sure, the most damnable charge made against those who built the gymnasium is that they removed the marks of circumcision, a charge, by the way, that significantly is not mentioned at all in 2 Maccabees. Moreover, if we trust the description of the method of undoing circumcision found in the medical text of Celsus (7.25.1), it is such a gory operation that it is hard to believe that anyone would have deliberately undergone it in an era, of course, without anaesthesia. Finally, is it true that eventually Jason's actions were met with resistance from both the ruling council of the people and from the ordinary people who rioted and killed his brother Lysimachus?

Bickerman<sup>24</sup> puts the blame solidly on the "extreme Hellenists," i.e. Menelaus and the Tobiads. The Tobiad family appears to have been the main instigators of the Hellenistic reform in Jerusalem (Josephus, *Ant.* 12.239). The Hellenists were attempting to create an "enlightened" religion, in which the so-called degenerate and anachronistic accretions (e.g., circumcision, food taboos, purity regulations) would be removed and the pristine original could once more shine forth. Hengel views the Maccabean revolution as a civil war between Jews, rather than as a Jewish national uprising against a foreign occupant. The reformers attempted to integrate the national religion in the universal world of the Greeks. The reformed religion thus emerging was in many ways parallel with the Reform Judaism that arose in the nineteenth century.<sup>25</sup> Daniel 11:30 refers to those Jews who forsake the covenant, a statement paralleled in 1 Macc. 1:11: "At that time there came forth from Israel certain lawless men who persuaded many, saying, "Let us

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<sup>23</sup> Erich S. Gruen, "Hellenism and Persecution: Antiochus IV and the Jews," in Peter Green, ed., *Hellenistic History and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 238-239.

<sup>24</sup> Bickerman, *Gott der Makkabaeer* (1937).

<sup>25</sup> Bringmann, *Hellenistische Reform und Religionsverfolgung in Judaea* (1983), 110-11.

go and make a treaty with the heathen around us, because ever since we separated from them, many evils have come upon us." According to Josephus (12.385) it was Menelaus who "had compelled his nation to violate their own laws." 2 Macc. 13:3-8 also has Menelaus more or less putting Antiochus up to the religious suppression. Menelaus obtained the office of high priest by going to Antiochus and offering him 300 talents more than Jason did. There is even suspicion that he was not even a priest,<sup>26</sup> since we are told that he had a brother Simon, who, we are informed (2 Macc. 3.4) was of the tribe of Benjamin, and hence not a priest.<sup>27</sup>

Menelaus was interested in power, not in an idealized, syncretistic religion. He was not a sophisticated philosopher or historian of religion. The account (2 Macc.4:39-42) that associates him with temple robbery may contain an element of slander, but it suggests an individual more concerned with personal gain and advancement than with the ideals of religious innovation. We have no religious slogans connected with the reforms.

Why would Menelaus have created a religion that forced on the Jews practices that contravened such deeply ingrained elements of Judaism as circumcision and abstinence from pork? As for Menelaus, three years after the outbreak of the Maccabean revolt, Menelaus helped to arrange an amnesty for the rebels and to restore to the Jews the privilege of adhering to their dietary laws.<sup>28</sup> Apparently, Antiochus Epiphanes came to the realization that the policy of persecuting the Jews brought no advantage to the Hellenists; and so, Antiochus reverted to the previous tolerant policy of himself and of his predecessors; and Menelaus dutifully followed him.

## The role of the masses

Two centuries after the Maccabean revolt we have indications that the number of Jews living in Syria was over a million and that there were approximately three million living in Palestine.<sup>29</sup> Josephus (*War* 2.280) states that a crowd of no less than three million Jews implored the Roman governor Cestius Gallus, when he visited Jerusalem at Passover in 65 C.E. to have compassion upon them in view of the excesses of the procurator Florus. If they had been strongly motivated, surely a large number of Jews might have gathered to protest the attacks, whether by the Syrian rulers or by the high priests against Jewish tradition. But we hear of no such protests. Indeed, there is no evidence that the Maccabean resistance was a class war, i.e. a "peasants' revolt."

In fact, we read (1 Macc. 1.11) that at the time of the accession of Antiochus Epiphanes "there came forth from Israel certain lawless (παράνομοι) men who persuaded many (πολλούς), 'Let us go and make a treaty with the heathen because ever since we separated from them, many evils have come upon us.'" (1 Macc. 1.41). Then the king ordered all in his kingdom to become one people (1 Macc. 1.42) and that everyone should forsake his own laws. All the heathen acquiesced in the decree of the king (1 Macc. 1.43); even many from Israel consented to his worship and sacrificed to idols and profaned the Sabbath.

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<sup>26</sup> If Menelaus was, indeed, not a priest, we would expect bitter opposition and mass demonstration by the Jewish populace, and there is no indication of this in either of the two books of Maccabees.

<sup>27</sup> Simon, however, was captain of the temple, a priestly office (2 Macc. 3.4).

<sup>28</sup> Gruen (above, n. 23) 261.

<sup>29</sup> L.H. Feldman, "Conversion to Judaism in Classical Antiquity," in my *Judaism and Hellenism Reconsidered* (Leiden: Brill, 2006) 219.

Further (1 Macc. 1.12), we read: "The plan seemed good in their eyes, and some of the people went eagerly to the king, who gave them permission to perform the rites of the heathen. They (1 Macc. 1:14) [the Jews] built a gymnasium in Jerusalem in accordance with the rites of the heathen. They (1.15) also subjected themselves to uncircumcision and stood aloof from the sacred law. Many Israelites (1 Macc. 2:16) came forward to them [to renounce G-d] Thus they joined the heathen, and sold themselves to do evil." Nowhere do we find that the initiative came from the Syrians. Yet, significantly, we know of no riots or demonstrations against Jason's innovations.

To be sure, we do hear that when Menelaus stole some of the golden temple vessels (2 Macc.4.39), there was rioting in the streets. Apparently, the rioters were so numerous that they drove off the soldiers sent by Lysimachus, who was governing in Menelaus' absence and actually managed to kill Lysimachus himself. Moreover, after the riot was over, we hear that the *gerousia*, "the council of elders," sent a delegation to complain to the king (2 Macc. 4:4).

Moreover, and most remarkably (2 Macc. 12:39-40), when Judah the Maccabee in 164 B.C.E. was leading his warriors against the Syrian general Gorgias, and when, after the battle, Judah's men went to recover the bodies of those who had fallen in order that they might lie with their relatives in their ancestral tombs (2 Macc. 12.40), they discovered, under the shirt of each of the slain, consecrated objects of the idols of Jamnia, which the Law forbade to the Jews. It then became clear to all that this was the reason that these men had fallen. Apparently, many of the very soldiers in Judah's army saw no contradiction between their fighting against the violation of the Torah's condemnation of idolatry and carrying these idolatrous objects.

## Hasidim (Hasideans)

Tcherikover<sup>30</sup> argues that resistance to Hellenization had developed in Jerusalem, led by the Hasidim, who drove Jason out of the city and tried to restore the status quo that prevailed under Onias III. They were not, however, a separate organized group. This revolt caused Antiochus to sack Jerusalem on his way back from Egypt. Indeed, the Hasidim were the strongest defenders of the Jewish religious tradition. They were apparently the chief scribes and authoritative interpreters of the commandments of the Torah, but the identification of the Pharisees as heirs of the Hasidim is unfounded. According to 1 Maccabees 2:42, at the beginning of the revolt by Mattathias, a company of Hasidim joined Mattathias. They were an exceedingly forceful group, each one offering himself willingly in defense of the Law. Only after more than a thousand persons were burned to death in a cave because they did not wish to resist Antiochus, did the Hasidim see the folly of their policy and join the rebellion; but as soon as the Jews received religious freedom, the Hasidim withdrew from the Hasmoneans and refused to participate in the struggle for political independence. The fact that the Hasidim withdrew from the Maccabean fighters and regarded the struggle as a religious one only constitutes a fundamental split in the Jewish response to Hellenism and to the struggle for political independence, comparable to the attitude of Neturei Carta in Jerusalem in modern times.

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<sup>30</sup> Tcherikover (*op. cit.*) 186-203. Cf. Philip Davies, "Hasidim in the Maccabean Period," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 28 (1977) 127-140, who argues that the Hasidim were not a separate sect but rather all Jews who were concerned to preserve their law and traditions in the face of Hellenism.

## Conclusion

The most influential modern scholars--Elias Bickerman, Victor Tcherikover, and Martin Hengel<sup>31</sup>-- who have dealt with the Jewish revolt against the Syrian Greeks in the second century B.C.E. look upon it as a civil war between Hellenized reformed Jews, who sought to integrate the Jews in Greek culture, including Greek religion, and the traditional Torah-abiding Jews. In 198 B.C.E., when the Syrian king, Antiochus III, conquered Palestine, he established the policy of granting religious independence to the Jews. His son, Antiochus IV, in his financial need for money to maintain his continuous struggle against the Ptolemaic kings of Egypt, abolished these privileges and established a Greek gymnasium in Jerusalem. Since the ruler of the land had the power to appoint whomever he wished as high priest (Josephus, *Antiquities* 12.237), who in turn directed the religious worship in the land, Antiochus opened the high priesthood to the one who offered the most money, namely Jason, who, in turn, deposed the pious high priest, Onias, and abolished the traditional Jewish worship (2 Maccabees 4:11). That it was Jews who took the initiative to violate the traditional practices of Judaism is clear from the comment (1 Macc.1:11) that at the time when Antiochus became king "there came forth from Israel certain lawless men" (παράνομοι). That these lawless men were Jews may be seen from the statement that these men are contrasted with the non-Jews around them from whom they are separated, since we are told that they declared that they said, "Let us go and make a treaty with the heathen around us, because ever since we separated from them, many evils have come upon us." Some of these people, again clearly Jews, "went eagerly to the king, who gave them permission to perform the rites of the heathen." It is these people who built a gymnasium and subjected themselves to uncircumcision and disobeyed the law of the Torah. It is significant that the gymnasium was built in 175 or 174 B.C.E. and that almost eight years passed before Mattathias and his sons started the revolt (1Macc. 2:45). The cause of the revolt was Antiochus' attack on Jerusalem in 169-168 B.C.E. and his need for money to carry on wars and to pay his troops and the theft from the Temple by Jason and Menelaus in return for the high priesthood.

In summary, the Jews, as today, were divided: there were varying degrees of religiosity, some of whom identified with Menelaus or Jason in extreme admiration for Greek culture and Greek ways and the Greek language, some of whom had the political aim of a Jewish state, and, of course, there were the Asidaioi, the ancestors of the Neturei Carta.

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<sup>31</sup> Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974) 247-254.