

## REVIEW–DISCUSSION

### THE HASMONEAN DYNASTY AND THE PROMISED LAND

Katell Berthelot, *In Search of the Promised Land? The Hasmonean Dynasty between Biblical Models and Hellenistic Diplomacy*, transl. Margaret Rigaud. *Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements*, 24. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018. Pp. 494. Hardback, €79.99/\$125.00. ISBN 978-3-525-55252-0.

**K**atell Berthelot (henceforth B.), Professor of the History of Ancient Judaism at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique/Aix-Marseille University in Aix-en-Provence, makes a major contribution to the study of the Hasmonean dynasty in this thought-provoking monograph focusing on biblical models and Hellenistic diplomacy. B. challenges the widespread academic consensus that the Hasmoneans (a.k.a. the Maccabees) embarked on wars of conquest to reconquer the Promised Land, namely the Biblical Land of Israel. Building upon her extensive and impressive body of work on this topic, B. primarily focuses on 1 Maccabees and the *War and Antiquities* of Flavius Josephus to propose that scholars have largely read into them the belief that the Hasmoneans undertook wars of conquest like those described in Scripture, particularly the conquest narratives. Although B. acknowledges that the Hasmoneans used biblical models to legitimate their dynasty, she argues that many aspects of their policies, particularly their wars of expansion, are best examined in the context of Hellenistic diplomacy and kingship.

B. begins her study with an introduction entitled ‘The Historiography of the Hasmonean Period: The Influence of Biblical Models and of Modern Debates on the Creation of a Jewish State’ (15–64), a lengthy and detailed review of scholarship on the Hasmoneans from approximately 1850 to the present. The chapter alone is worth a careful reading for its summary of modern theories regarding the development of the Hasmonean state. B. mentions that she includes this literature review to support a central thesis of her book, namely that misguided historiographical paradigms and readings of the primary sources continue to mislead scholars. She devotes special attention to those influential researchers who have supported the traditional paradigm, which maintains that the goal of the Hasmonean family was to regain control of territories once held by the Israelites in biblical times (i.e. Heinrich Grätz [Graetz], Joseph Derenbourg, Victor Tcherikover, Menahem Stern, Bezalel

Bar-Kochva, Uriel Rappaport). She observes that the conquest model endorsed by these authorities has largely dominated scholarship on the Hasmoneans since the middle of the twentieth century.

B. sides with the group of academics she terms ‘dissident voices’ (i.e. Joseph Sievers, Shaye Cohen, Seth Schwartz) who focus on political, economic, demographic, and strategic issues behind Hasmonean policies and downplay any religious dimensions that may have motivated them to conquer neighbouring lands. She challenges the field by stating that the view she puts forth in her book, which she notes is close to that outlined in some brief comments by D. R. Schwartz, ‘is preferable to the arguments put forward by the majority of scholars working on this period’ (51). B. somewhat weakens the main proposal of her book when she cautiously notes that some of the more culturally Hellenised Hasmoneans possibly had a great respect for biblical precepts (49). She also acknowledges that devotion to the Mosaic laws and the sacred character of the Jerusalem temple played an important role during the Hasmonean period (62).

Although B. and many of the dissenting voices she cites in support of her approach are correct to emphasise the political and non-religious nature of some Hasmonean policies, several Hasmoneans were Jewish high priests. Consequently, they used religion to justify their rule and policies. Their subjects, moreover, were united by a culture based on a belief in God whose works were revealed in Scripture, with Jerusalem being God’s chosen city for the temple. The difficulty is in determining the extent of the Hasmonean family’s use of the form of Scripture available to them in the implementation of their political and military policies. Such discussion is lacking in B.’s book as is an investigation of the problem with our major source for the Hasmoneans, namely the writings of Flavius Josephus. Several recent books address these and related topics in detail. While B. uses many of them, some of the most important are lacking due to a few years’ delay in the publication of her monograph.

B. comments in her preface that she completed her book in 2015 and that it was translated from French into English. Consequently, because of this delay in publication, her study does not take into consideration several important monographs on the Hasmoneans that appeared after she completed her manuscript. Some of these are particularly significant because they either supplement or challenge aspects of B.’s thesis.

Several authors whom B. cites have focused on how the Hasmonean family created, maintained, and justified the existence of their kingdom, which they first ruled as political leaders and then as high priests until they created a monarchy combining religious and secular powers. The most notable include Eckhardt (2013), Dąbrowa (2010), Regev (2013), and Seeman (2013). These scholars emphasise that our traditional sources for understanding the origin and development of the Hasmonean dynasty, especially 1 Maccabees, are

largely religious documents that often do not reflect historical reality. Consequently, these experts frequently use other sources, particularly those concerning the Seleucid Empire, to understand Hasmonean history. B.'s thesis is largely indebted to this new approach as she seeks to determine the extent to which Hellenism affected Hasmonean political and economic policies.

B.'s methodology and her interpretation of 1 Maccabees is greatly influenced by the new understanding of the Hasmonean dynasty's turbulent beginning, commonly known as the Maccabean Revolt, by Honigman (2014). Using the Heliodorus inscription and comparative epigraphical evidence for tighter fiscal and administrative overhaul of Coele-Syria by Seleucus IV, which included Judea, as well as a careful reading of 1 and 2 Maccabees, Honigman argues that the so-called Maccabean rebellion was largely a tax revolt. Honigman's proposal is controversial and has already elicited a dissenting response by a major scholar of Hellenistic Judaism because of her interpretation of the traditional accounts of the Maccabean Revolt in 1 and 2 Maccabees as fictional.<sup>1</sup> However, several issues overlooked by proponents of the traditional theory that the Maccabean Revolt was a rebellion against Seleucid religious persecution support B.'s adoption of Honigman's thesis. The most important of these is the lack of evidence that any Hellenistic monarch attempted to eradicate a 'superstition' or a religion (Cf. Diod. 34–5; Tac. *Hist.* 5.8.2). This is particularly true of Antiochus IV. During his festival at Daphne in 166 BCE he celebrated religious tolerance (Pol. 30.26). B., like Honigman, seeks to distinguish between the historical reality of the Hasmonean wars and their literary representations in the books of the Maccabees to show that the family should be examined within the wider context of the Hellenistic world (62). B.'s use and expansion of Honigman's thesis alone makes her monograph a significant work on the Hasmonean dynasty's assumption to power and its evolution into a monarchy.

Like Honigman, B. devotes considerable attention to examining how the Seleucid dynasty sought to control temples in their territories. She highlights this issue by developing many insights in the important study of Babota (2014), who argues that the first Hasmonean high priests, Jonathan and Simon, acted as Hellenistic high priestly rulers. Like B., Babota focuses less on biblical and Jewish perspectives that have formed the basis for most traditional scholarship on the Hasmonean family to highlight the influence Seleucid policy had upon the dynasty. The significant work on this topic by Hunt (2010) is curiously absent from B.'s bibliography. This detailed study of high priests of the Second Temple Period argues against the existence of a Zadokite priestly dynasty. It also rebuts the traditional thesis that Zadokites founded the Qumran community of the Dead Sea Scrolls after the Hasmoneans displaced them as high priests.

<sup>1</sup> Collins (2016).

B.'s section on the Hasmoneans in the Dead Sea Scrolls is largely indebted to the interpretations put forth in the monographs of Eshel (2008) and Charlesworth (2002), who seek to identify the historical allusions in the Dead Sea Scrolls with specific Hasmonean rulers. B. largely adopts their proposals with little consideration of alternatives. A significant omission in her section on this topic are the following Dead Sea Scrolls that contain identifiable names of Hasmoneans and individuals involved in the 63 BCE Roman conquest of Judea: Shelamzion (Salome) Alexandra (in *4QpapHistorical Text C* (4Q331 1 ii 7) and *4QHistorical Text D* (4Q332 2 4)), Hyrcanus II (in *4QHistorical Text D* (4Q332 2 6)), M. Aemilius Scaurus (twice in *4QHistorical Text E* (4Q333 1 4, 8)), and Peitholaus (in *4QHistorical Text F* (4Q468e 3)). Because some of these texts may allude to other historical events and Hasmonean land conquests, they should, despite their fragmentary nature, be included in any discussion of the Hasmoneans and their state.

Several new monographs published after B. completed her book propose radical reconstructions of the Hasmonean dynasty, its chronology, its relationship with other nations, and the accuracy of our extant sources of relevance to the issue of Hasmoneans and the Promised Land. The works of this reviewer on the accuracy of Josephus' portrayals of the Hasmonean State<sup>2</sup> and the Dead Sea Scrolls and Classical literature that recounts the Hasmonean dynasty's relationship with its neighbouring kingdoms, the Roman Republic, and its conquests of neighbouring lands appeared too late for B. to incorporate.<sup>3</sup> These books include a new chronology for the Hasmonean period that have important ramifications for understanding their use of Scripture, the family's creation of a monarchy, and the accuracy of the extant accounts concerning the geographical extent of the Hasmonean state. Likewise, the significant recent study of Roman and Hasmonean political and diplomatic relationships by Zollschan (2017) examines the first ties between the Hasmoneans and the Romans, as documented in 1 Maccabees, and the connection between Hasmonean foreign policy and Roman international relations of relevance to understanding B.'s examination of the family's wars of conquest.

The most recent book that fills in a major gap in B.'s book is the study of the late Hasmonean period by Sharon (2017). A major problem with B.'s monograph is that she does not examine the entire Hasmonean dynasty (152–63 BCE). The Hasmonean rulers from Shelamzion (Salome) Alexandra (76–67 BCE) to the 63 BCE Roman conquest of the Hasmonean state by Pompey and its aftermath, including the efforts by Mattathias Antigonus, and the lesser known effort by his sister (Jos. *B* 7 1.364), to recapture lost lands to recreate the

<sup>2</sup> Atkinson (2016).

<sup>3</sup> Atkinson (2018).

Hasmonean state, are confined to only a few pages (279–83). Because the Hasmonean state reached its greatest extent during the reign of Alexander Jannaeus' (104–76 BCE) wife and successor, Shelamzion Alexandra, it is essential to consider her reign and foreign policy in any discussion about the extent, creation, and expansion of the Hasmonean state. Sharon's book examines the final Hasmonean wars to preserve the family's kingdom in light of the Roman conquest that are of great relevance for understanding the Hasmonean dynasty's use of biblical traditions to justify their rule. B. omits a recent study of Salome Alexandra's reign that argues that Josephus—sometimes falsely, in other instances mistakenly—attributed many of Salome Alexandra's conquests to Alexander Jannaeus.<sup>4</sup> If correct, this thesis has profound ramifications for understanding the Hasmonean wars of conquest that form the basis for B.'s monograph and the family's possible use of Scripture to justify their capture of territories that once made up the biblical Promised Land.

Part I, entitled 'Did the Hasmoneans Seek to Reconquer the Promised Land or Restore Judea?: The Account of the Hasmonean Wars in 1 Maccabees' (65–212), presents the author's major thesis. Here, B. challenges the long-held consensus that the Hasmoneans embarked on wars of conquest to reconquer the Promised Land, the biblical Land of Israel. The traditional view, largely based on 1 Maccabees, is that the Hasmonean family from the second century BCE to the early decades of the first century BCE expanded their fledgling kingdom to encompass what had once been the biblical land of Israel under kings David and Solomon. In this section, B. focuses on 1 Maccabees 15:33–5 to show that scholars continue to over-interpret this passage based on their readings of it in conjunction with biblical texts, most notably the laws of warfare in Deuteronomy 20. Although B. and others are correct to emphasise the secular nature of the Hasmonean dynasty despite many of its ruler's positions as high priests, the texts about it are largely religious and appeal to the Bible to explain events of the Hellenistic period. This raises the issue of what constituted the Bible in the second century BCE when the Hasmoneans created and expanded their state.

Several Hebrew Dead Sea Scrolls, most notably *4QTestimonia* (4Q175) and *4QApocryphon of Joshua* (4Q378, 4Q379, and possibly 4Q522) which B. discusses, demonstrate the popularity of the Book of Joshua and conquest traditions during the Hellenistic period. B. follows the suggestion of several scholars that these texts revised the Book of Joshua to denounce the Hasmonean ruler John Hyrcanus. Yet it is important to keep textual traditions apart. The Old Greek (LXX) text of Joshua reflects what the Hebrew Bible looked like in its penultimate, pre-Masoretic or canonical, stage. The canonical Hebrew (Masoretic) text is thus a later rewritten version of an older

<sup>4</sup> Atkinson (2012).

text, which at times is visible in the Old Greek. The Book of Joshua, which documents the Israelite conquest of the Promised Land, was the subject of considerable exegetical interpretation and expansion during the Second Temple Period. It was apparently revised to reflect locations of relevance to the Hasmonean family. For example, the insertion of Joshua 10:15 in the Hebrew text, a passage absent in the Greek tradition, adds the city of Gilgal to the story. This appears to have been inserted in the second century BCE to allude to events in nearby Modein, the ancestral home of the Hasmonean family and the place where their rebellion against Seleucid rule began. For the Greek translator, this movement led by the Hasmoneans represented a new era in which Israel would reclaim the Promised Land just it had first conquered it under Joshua.<sup>5</sup> This evidence shows that the conquest model was of such importance during the Hasmonean period that biblical editors altered the text of Scripture to reflect the activities of the Hasmonean family.

The entries in the international project, the *Textual History of the Bible*,<sup>6</sup> should make scholars cautious in using the word ‘Bible’ since the many essays in this work reveal that the biblical text, including its translations, was subjected to frequent redactions during the Hellenistic era. This raises the question of whether the Hasmoneans always appealed to traditions about the Promised Land preserved in the Masoretic Text, or whether they sometimes used those extant only in the Greek translation, some of which were updated in light of second-century BCE events. Many biblical passages suggest that such revisions frequently occurred. Discrepancies in the priestly courses in Nehemiah 12:1–7, 12–21, and 1 Chronicles 24:1–9 (cf. *AJ* 7.365–7), for example, suggest that 1 Chronicles was redacted during the Hasmonean period to enhance the Hasmonean family’s ancestry. The enemies on all four sides of Israel in the Book of Nehemiah, moreover, correspond with the adversaries of 1 Maccabees, which was likely composed during the reign of John Hyrcanus. These insertions reflect the Hellenistic period when the Hasmoneans were expanding their territory in all directions and clashing with their neighbours. The biblical Book of Nehemiah and the genealogical lists in the Book of 1 Chronicles fit the time of John Hyrcanus and suggest that Hasmonean territorial expansion was viewed as a legitimate reconquest of the biblical Promised Land.<sup>7</sup> This combined evidence shows that it is inappropriate merely to ask to what extent, if any, the Hasmoneans attempted to restore the biblical Promised Land. Rather, the focus of discussion should also explore the extent to which the Hasmonean conquests shaped later views of the Promised Land preserved in the canonical, Masoretic Text, of the Bible.

<sup>5</sup> See further, De Troyer (2006) 105–18.

<sup>6</sup> Lange et al. (2016–present).

<sup>7</sup> For relevant archaeological and historical evidence to support this thesis, see Finkelstein (2018).

In Part II, entitled ‘The Era of the Conquests: Rise and Fall of the Hasmonean State’ (213–340), B. recounts the history and motivation behind the Hasmonean family’s territorial expansion and related topics. As previously noted, this section contains little about the Hasmoneans after the reign of Alexander Jannaeus. It also fails to consider modifications to Hasmonean chronology based on Egyptian papyrological evidence from the War of Sceptres (103–101 BCE), which shows that the reign of Jannaeus began in 104 BCE and not, as commonly believed, 103 BCE.<sup>8</sup> This revised chronology has some significant ramifications for understanding the apocalyptic worldview of the opponents of the Hasmonean family that may have led them to conquer lands. If the Seleucid king Demetrius III invaded Judea and fought Alexander Jannaeus (*BJ* 1.88–95; *AJ* 13.372–8) in 90/89 BCE instead of the traditional date of 88 BCE, it is possible that Jannaeus’ enemies appealed to the biblical Book of Daniel’s (9:24) eschatological calculation of seventy weeks of prophecy in the expectation that the eschatological salvation would soon come (cf. 4Q390). This may have ramifications for understanding Jannaeus’ decision to expand his kingdom at this time. Although such calculations are theologically based, they nevertheless reflect their respective authors’ beliefs that the Hasmonean family’s activities fulfilled biblical prophecy. This Dead Sea Scroll, as B., largely using the work of Eshel, recognises is clearly hostile to Mattathias’ descendants. Its author reacts to the Hasmonean’s use of Scripture to argue to the contrary, namely that they are blessed. This not only suggests that some Jews explained Hasmonean land acquisitions in light of Scripture, but also raises the issue of which chronology writers of the Second Temple period adopted.

Josephus’ figure for the reign of the Hasmonean monarch Aristobulus I (*AJ* 13.301) is 481 years and three months after the return from Babylonian exile. This places the first year of Jannaeus’ reign close to the beginning of the 70th heptad (years 483–90) of 4Q390’s interpretation of the eschatological prophecy of Daniel 9:24–7. A similar calculation is found in Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Demonstratio Evangelica* 8.2.394b–d, suggesting that these writers used a common source that considered Jannaeus’ reign, and likely his sibling and predecessor Aristobulus, as the fulfilment of biblical prophecy. Josephus emphasises that both conquered adjacent lands in connection with his theologically based chronology. The only extant chronograph among the Dead Sea Scrolls, 4Q559 (*4QpapBibChronology ar*), matches no known chronology. Although it is not complete, there is no reason to assume that its chronology for the Persian period would have matched any other ancient or modern dating for this era. This combined evidence suggests that chronology

<sup>8</sup> For this evidence, see the extensive documents translated and discussed in Van ’t Dack et al. (1989).

and Scriptural interpretation were used to interpret and justify Hasmonean land conquests.

Although B. engages in a careful analysis of 1 Maccabees, she largely takes Josephus' accounts and chronologies of events at face value without recognising that his *War* and *Antiquities* are largely literary productions. Recent scholarship, mainly beginning in the 1990s, has rejected the positivistic tradition that used Josephus' books as discrete pieces of historical information that could be used to reconstruct the past. Josephus studies in recent decades have sought to explore his literary context, his use of language, his rhetorical artifice, as well as the historical accuracy of his accounts in light of archaeological discoveries.<sup>9</sup> Josephus appears to have sometimes redacted his sources to explain or defend his own status as a Roman citizen in Flavian Rome of the late first century CE. His writings are often polemical. This is especially true of his accounts of Jannaeus and his expansion of the Hasmonean state.

Although B. recognises there are historical problems with Josephus' accounts of Jannaeus' conquest, as demonstrated through the archaeological record (see especially her chart on pp. 274–5), she does not engage in the same detailed literary analysis of his books as she does for 1 Maccabees. This leads to some oversights concerning the accuracy of Josephus' accounts of the Transjordan land conquests in *AJ* 13.356–7 and *BJ* 1.86–97. These are reminiscent of his later accounts in *AJ* 13.393–4 and *BJ* 1.103–5 and show that he duplicated the details of one expedition to the Transjordan. Theodosius and the battles of Amathus and Gadara are mentioned twice, and it is unexplained why Jannaeus attacked the latter city again (*AJ* 13.356/*BJ* 1.86/*AJ* 13.374; *BJ* 1.89). These discrepancies have important ramifications for understanding his narratives of Jannaeus' battles with the Nabateans and lands the Hasmoneans conquered that the Bible claimed the Israelites had previously annexed. He is clearly a flawed historical source regarding Hasmonean land conquests. His description of the land in the possession of Jannaeus in *AJ* 13.395–7 is not accurate as it includes territories (Marisa, Adora, Samaria, and Scythopolis) that had been conquered earlier while some regions Jannaeus controlled (Galilee and Judea) are absent. The list of Jannaeus' conquests preserved by George Syncellus appears to be independent of Josephus' *Antiquities* and is likely more accurate.<sup>10</sup>

In Part III, entitled 'Polemic, Memory, Forgetting' (341–426), B. investigates the Hasmonean wars of conquest in the Dead Sea Scrolls and their memory in rabbinic literature. She proposes that, contrary to expectation, there is little evidence that the Hasmonean dynasty was perceived as having

<sup>9</sup> See the proceedings of the two most recent meetings of the Josephus Colloquium that contain many essays on these issues: Rodgers (2006); Pastor, Stern, and Mor (2011).

<sup>10</sup> For this issue, see Schwartz (1990).



reconquered the Promised Land or restored the people of Israel within the borders of the biblical Land of Israel. Although the rabbinic literature is perhaps too late to be of value for her study, the Dead Sea Scrolls, as previously discussed, show a great concern with connecting Hasmonean activities with Scripture rather than Hellenistic models of diplomacy.

B.'s monograph is an outstanding work of scholarship that offers a bold and innovative thesis that challenges the traditional approach to researching and understanding the Hasmonean dynasty. It is clearly among the most important works written on the Hasmonean era in recent decades. The author raises many significant issues that demand a careful review. It should be required reading for any scholar or serious student interested in the Hasmonean dynasty, the Second Temple Period, and Hellenistic Judaism. Although scholars may not agree with her attempt to challenge the consensus that the Hasmoneans embarked on wars of conquest to reconquer the biblical Land of Israel, she has presented an admirable defence of her innovative thesis.

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