

General Introduction

SUMMARY

The first and second books of Maccabees narrate events that occurred in Judea from the 170s through the 150s and eventually led to the rise of the Hasmonean dynasty: the toppling of the last high priest of the Oniad dynasty, the transformation of Jerusalem into a Greek polis, Antiochos IV's storming of Jerusalem, his desecration of the temple and his so-called persecution of the Jews, the liberation of the city and rededication of the temple altar by Judas Maccabee, the foundation of the commemorative festival of Hanukkah, and the subsequent wars against Seleukid troops. 1 Maccabees covers the deeds of Mattathias, the ancestor of the Maccabean/Hasmonean family, and his three sons, Judas, Jonathan, and Simon, taking its story down to the establishment of the dynastic transmission of power within the Hasmonean family when John, Simon's son, succeeded his father; whereas 2 Maccabees, which starts from Heliodoros's visit to Jerusalem under the high priest Onias III, focuses on Judas and the temple rededication, further displaying a pointed interest in the role of martyrs alongside that of Judas. Because of this difference in chronological scope and emphasis, it is usually considered that 1 Maccabees is a dynastic chronicle written by a court historian, whereas 2 Maccabees is the work of a pious author whose attitude toward the Hasmoneans has been diversely appreciated—from mild support, through indifference, to hostility. Moreover, the place of redaction of 2 Maccabees, either Jerusalem or Alexandria, is debated. Both because of its comparatively flamboyant style and the author's alleged primarily religious concerns, 2 Maccabees is held as an unreliable source of evidence about the causes of the Judean revolt. While modern scholars

(erroneously) believe that the ancient author emphasizes religious and cultural issues, allegedly depicting the revolt as a struggle between Judaism and Hellenism, they are convinced that the causes of the revolt were a mix of religious and political factors (the family feud between the Oniads and the Tobiads, and how this interlocks with geostrategic tensions between the Ptolemies and the Seleukids), and perhaps also economic ones. However, for want of a reliable account, a detailed back story continues to elude us.

The present book questions these assertions both about the nature of 1 and 2 Maccabees and their depiction of the causes and essence of the Judean revolt, and, on the basis of its revised literary analysis of the two works, offers a new historical interpretation of these events. I argue that when 1 and 2 Maccabees are read with the proper attention to their culturally conditioned narrative codes, they appear to tell a completely different and perfectly rational story, albeit one with a heavy political bias. Far from being opposed in nature and purpose, these two Maccabees books are parallel works; despite their undeniable differences in narrative scope and style, both tell the founding myth of the Hasmonean dynasty. This, indeed, is what the story of the rededication of the temple altar by the Maccabees, the ancestors of the Hasmonean dynasty, is: a variant of the narrative pattern of temple foundation (or refoundation) that, in the Judean political tradition, was instrumental to any claim to political legitimacy. When we trace the evolution of the narrative pattern from the days of native kingship, through Persian, to Hellenistic times, it appears that the specific variant found in 1 and 2 Maccabees was precisely crafted to suit the specific shape of the Hasmoneans' power, which combined priestly and kingly prerogatives—a clear indication that both texts were crafted by court historians. As parallel works, they complement rather than duplicate each other: whereas 1 Maccabees narrates the run-up to the establishment of the dynastic principle, 2 Maccabees, by dwelling on the events that took place prior to the revolt, highlights the temple refoundation theme. Moreover, by focusing each on a different set of events—those that occurred before and after the temple refoundation, respectively—they appropriate the memory of both to the Hasmonians' benefit.

While the two Maccabees authors offer strongly biased accounts of the events owing to their political allegiance, they can be shown to have a perfectly rational understanding of the causes and nature of the Judean rebellion against Antiochos IV. In particular, the modern view that 2 Maccabees presents the revolt as a struggle between Judaism and Hellenism is a misrepresentation and fails to recognize the cultural and narrative codes shaping the text. Both ancient authors expressly point out political causes—not only the wide-ranging consequences of the transformation of Jerusalem into a Greek polis, which have been abundantly commented upon by modern scholars, but also the political destabilization that resulted from Antiochos IV's deposition of Onias III, whose key role is usually

overlooked—and furthermore they denounce the fiscal crisis that preceded (and largely explains) the revolt in far more explicit terms than modern students seem willing to acknowledge. Conversely, a proper literary analysis of 1 and 2 Maccabees, the book of Daniel, and Josephus, shows that there was no religious persecution. What we have are complex literary elaborations of a military suppression whose genesis can be reconstructed, once again, by being attentive to the ancient authors' culturally conditioned narrative codes. In turn, interpreting the "persecution" stories as accounts of a military suppression implies that the popular rebellion was the cause and not the consequence of Antiochos IV's crackdown on Jerusalem and therefore must have broken out during the king's second campaign in Egypt in 168 B.C.E. This must mean that religious issues were not in fact the primary cause of the rebellion, if a cause at all.

The revised literary analysis of 1 and 2 Maccabees offered in this book—and in particular the revised interpretation of how the ancient authors themselves understood the causes and nature of the revolt—provides fresh material for the historical reconstruction of the events themselves. For a proper understanding, this must start from Antiochos III's conquest of the region in 200/198 B.C.E. In Part III of this book I argue that the Judean revolt, which as just stated broke out during Antiochos IV's second campaign in Egypt, was primarily a reaction, first, to the wide-ranging administrative reforms implemented at the end of Seleukos IV's reign and the beginning of Antiochos IV's; second, to the political destabilization entailed by Antiochos IV's brutal ousting of Onias III; and third, to the seemingly sharp tax increase imposed by this king. As it appears, this interpretation of the decisive factors of the revolt is very close to the causal analysis offered by the author of 2 Maccabees himself. Reinstated thus from a bigoted account of little use to modern students of the rebellion, through the revised literary analysis offered in this book the text becomes a reasonably dependable source of evidence for modern historians to employ—provided we remain aware of its political bias. The historical reliability of 2 Maccabees as it is read in this book may be further supported by documentary evidence. In particular the recently published Olympiodoros inscription, which documents Seleukos IV's administrative reform of 178 B.C.E. aiming at a tighter control over the temples of the satrapy of Koilē Syria and Phoinikē, casts new light on the story of Heliodoros's visit to the Jerusalem temple that is told in 2 Maccabees 3.

The historical scenario sketched out in this book relies on the comparative approach, adducing documentary evidence from elsewhere to cross-check the literary accounts of the Judean events. However, whereas most adepts of the comparative approach since Elias Bickerman have primarily explored the relations between Seleukid kings and Greek cities for parallels, in this book the principal emphasis is on the relations between Hellenistic kings and temples. By this logic there is no reason to restrict our search of parallel material to the Seleukid empire,

all societies of the ancient Near East in which temples had a status similar to that in Jerusalem being potentially relevant. For practical reasons, our main focus here is on Ptolemaic Egypt and Seleukid Babylonia.

Rather than simply offer a fresh historical reconstruction of the causes, nature, and unfolding of the Judean revolt against Antiochos IV, this book aims to make a methodological contribution by examining how the authors of 1 and 2 Maccabees, as Judean scribes of Hasmonean times, elaborated the relation between historical experience and the literary transcription of it. It is now a well-established tenet of scholarship that before we can use literary works as sources of evidence for historical investigation, we need to clarify their internal narrative logic. This does not merely entail unmasking the authors' calculated use of rhetoric for ideological purposes suiting their political biases. More crucially, as far as possible we need to identify the cognitive and narrative codes of the culture in question, which determined the perception of reality of the contemporary social actors in the context, and also establish the ways in which ancient authors, as professional scribes, intuitively understood how to put this perceived experience into words and give it appropriate, meaningful literary form. This is not a matter of rhetorical manipulation on the part of the authors, or of consciously motivated bias, but of ethnopoetics, both generated by and catering to the basic values of the respective authors' society. I will refer to the way the authors of 1 and 2 Maccabees perceived reality as a "symbolic universe." What is more, the intentional distortions resulting from political biases—in which 1 and 2 Maccabees are not lacking—are inescapably shaped by these basic cultural codes.

First and second Maccabees have too often been, and still are, read as though their accounts were shaped by the same semantic categories as our own, as if certain words and concepts had the same connotations for their original audience as they do for us. In particular, a recurrent source of misinterpretation is the projection of the present-day categories "religion" and "politics" on these texts. But whereas according to modern Western semantic categories, 2 Maccabees' high interest in the temple is taken as evidence for its author's religiousness, according to ancient Judean criteria it is actually a token of political side-taking. The issue is not that the temple was desecrated and reinaugurated, but who did it. Admittedly, even a greater awareness of the cultural codes informing the Maccabees books (as well as other contemporary literary sources) will not solve all the uncertainties of these texts, because in practice while these cultural codes condition the authors, they do not prevent them from manipulating their material by selecting, rewriting, distorting, or accordingly omitting material as they think fit. That said, if we are more mindful of how cultural codes shape a given author's discourse, we will have more accurate parameters of interpretation for our historical reconstructions of the events in Judea. This is now the actual pressing matter, and this book primarily aims to contribute to its advance.

1. BOOKS 1 AND 2 OF THE MACCABEES

1.1. *The Literary Sources Documenting the Judean Rebellion*

The sources covering the Judean rebellion against Antiochos IV in the 160s B.C.E. are essentially of a literary nature: in chronological order, the book of Daniel, 1 and 2 Maccabees, and Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities* and *Jewish War*. Although the book of Daniel is held to be contemporary to the revolt, its allusive tone, typical of the apocalyptic genre, makes it problematic as a source of historical data. Moreover, Daniel was written in response to the disruption of the daily sacrifices,¹ and the range of information it offers is limited: only the few verses covering Antiochos IV's reign (Dan. 11:21–35) are usually deemed relevant to historical study, and they bear on what is traditionally described as Antiochos IV's "religious persecution."

Josephus wrote his *War* ca. 75 C.E. and *Antiquities* ca. 94 C.E. in Rome. The section of *Antiquities* that interests us is 12.237–56: starting from Antiochos IV's appointment of Jason, whom Josephus calls "Jesus," it describes his replacement with Menelaos (whom Josephus calls "Onias"), the ensuing party strife between the Oniads and the Tobiads (237–40), Menelaos's and the Tobiads' petition to Antiochos to build a *gymnasion* (241), Antiochos's campaign in Egypt (242–45) and his attack on Jerusalem on his way back (246–47); and the king's second attack on Jerusalem "two years later," during which he plundered the temple, prohibited the Judean customs, and persecuted the people (248–56). Starting from *Antiquities* 12.241, Josephus follows 1 Maccabees from 1:11 on. After a protracted debate about whether or not Josephus interspersed his paraphrase of it with additional sources exploitable by modern scholars, it is now established that the discrepancies between 1 Maccabees and *Antiquities* are owed to Josephus himself.² The summary of Antiochos's Egyptian campaign inserted at 12.242–45 is a typical example of his technique: although he did not paraphrase any specific source, he compiled from other works the missing information he thought was indispensable to his own account and composed the passage himself.

From *Antiquities* 12.241 on, therefore, Josephus's account has been discredited as an independent source of evidence. So what about the preceding sections, 12.237–40? The question is of interest, since they form the most ancient source mentioning the civil strife between the Oniads and the Tobiads (the second and last one being Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel* 11:14). In contrast with the prevailing tendency to hold this account as an independent source, I see it as much more plausible that, like the rest, it is Josephus's own composition.³ If we turn to Josephus's *War*, the few sections covering Antiochos IV's reign (1.31–40) add no information. In contrast with Daniel and Josephus, the first two Maccabees books offer a firsthand and detailed account of the events. The present book focuses primarily on these, as the most important sources on the Judean rebellion.

1.2. Dating 1 and 2 Maccabees

Although there can be no doubt that 1 and 2 Maccabees were written in the days of the Hasmonean dynasty, their precise dating is debated.⁴ Moreover, investigations of this issue partly hinge on questionable criteria, which range from the emphasis on specific “facts” whose authenticity is far from ascertained to questionable distinctions between the “original” works and later interpolations, and the alleged dependence of one work on the other. The literary analysis of 1 and 2 Maccabees put forward in this book questions the viability of this positivistic method. But while it corroborates the works’ dating to the days of the Hasmonean dynasty, reliable landmarks for narrowing down this time-span are scant. John Hyrkanos, the last character mentioned in 1 Maccabees, ruled in 134–104 B.C.E., providing a rough terminus post quem for this work. The date of the first letter prefixed to the account of 2 Maccabees, which supposes its completion, exhibits the date of 124 B.C.E., and to the extent that it is reliable, this may set a terminus ante quem. If these data are tenable, then the two works are roughly contemporary. Actually, the issue of their relative dating is secondary, since there is no reason to conclude that one is dependent upon the other. As I shall argue below, they simply betray a common tradition, and they will be treated as parallel works in this book.

1.3. 1 Maccabees

This proposal certainly runs against the common view, since 1 and 2 Maccabees are still widely regarded as markedly different because of their respective styles, scope, (alleged) subject matter, political (and religious) sensitivity, and possibly place of redaction. Notably, 1 Maccabees is a translation from a Hebrew original, and moreover imitates Septuagint Greek.⁵ Following the survey of the rule of the Seleukid dynasty from Alexander’s succession to Darius on in the first ten verses, the account starts from the establishment of the *gymnasion* under Antiochos IV (at 1 Macc. 1:11) and seemingly chronicles the ensuing events until the establishment of the dynastic principle within the Hasmonean family, with the first succession from father to son. Set in the shadow of the Seleukid dynasty, the first chapter surveys the time of disruption, culminating in a detailed account of the disruption of the temple cult and of the massacre of the Judeans faithful to their ancestral customs (the so-called religious persecution of 1 Macc. 1:41–64). The high priests Jason and Menelaos, who are explicitly identified in 2 Maccabees, are nowhere named in the corresponding account in 1 Maccabees. The rest of the book successively surveys the deeds of four heroes, Mattathias (1 Macc. 2:1–70), Judas (3:1–9:22), Jonathan (9:23–12:53), and Simon—the last of these by himself first (13:1–15:41) and then in association with his sons (16:1–22)—and closes with a short conclusion summarizing John Hyrkanos’s reign after his father’s death (16:23–24).

Because of this chronological pattern, 1 Maccabees is unanimously defined as dynastic history. Indeed the unmistakable bias of the account leaves no doubt that

its author was a Hasmonean supporter, most probably a court historian. Although the most recent studies of the literary composition of the work depart from the old view that 1 Maccabees is a plain linear chronicle,⁶ no structuring principle lending the work its inner coherence has yet been identified in a satisfying way. As a palliative, scholars persistently fall back on attempts to show that the extant work is composite.⁷

1.4. 2 Maccabees

The issues raised by 2 Maccabees are more complex. In particular, the literary structure of the work continues to baffle commentators. In its present form, the work includes two prefixed letters (2 Macc. 1:1–10a; 1:10b–2:18), the first enjoining the Judeans of Egypt to celebrate the Festival of the Dedication (Hanukkah), while the second narrates how Nehemiah rekindled the temple altar with hidden fire, and further evokes the divine fires that consumed Moses' and Solomon's sacrifices. The main body of the work begins with the proem (2:19–32), which famously describes the work as the abridged version of a longer historiographical opus allegedly written by one Jason of Cyrene—about whom, however, nothing is known. The main account itself is composed of four units. The first of these, the Heliodoros story (3:4–4:6), narrates the attempted plunder of the temple by Heliodoros, Seleukos IV's senior official, in the time of the high priest Onias III. The second unit (4:7–10:9), usually regarded as the principal one, tells the etiological story of the Hanukkah festival. It covers Antiochos IV's reign, successively narrating Onias III's deposition by Jason, Jason's foundation of the *gymnasion*, and his eviction by Menelaos (4:7–50); the king's campaign in Egypt and his assault on Jerusalem caused by the civil war between Menelaos and Jason, as well as the desecration of the temple, the disruption of the sacrificial rites, and the massacre of the Judeans (5:1–6:11). In 6:18–7:42 a lengthy description of the exemplary deaths of the faithful Judeans (the so-called martyrs) suspends the narrative. Closing this section are Judas Maccabee's first victories (8:1–36), Antiochos's death (9:1–18), and the temple rededication (10:1–8). The third unit (10:10–13:26) is entirely devoted to Judas's wars, lumping them all together in Antiochos V Eupator's reign. Finally, the fourth unit (14:1–15:37a) narrates the institution of a second festival commemorating Judas's victory over Nikanor and the latter's death. The narrative ends before the death of Judas Maccabee.

A. Literary Structure. The unifying principle of the literary structure of 2 Maccabees is not immediately apparent, to say the least, and this problem is further complicated by the fact that the work either is or purports to be an epitome. The combination of these two difficulties has encouraged the hunt for additions, interpolations, and displacements, as well as suspicions about cuts.⁸ Many would elide the first and last units (the Heliodoros story and the Nikanor's Day story)

altogether from what they suppose Jason's original to have been; there is unanimous agreement that the third unit (the wars section) lumps together different campaigns in complete disregard of chronology, although the question whether this unit is conceptually linked to the preceding or following one is debated; the martyrs stories inserted in 6:18–7:42 are almost unanimously seen as a late interpolation; the account of Antiochos IV's death should be chronologically located after the temple rededication, and Daniel Schwartz has pointed to this seemingly illogical order to argue that the story of the temple rededication is a secondary insertion that was added at the same time and by the same author as the prefixed festal letters.⁹ Moreover, scholars disagree whether the epitomator is responsible for the current (apparent) lack of coherence, some seeing him as a mere abbreviator, others as a genuine author. Recently Schwartz has reconciled his view of the work as composite with the affirmation that the writer was a genuine author in claiming that he not only abbreviated Jason of Cyrene's work but inserted the extant additions.¹⁰

Schwartz's drastically segmented reading of 2 Maccabees was published almost three decades after Robert Doran's detailed review of earlier source theories, in which the latter had concluded: "The application of the methods of source-criticism . . . has failed to turn up 'sources' in the technical sense. The epitome, therefore, must be considered as a whole and analysed accordingly."¹¹ Doran's conclusion is fully supported by the literary analysis of the main account of 2 Maccabees presented in this book, which admits of one possible addition alone, namely the so-called martyr stories of 6:18–7:42. With due respect to the prevailing view, the overall coherence of the text's literary structure leaves no doubt that its writer is a genuine author. For these reasons I will refer to 2 Maccabees as a work, and not as an epitome.

B. Subject Matter and Purpose: The Location Issue. Given this wide disagreement about the original form of the work, it is not surprising that its subject matter and purpose continue to elicit diverging appraisals. To begin with, the problem of the relation between 2 Maccabees and the original book by Jason of Cyrene has some bearing on this issue. Jason's place of origin prompted scholars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to surmise that he lived and wrote in the diaspora.¹² This implied a diasporan viewpoint in 2 Maccabees as well, which at that time was regarded as a mere epitome, the perfectly fluent Greek of the work even fostering the assumption that this too was written in the diaspora, most probably in Alexandria.¹³ Recently Schwartz has revived the Alexandrian or diasporan hypothesis on the argument that the author's religious sensitivity is not primarily centered on the temple and is therefore typically diasporan in approach. According to him, the subject matter of 2 Maccabees is the city of Jerusalem and not the temple.¹⁴ Doran now concurs, taking "the author's passionate dissent from the

practice [of Jews (*sic*) going to *gymnasia*]” to be a diasporan concern.¹⁵ In contrast, scholars relying on arguments of intertextuality point to a Judean setting, a conclusion that I substantiate in the present study.¹⁶

C. Subject Matter and Purpose: Further Aspects. The location issue is not the only cause of disagreement about the subject matter of 2 Maccabees. At first sight, it is easy to draw a reasonably agreeable list of the work’s major topics: the temple, the exemplary dead, divine epiphanies, Judas Maccabee (and the omission of Judas’s brothers), the sin-retribution (or measure-for-measure) motif illustrating God’s righteousness, and the (alleged) conflict between “Hellenism” and “Judaism.” Yet the controversy revolves not around the list per se but around the relative weight of each topic in the overall economy of the work. For instance, is the main focus on the temple or on the so-called martyrs? Schwartz’s claim that the narrative betrays a diasporan “religious and political orientation” has led him to revive the old claim that 2 Maccabees is more concerned with the martyrs than with the temple.¹⁷ However, in contrast with Schwartz, virtually all recent critics agree that the temple is the central motif of 2 Maccabees.¹⁸ Accordingly, there is some consensus about the (assumed) purpose of the work: to promote the celebration of the Hanukkah festival by recounting its etiological story, namely the desecration of the temple by Antiochos IV and its liberation.¹⁹ This indeed is patently the objective of the prefixed letters.

Disagreements resurface when we turn to secondary aspects. In particular, what is the relative weight granted to the martyrs and Judas Maccabee in liberating the temple? In George Nickelsburg’s view the martyrs are given prominence, whereas Judas Maccabee’s heroism is downplayed—an opinion shared by Doran (1981), whereas Jan Willem van Henten tends to concede equally important roles to the martyrs and Judas Maccabee.²⁰ In contrast, John Kampen puts the emphasis on the conflict between “Judaism” and “Hellenism,” and not the martyrs.²¹ Nonetheless, all commentators agree that the sin-retribution scheme, by which the oppressors of Israel are punished by God, is a major theme in the narrative, whether or not it is associated with the story of the temple’s desecration and liberation.²²

Virtually all critics are aware of the major shortcomings of their analyses: if the central topic of 2 Maccabees is the etiological story of Hanukkah, which is told in the second narrative unit of the work, what role does the Heliodoros story (the first unit) play? And the last unit? And why is the long unit about Judas’s wars (the third one) necessary? In other words, how does this definition of the subject matter and purpose explain the extant literary composition of the work?

D. The Author’s Religious and Political Sensitivity. The accepted definition of the subject matter and purpose of 2 Maccabees—to which I do not subscribe²³—further

impinges on a scholarly appreciation of the author's religious and political sensitivity. Although the authors of both 1 and 2 Maccabees are routinely described as "pious," only in the latter case does this characterization effectively influence the way many scholars perceive the nature of the work. Thus whereas 1 Maccabees is considered "dynastic history," 2 Maccabees is seen as "theological history."²⁴ This definition, as well as the insistent characterization of the author of 2 Maccabees as a "pious" (or "devout") man, is upheld even in the most recent scholarship, among both biblical scholars and historians of the rebellion.²⁵

This ingrained position explains the enduring opinion that the two authors display quite distinct political stances. The view that the author of 2 Maccabees kept his distance vis-à-vis the Hasmoneans continues to prevail in most recent studies, either explicitly or implicitly. In earlier scholarship, clues to this stance were sought in isolated verses allegedly critical toward Simon Maccabee; in the fact that the narrative breaks off before Judas's death, whereas 1 Maccabees takes its story down to John Hyrkanos;²⁶ and in the omission of the figure of Mattathias.²⁷ It was even contended that 2 Maccabees was a learned response to 1 Maccabees' pro-Hasmonean "propaganda," to use the term then accepted.²⁸ With the emergence of the theory that 2 Maccabees is "theological history," the author's supposed piety became the main ground for setting the works in opposition to each other. Nickelsburg opined that the author sided with the Hasidim, the Hasmoneans' "pious" opponents.²⁹ Doran also found in what he saw as the author's "religious" perspective a clue to his critical stance vis-à-vis the Hasmoneans.³⁰ In recent studies this perception seems to persist out of tradition rather than well-thought-out arguments, being sometimes simply implied, although outright statements that one is "dynastic history" and the other "theological history" have by no means disappeared.³¹ Nevertheless, some dissent is finally emerging, if only sporadically.³²

The idea that 2 Maccabees is "theological history" was first aired in the 1970s,³³ with the aim of salvaging the work from its previous appraisal as "pathetic [i.e., bad] historiography." However, while this new label opened fresh avenues of investigation into the properly literary composition of the work, it did little to improve its value in the minds of modern historians scouring ancient literary works primarily for hard facts on which to base "pragmatic" interpretations. If characterizing 2 Maccabees as "theological history" means that the author's primary interest is to demonstrate God's power at rescuing His temple and to show how sinful Gentiles are punished and Israel brought back to God's path, this is of no interest to historians of the Judean rebellion—or so it was perceived.

The gap between what modern historians consider viable evidence for reconstructing the history of the Judean rebellion, and what they believe the author of 2 Maccabees has to say about it, is made no narrower by the complementary—and no less ingrained—view that he perceived and described these events in terms of a conflict between "Judaism" and "Hellenism."³⁴ In fact although the conviction that

this is indeed the ancient author's view is seldom challenged, for some time now modern students of the rebellion have been convinced that the key to comprehending the events in Judea lies in the political, economic, and institutional aspects, whereas the supposedly religious aspects of the crisis were an unintentional by-product.³⁵ In short, for these critics our author was somewhat blind to what was actually happening in his days, and as additional proof of the man's lack of perspicacity, they quote the fact that despite his pointed hostility toward "Hellenism," he himself was thoroughly Hellenized, as his remarkable command of Greek rhetoric betrays.³⁶

The fact that literary students of 1 and 2 Maccabees have so far failed to unravel the connection between form and content in these works; the enduring conviction that the interpretive framework set by the author of 2 Maccabees is worthless to modern historians; the parallel conviction that the "pro-Hasmonean bias" of the author of 1 Maccabees is transparent enough to be easily emended, and that 1 Maccabees is "on the whole factual and objective,"³⁷ may partly explain why modern historians investigating the Judean rebellion continue to read these works in a basically positivistic way. By this, I mean that the two books are treated as linear accounts from which hard facts may be freely extracted and recomposed into "pragmatic" narratives suiting the modern criteria of rational historical explanation. To take a comparison, the history of the Judean rebellion against Antiochos IV continues to be written like the history of tyranny in archaic Greece was in the 1970s, on the basis of a literal reading of Herodotus. That said, it may be that the sustained influence of Bickerman's groundbreaking study of the Judean rebellion (and to a lesser extent that of Tcherikover) on virtually all subsequent scholarship is also responsible for the persistently unsophisticated handling of the literary sources by modern historians. Before proposing an alternative literary interpretation of the works that opens the way to alternative historical investigations, I will examine the consequences that the current literary appraisal of the two books has on the contemporary historical research on the rebellion.

2. THE MODERN HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE JUDEAN REBELLION SINCE BICKERMAN

2.1. *Bickerman*

Published in 1937, Elias Bickerman's *Der Gott der Makkabäer* (*The God of the Maccabees*)³⁸ marks a watershed in the modern study of the Judean rebellion against Antiochos IV. Bickerman's pioneering methodological claim was that this episode must be investigated in the context of the Seleukid empire, and the historical reliability of the ancient literary sources cross-checked with documentary evidence. In particular, inscriptions casting light on the legal and institutional status of

subject communities in the Seleukid empire, as well as on the state practices of the king and the central administration of the empire, provide precious comparative material.³⁹ For the first time, *Der Gott der Makkabäer* put forward a comprehensive, genuinely historical interpretation of the Judean crisis.

Bickerman starts his historical survey from Antiochos III's conquest of southern Syria from the Ptolemies in 200/198 B.C.E., seeing the legal settlement granted to Jerusalem by Antiochos III on this occasion (*Ant.* 12.138–44) as “the cornerstone for any reconstruction of the fate of Seleucid Jerusalem.”⁴⁰ At each step of his analysis, Bickerman contextualizes the Judean events against Seleukid political history. The financial strictures of the Seleukid dynasty entailed by the treaty of Apamea (188 B.C.E.), by which the Romans imposed heavy war indemnities on Antiochos III, are used to explain several episodes: Heliodoros's visit to Jerusalem (2 Macc. 3), interpreted as Seleukos IV's attempt to abolish the financial autonomy of the Jerusalem temple, and similarly Antiochos IV's successive replacements of Onias III by Jason and of Jason by Menelaos, explained as Antiochos's will to award the office of high priest to the highest bidder. Likewise the allegations that Menelaos stole and sold temple vessels and helped Antiochos IV plunder the temple to procure the money he owed the king (2 Macc. 4:27–28, 39; 5:15–16) are taken at face value and read in the light of the Apamea treaty; and finally Antiochos's plunder of the temple is made the last repercussion of Antiochos's financial strictures. Next, Bickerman used wide-ranging comparative material to offer a detailed analysis of the legal aspects of Jason's foundation of the *gymnasion* (2 Macc. 4:7–15).⁴¹ He famously identified the “Antiochenes of Jerusalem” as a *politeuma*, an institution known from other cities and denoting an organized community of foreign residents. The resulting legal situation was, in his view, the coexistence of a “sacred city” (a “temple-state”) side by side with a polis, a situation he compares with that of Comana in Cappadocia. Finally, Bickerman draws on his knowledge of the Hellenistic *gymnasia* to explain why and in precisely what way Jason's *gymnasion* was offensive to “pious Jews.”

Bickerman took advantage of his comparative standpoint to substantially depart from the version of his sources in several instances,⁴² relying on his sole intuition as a guide to build his own sequence of events from details plucked by turns from 2 Maccabees, Josephus, Jerome, and Polybius. His basic contention that Antiochos IV's attack on Jerusalem was motivated by the civil strife between Jason and Menelaos follows 2 Maccabees 5:1–14. However, whereas this source blames the episode solely on the personal ambitions of Jason and of Menelaos, Bickerman turns it into a nexus of personal ambition, family rivalries, and the local repercussions of the geostrategic conflict between the Seleukids and the Ptolemies, laying down his immensely influential theory of the Seleukid and Ptolemaic “parties.” Drawing on Jerome's *Commentary on Daniel* and Josephus's *Antiquities*, he argues that the Seleukid party in Jerusalem was represented by the Tobiads, who sup-

ported Menelaos, whereas the Oniads (i.e., Jason) had been driven to associate themselves with the Ptolemaic party.

This questionable use of the sources is responsible for another highly influential legacy of Bickerman's, namely his dividing the atrocities that occurred under Antiochos IV into three neatly differentiated sequences. First, Antiochos's plunder of the temple is treated as a separate episode,⁴³ which Bickerman dates to the aftermath of Antiochos's first Egyptian campaign—that is, to the autumn of 169 B.C.E. Next, Bickerman points to a military and political repression,⁴⁴ presented as the consequence of the civil strife between Jason and Menelaos reinterpreted as an attempted rebellion of the Ptolemaic party triggered by Antiochos's second invasion of Egypt. This sequence of political revolt and military reaction to it started in the autumn of 168 and lasted till the summer of 163, and was marked by the legal annihilation of the “temple-state,” the incorporation of the Jerusalem temple into the polis of the Akra, and the transformation of the “Jewish” community into a subordinated population incorporated within the territory of the polis.⁴⁵ Finally the “religious persecution” forms the third sequence, which started in December 167 and lasted till March 164.⁴⁶ Bickerman's analysis of Antiochos IV's “political repression” (i.e., the second phase) hinges on his definition of Antiochos III's decree for Jerusalem as a charter by which he had granted the Jews the right to live according to their ancestral laws. But whereas in a Greek city the ancestral constitution determined the political system, “for the Jews ‘the laws of the fathers’ meant Torah. Only Torah and nothing but Torah.” In other words, Antiochos III's “charter” transformed the Mosaic laws into Jerusalem's legal constitution.⁴⁷ Therefore when Jason first endowed his *politeuma* with a Greek constitution, he had to apply to Antiochos IV for derogation, since Mosaic law was the valid public statute in Jerusalem under royal guarantee.⁴⁸ Next the political repression comprised the abolition of the “charter” and the replacement of Mosaic law with a Greek constitution. In turn, its restoration by Antiochos V in 163 B.C.E. marked the end of the crisis. In contrast, Bickerman famously blames the “religious persecution” on the local authorities, by which he means both Jason and Menelaos, whom he dubs “renegades,” “Hellenists,” and “reformers.”⁴⁹ The Maccabean revolt was a reaction to this specific episode.⁵⁰

2.2. Tcherikover

By demonstrating that it was possible to propose a coherent and rational interpretation of the Judean events by contextualizing them in their Seleukid setting, Bickerman allowed a new start. An important complement to his monograph was Victor Tcherikover's *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, which was published in 1959.⁵¹ Tcherikover took the rational reinterpretation of the events further still by questioning Bickerman's idealistic conception of religious matters, and his own reconstruction departs from Bickerman's in several key aspects. First, against

Bickerman's view that the Antiochenes of Jerusalem formed a *politeuma* coexisting with the "temple-state," he argued that the entire city of Jerusalem was turned into a polis as Antiocheia of Jerusalem. However, this polis had an aristocratic character, and therefore full-fledged citizen rights were restricted to the wealthy.⁵² Second, he argued that "the conversion of the theocracy to a polis" did not entail the "abolition of the Jewish religion," thereby refuting Bickerman's assessment of the impact of Jason's *gymnasion* on "the Jewish faith."⁵³ Moreover, Tcherikover nuanced Bickerman's appreciation of Jason and Menelaos by defining the former as a "moderate" and the latter as an "extreme Hellenizer." Jason's leading motive was to put an end to the "self-differentiation from the Gentiles" in the political sense alone, given that "the Greek *politeia* ('way of government') was not a religious concept, but a political one."⁵⁴ Tcherikover identifies the "privileges [that] were to fall to the lot of Jerusalem as a result of the reform" as being of a primarily political and economic nature.⁵⁵

Finally, Tcherikover put forward a distinctly rationalized interpretation of Antiochos IV's "religious persecution" that departs from the sequence of events found in the sources as boldly as Bickerman's.⁵⁶ As he summarizes it, in 1 and 2 Maccabees (in fact, in 2 Maccabees), the events unfolded in the following order:⁵⁷ First, collisions between parties or personalities among the Jews; second, the military intervention of Antiochus in the affairs of Judea; next, the persecution; and last, the rebellion of the Hasmoneans. According to this order, the rebellion came as an answer to the persecution. In contrast, Tcherikover argued that the popular rebellion antedated, and hence explained, Antiochos IV's attack: "It was not the revolt which came as a response to the persecution, but the persecution which came as a response to the revolt."⁵⁸ This inversion restored the "political purpose" of Antiochos's decrees, but it required additional changes. First, it was necessary to pinpoint an alternative trigger to the rebellion, and accordingly Tcherikover pointed to Menelaos's theft of the temple vessels shortly after his appointment as high priest in 172 B.C.E., the earliest manifestation of popular anger being the ensuing murder of Lysimachos, Menelaos's brother and accomplice, by the mob. Tcherikover further intertwined the religious and cultural issue with an underlying class conflict. He equated the Hellenizers with the citizens of Jason's polis, who belonged to the upper class, whereas the popular movement comprised the poorer sections of the urban plebs who had been excluded from the citizen body, along with the agricultural population of the villages around the city, and the lower priesthood. Moreover, whereas the Maccabees effectively became leaders of the revolt only after the persecution, as the sources claim, in its early stage the popular movement was led by the Hasidim, the "pious." Therefore the king's crackdown on the "Jewish observances" was a rational act dictated by the identity of the rebels' leaders.

Subsequent scholarship viewed Tcherikover's analysis of the class conflict with reservation, and his claim that the rebellion preceded and therefore explained

Antiochos's "prohibition of the Jewish religion" won few adherents. However, by stressing Menelaos's alleged religious cynicism as well as the Hellenizers' economic motivations, Tcherikover paved the way for a strictly rationalized type of interpretation that prevailed in the scholarly circles of the 1970s and 1980s.

2.3. *Bringmann*

In his *Gott der Makkabäer*, Bickerman had achieved the scholarly ideal of putting forward a comprehensive historical interpretation that was both entirely plausible by the standards of his time and faithful to the testimony of the ancient authors themselves—albeit at the cost of arbitrarily reshuffling their data.⁵⁹ In contrast, the approach that crystallized in the 1970s and 1980s, and whose influence is felt to this day, generated a yawning gap between ancient and modern narratives.⁶⁰ As the biblical scholars redefined 2 Maccabees as "theological history," this was interpreted by historians of the revolt as a license to disregard the author's frame of interpretation—and all the more eagerly since, like most historians of their generation, they were convinced that the "real" driving forces of history were to be sought in the economic and political motivations of the leading actors. The main proponent of the "pragmatic school," as we may dub it, was Klaus Bringmann with his *Hellenistic Reform and Religious Persecution in Judea*, which was published in 1983. Bringmann's interpretation has been described as a combination of Bickerman's and Tcherikover's works,⁶¹ with the specific twist that he systematically selected from their propositions those most compatible with his extreme instrumentalist conception of religious matters.

Bringmann exploited Bickerman's theme of Antiochos IV's financial strictures further by adding the king's need to secure his position at the court at the beginning of his reign through bribes and by attributing his prospective Egyptian campaign to the war indemnities owed to the Romans.⁶² Antiochos supported Jason and Menelaos both because of his money needs and in order to put an end to the internal Judean conflict between Onias III and Simon. The incentive for Jason's "Hellenizing reform" was primarily economic, Jason seeking to promote commerce. Moreover, it is excluded that this reform affected the "traditional Jewish" cult, because it was Jason's and the priests' personal interest to maintain the purity of the temple, as their main source of revenue.⁶³ Menelaos put an end to Jason's Hellenizing reform for narrow political reasons, the Hellenizers being Jason's partisans.⁶⁴ Like his predecessors, Bringmann endorses 2 Maccabees' claim that Menelaos stole temple vessels in order to pay off the tribute arrears to Antiochos, magnifying the episode by arguing that it opportunely replenished the king's coffers on the eve of his Egyptian campaign.⁶⁵ In contrast with Tcherikover, he further reverts to 2 Maccabees' (and Bickerman's) version that Antiochos's attack on Jerusalem was caused by the civil strife between Jason and Menelaos, and maintains the distinction between Antiochos's military steps—in particular, his

establishment of a colony in Jerusalem—and the “religious reform.”⁶⁶ The latter was instigated by Menelaos for political reasons: by instituting a new cult in Jerusalem, Menelaos hoped to weaken the hereditary priesthood and strengthen his own power.⁶⁷ Logically, because the military colonists were Syrian, he opted for a Syrian cult.⁶⁸ Antiochos accepted Menelaos’s religious reform because he had no choice and, moreover, did not realize that such a move would be seen as sacrilegious by “pious Jews.”⁶⁹ The Maccabean rebellion was the outcome of this tragic misunderstanding.

Bringmann’s monograph constituted a new turning point in the scholarly investigation of the Judean rebellion. To a large extent, Bickerman and Tcherikover have been read through Bringmann’s lens ever since. At the same time, there is a sense that the classical model Bickerman and Tcherikover had put forward was being transformed into a paradigm, by which I mean a set of interconnected assumptions that together form a binding conceptual framework of analysis.⁷⁰ The outline of historical facts, the questions asked, and the underpinning theoretical premises that constitute the “Bickerman-Tcherikover paradigm” are interdependent.⁷¹ This is precisely why substantial changes are difficult to introduce in isolation.

For three decades the Bickerman-Tcherikover paradigm has determined the scholarly agenda on the Judean rebellion.⁷² This consists exclusively in finding ever more refined rational explanations to the same set of recurrent issues, using the same methodological premises—a positivist reading of the sources, endorsing and discarding the ancient authors’ version at will, a rigidly legalistic conception of both the local institutions and the interaction between the king and the local rulers, and an instrumentalist conception of religion—despite the fact that these premises are increasingly outdated. We may pursue our historiographical survey with a review of the salient issues that have been debated in the last three or four decades. Our following step will be to show how questionable the theoretical premises on which the Bickerman-Tcherikover paradigm is based have become. I will take advantage of this survey of topics to situate my own views.

3. THE MODERN HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE REBELLION: AN OVERVIEW OF THE TOPICS INVOLVED

3.1. *The Chronological Issues*

The first debated issue bears on the chronological frame. Because of contradictions between the book of Daniel and 1 and 2 Maccabees, it is still disputed whether Antiochos IV attacked Jerusalem at the outcome of his first Egyptian campaign, which lasted from November 170 to autumn 169 B.C.E., or after his second one, in the ensuing summer of 168. The matter is further complicated by uncertainty

about the question whether the book of 1 Maccabees uses a coherent dating system or mixes the Syrian-Macedonian and Babylonian time-reckoning systems of the Seleukid era. In the former the first year begins in Tishri (autumn) 312; in the latter, in Nisan (spring) 311.⁷³ The chronological issue is crucial to scholars who accept Bickerman's argument that Antiochos IV's attack on Jerusalem was a response to the strife between Jason and Menelaos, and endorse Bickerman's distinction between the "political repression" and the "religious persecution." If the "persecution decree"—the "prohibition of the Jewish religion," as scholars now say—was issued in December 167, as Bickerman believed, this means that more than one year elapsed between the two, compelling scholars to speculate about the possible causes of the aforesaid "prohibition."⁷⁴

In my view, on the basis of my literary analysis of the works, the very terms of the debate need modification. On the one hand, all three literary sources may be equally suspected of distorting the number of Antiochos IV's Egyptian campaigns, and there is no means to know whether he attacked Jerusalem in 169 or 168 B.C.E. On the other, I argue that Antiochos's plunder of the temple, his "political repression," and his "religious persecution" are actually three aspects of the same episode. Therefore the chronological framework of my historical reconstruction is based on the following landmarks: thanks to the Babylonian astronomical diaries it is now firmly established that Antiochos IV became king in September 175 and died in November 164 B.C.E.;⁷⁵ it is impossible to determine with certainty whether he attacked Jerusalem in 169 or in 168; nor is it possible to precisely date his decree, which meted out punishments in the wake of the rebellion. (While the temple cult was disrupted, it was not "prohibited" by this decree.) Antiochos V's decree (2 Macc. 11:23–26) rescinding his father's decree of suppression probably dates to early 163 B.C.E.,⁷⁶ immediately after Antiochos Eupator's accession to the throne.

Likewise it is unclear whether the Jerusalem temple was rededicated before or after Antiochos IV's death. In the former case, 25 Kislev (i.e., the commemorative date of Hanukkah) refers to December 165 B.C.E.; in the latter, to December 164.⁷⁷ This issue partly interlocks with the delicate dating of the four official letters clustered in 2 Maccabees 11:16–38. According to Christian Habicht's reconstruction, to which most scholars subscribe, an amnesty was granted to the rebels by Antiochos IV, to take effect on 30 Xanthikos (i.e., March 164 B.C.E.; 2 Macc. 11:27–33).⁷⁸ It is therefore likely that Judea was in a state of war in December 165, meaning that the temple rededication at this date is improbable. As the royal inscriptions of the ancient Near East make clear, the restoration of peace was a precondition to the foundation or refoundation (or rededication) of a temple, and there is no reason to doubt that this conception was reflected in actual practice.⁷⁹ On this account the date of December 164 B.C.E. for the temple rededication seems more plausible, although no certainty is possible.

John Ma has recently questioned not only Habicht's reordering and dating of these letters but indeed the very version of 1 and 2 Maccabees regarding the circumstances of the temple's rededication.⁸⁰ According to him it is implausible that the Maccabees won major victories against Seleukid armies in the years 167–166, because at this time Antiochos IV was gathering his military forces in the region of Antioch, not far away from Judea, in preparation for his Eastern expedition.⁸¹ Therefore, the temple was recovered not through the Maccabees' reconquest of Jerusalem but through negotiations between Menelaos and the Seleukid administration after Antiochos IV's death, Menelaos acting as the head of the Judean elites who had remained faithful to the Seleukids during the time of unrest. By this logic, the four letters of 2 Maccabees 11 date to Antiochos V's first year and respond to Menelaos's petition. The amnesty negotiated by Menelaos must be situated in March 163, and the date of the temple's rededication is uncertain—perhaps 25 Kislev of 163 B.C.E.⁸²

3.2. *Issues Relating to the Period Prior to Antiochos's Assault on Jerusalem*

The debated issues may be reviewed in their chronological order. A first series relates to the period prior to Antiochos's attack on Jerusalem.

A. The Assault on the City. As we saw earlier, Bickerman and Tcherikover analyzed the reason for Antiochos IV's assault on Jerusalem in very different ways. Tcherikover sees it as the consequence of the popular rebellion that had started earlier; and Bickerman, of the civil strife under way between Jason and Menelaos. While most scholars accept Bickerman's view, the Olympiodoros inscription, to my mind, now substantiates Tcherikover's belief that Antiochos began his crack-down in reaction to a popular rebellion.⁸³

B. The Plunder of the Temple. Following Bickerman, some scholars see the theft of the temple's treasures as a distinct episode that occurred in 169 B.C.E. (cf. 1 Macc. 1:20–24), the motive being Antiochos's need to replenish his coffers after his Egyptian campaign.⁸⁴ Alternatively, others explain the act of plunder in the context of the military repression that followed the civil strife (cf. 2 Macc. 5:15–21).⁸⁵ On the basis of my literary analysis, I argue that the three items distinguished as separate episodes by Bickerman—the temple plunder, political repression, and religious persecution—are actually three aspects of the same event.

C. The Deposition of Onias III. According to 2 Maccabees 4:7–10, Antiochos IV deposed Onias III upon Jason's initiative. Bickerman endorsed this version, contending that kings were entitled to depose the high priests at their discretion.⁸⁶ While he has been followed by Fergus Millar, who quotes *Antiquities* 12.237–38 in

support, other scholars have instead emphasized Jason's personal initiative in the matter.⁸⁷ As shown below in Chapters 7 and 10, a closer literary analysis reveals that the presentation of events offered in 2 Maccabees is patently biased. Although Jason did play an active role, it was Antiochos IV who actually took the initiative.

D. Jason's Legal Reform: The Antiochenes. The question continues to be debated whether Jason's reform turned the whole of Jerusalem into a Greek city under the name Antiocheia (Tcherikover's thesis) or whether he instituted a *politeuma* within the city (Bickerman's view).⁸⁸ Technically, the problem revolves around the translation of a phrase in 2 Maccabees 4:9 referring to Jason's creation of a list of "Antiochenes." While a minority has reaffirmed Bickerman's view, most scholars have accepted Tcherikover's philological demonstration that "Antiochenes" stands as a predicate accusative: that is, that Jason had received the king's permission to inscribe "those of Jerusalem *as* Antiochenes." Tcherikover's analysis is usually endorsed, together with his mitigating commentary that in actuality full citizenship was restricted to prominent families.⁸⁹ Fine-tuning Tcherikover's arguments, Maurice Sartre has suggested that, to judge from attested Hellenistic practice, Jason must have founded a city of Greek type and named it Antiocheia, after Antiochos IV. At the same time, the fact that Jason drew up the list of the new citizens implies that not all Judeans were automatically enfranchised.⁹⁰ Recently, Nigel Kennell confirmed afresh Tcherikover's translation, basing his philological analysis on epigraphic parallels, in particular the recently published Tyriaion inscription. While objecting to the translation itself, Doran upheld the view that Jason's reform turned the whole city into an "Antioch-in-Jerusalem."⁹¹ Arguably these technicalities have only a limited bearing on the issue of the social impact of Jason's reform, because even though the fate of the underprivileged urban population is open to question, by far most commentators agree that some segments of the population of Judea—in particular the nonurban one—were not enfranchised, and presumably suffered a degradation of both legal and economic status. In my view, this aspect is decisive for understanding the subsequent troubles. In recent years the foundations of *poleis* in native cities and temple-states have been adduced as parallels that may cast light on the nature and impact of Jason's reform.⁹² In this book I pay particular attention to the *polis* founded in Babylon under either Antiochos III or Antiochos IV.

E. The Legal and Economic Implications of Jerusalem's Politicization. A related issue concerns the legal implications of Jason's politicization of Jerusalem,⁹³ which commentators have interpreted in diametrically opposed ways. As summarized above, Bickerman was convinced that Antiochos III's decree of 200/198 B.C.E. had turned Mosaic law into the official *politeia* of Jerusalem, with the consequence that when Jason founded his *polis* in 175 B.C.E.—which in Bickerman's mind was

necessarily endowed with a constitution of Greek type—he needed a derogation from Antiochos IV. Moreover the creation of the polis entailed religious changes. With varying nuances, this view became a basic tenet of the Bickerman-Tcherikover paradigm and in its most extreme form—Bickerman’s own—has been recently revived by John Ma.⁹⁴ Conversely, Doran has defended the view that Jason’s reform had no real legal implications, denying the tenet that the politicization of a native city necessarily meant its adoption of a Greek type of government and institutions, citing as evidence the retention of indigenous titles for officials in various cities of Phoenicia, Syria, and Babylonia.⁹⁵ Likewise, Sartre has stressed that Jerusalem’s previous political institutions—namely the *gerousia*, priests serving as officials, and the high priest—remained unchanged.⁹⁶ I follow Sartre’s viewpoint. Moreover, I hold as implausible that Antiochos III’s decree endorsed anything but the political institutions of Judea.⁹⁷ No less important, several scholars have pointed out that alongside the religious and political factors, the increased tax burden that accompanied Jason’s reforms must have played a part in the rebellion.⁹⁸ In my view the Olympiodoros inscription brings additional clues to the fiscal aspect of the rebellion, although it invites a modification of its chronology. (See above, §3.1.)

F. The Religious Implications of Jason’s Reforms. Bickerman’s thesis that Jason and Menelaos were intent on effecting a Hellenizing religious reform of the temple cult was famously endorsed by Martin Hengel,⁹⁹ and more recently also by George Aperghis.¹⁰⁰ Alternatively, Tcherikover and Bringmann emphasized the underlying political and economic motivations, whereby the religious changes were rather the consequence and not the motive driving the reform.¹⁰¹ Subsequent studies tend to combine the religious and instrumentalist explanations.¹⁰² As shown in this book, the surmise that Jason’s reform involved specifically “religious” problems is erroneous.

G. The Gymnasion. Initiated by Bickerman, the debate aimed at clarifying why the institution of the *gymnasion* was deemed offensive by “pious Jews” seems to be coming to an end, as recent studies now argue that the practices of the *gymnasion* need not have entailed major breaches of religious tradition.¹⁰³ In a fundamental study of 2 Maccabees 4:7–15, our main source of evidence on the *gymnasion*, Kennell established that, as elsewhere in the Hellenistic world, the main purpose of the Jerusalem *gymnasion* was the physical training of ephebes.¹⁰⁴ As shown in Chapter 5 below, the question why in 1 and 2 Maccabees the *gymnasion* is described as an “abomination” is a typical example of how a revised literary analysis of the texts may change the very terms of the question.

H. The Plunder of the Sacred Vessels by Menelaos. So far as I am aware, the overwhelming majority of commentators accept outright 2 Maccabees’ claim that Menelaos stole temple vessels to pay the tribute; their disagreement is limited to

whether this deed was sacrilegious or not.¹⁰⁵ To my mind, this claim is merely a case of slandermongering, the far-reaching ideological resonances of which are analyzed below in Chapter 5.

3.3. *Issues Relating to the Military Repression and the “Religious Persecution”*

A second set of issues concerns the military repression and the alleged “religious persecution” (or “prohibition of the Jewish religion,” to quote the favored alternative phrase).

A. Those of the Akra. In Bickerman’s wake, there is a wide consensus that the fortress of the Akra housed both a military garrison and civilians, the latter variously called “renegades” or “Hellenized Jews.”¹⁰⁶ Recently, John Ma refined Bickerman’s view by sketching out a precise legal procedure that may aptly support it, whereby the polis that had been founded by Jason in 175 B.C.E. was refounded by Antiochos IV following the Judean revolt. The refoundation involved a *synoikismos* (synoecism): that is, the merging of a group of foreigners with privileged locals. The polis received new laws, which were written by a lawgiver, the “Geron the Athenian” of 2 Maccabees 6:1, as well as fortifications (the Akra).¹⁰⁷

An additional issue concerns the ethnic identity of the foreign settlers, some endorsing Bickerman’s view that they were ethnic Syrians, while one scholar has argued they could only be Greeks.¹⁰⁸ This dispute was generated by Bickerman’s claims that the Jerusalem patron deity was identified with a Syrian god by the foreigners and that some of the rites described in the persecution accounts are of Syrian origin.

B. The Identity of the Instigators of the “Prohibition of the Jewish Religion” and their Motivations. In the wake of Bickerman and Bringmann,¹⁰⁹ some scholars put the blame for the so-called prohibition on the “Jewish Hellenizers,” who by deception incited the king to promulgate his decree of prohibition.¹¹⁰ Others put the blame on the king alone.¹¹¹ Strikingly, those who indict the “Jewish Hellenizers” explain Antiochos IV’s support for their measures by invoking a tragic misunderstanding: the king supported the prohibition of the “Jewish laws” because he was unaware of their specificity—prompted not so much by hostility as by ignorance.¹¹² In contrast, those imputing the initiative to the king are sometimes reduced to concede that his motivations remain obscure.¹¹³ John Ma has recently contended that the cultic reforms were but the logical consequence of what in essence was a purely administrative reform, namely Antiochos’s refoundation of the polis of Antiocheia, which had originally been founded by Jason.¹¹⁴

The settlers have also been assigned some responsibility in the cultic changes. Thus, although most scholars identify Zeus Olympios as a Greek deity promoted

by Antiochos, Bickerman argues that this Greek name actually refers to the Syrian god Baalshamin, an identification made by the settlers, who moreover instituted Syrian rites. (This line of argument was recently revived by Aperghis.)¹¹⁵ Through the literary analysis expounded here, I argue instead that this so-called “prohibition of the Jewish religion” has no historical basis whatsoever and that what is being described in the sources is in fact a literary elaboration of the symbolically more sensitive aspects of the military repression that followed the popular rebellion.

C. The Authenticity and Actual Tenure of Antiochos IV’s Decree (1 Macc. 1:41). According to 1 Maccabees, a royal decree ordered all the king’s subjects to forsake their customs and become one people. In the earlier modern historiography, this generated the tenet that Antiochos IV carried out an active Hellenizing policy, which was allegedly demonstrated by his exceptionally active policy of city foundations as well as his promotion of the cult of Zeus Olympios.¹¹⁶ Alongside the ongoing discussions regarding Antiochos’s policy in these two matters, the actual content and very existence of this decree remain controverted.¹¹⁷ Ma has recently advocated anew, in a slightly modified form, the old view that Antiochos IV’s active policy of state centralization included questions of worship.¹¹⁸ Through active interventions in the cities of Syria and Cilicia, among them his promotion of Zeus Olympios as a unifying cult, Antiochos IV aspired to create a homogeneous imperial culture within a metropolitan area. Ma suggests that the description of Antiochos’s “universal edict” in 1 Maccabees could be a distorted echo of this policy.

The literary analysis proposed below in Chapter 6 supports the conclusion that the notion of a decree “prohibiting the Jewish customs” has no historical basis. That said, it is plausible that Antiochos promulgated a decree with a totally different purpose whose content was either severely distorted by the popular Judean memory or reinterpreted in a contentious way by the author of 1 Maccabees. I contend that the actual decree announced punishing measures following the crushing of the popular rebellion. Alternatively, in tune with John Ma’s hypothesis that Geron was the lawgiver of the refounded polis, 1 Maccabees may contain a distorted echo of the foundation decree.

Despite the ongoing debates over these issues, the very framework of discussion changed very little from the publication of Bringmann’s monograph in 1983 till the early 2010s. By this I mean that neither the critical machinery used to verify the reliability of the literary sources nor the underpinning picture of the Hellenistic world was revised in any substantial way, even though in the meantime studies of the Hellenistic world at large were anything but static. In particular, our comprehension of the relations between the central power and local communities was thoroughly modified.¹¹⁹ As a result the tenets of the Bickerman-Tcherikover para-

digm have become untenable by the current scholarly standards of investigation of the Hellenistic world, making its interpretations of the rebellion in question increasingly implausible. Since the 2000s, and more clearly since the early 2010s, research on the Judean revolt seems to be taking a new start.¹²⁰ To allow a better appreciation of this turn, here follows a discussion of the more questionable premises of the paradigm in light of the current standards.

4. THE BICKERMAN-TCHERIKOVER PARADIGM: A REVIEW OF ITS FLAWED THEORETICAL PREMISES

The main methodological premises of the Bickerman-Tcherikover paradigm may be summarized as follows:

1. The ongoing positivist reading of the ancient literary sources, coupled with an arbitrary handling of their versions; details are either retained as hard facts or discarded, according to the scholar's preconceived frame of analysis, and not as the result of a comprehensive literary analysis of the works.
2. The conception of institutions remains legalistic, and the relations between central government (the Seleukid king and administration) and subject communities are for the most described as top-down processes.
3. Discussions about the Hellenization of Jerusalem in general, and the *gymnasion* in particular, are persistently underpinned by an essentialist view of culture, turning the focus on the wrong questions.
4. The conception of religion remains instrumentalist, with two main consequences: on the one hand, the implications of the steps taken by Antiochos IV, Jason, and Menelaos on the "Jewish religious customs" are downplayed by invoking political and economic motivations. Scholars usually overlook the alternative approach, namely to start anew with an in-depth literary analysis of the ancient sources to reassess what really happened. On the other hand, the various semantic fields of religion, politics, economy, and culture are implicitly understood to be coterminous with ours: hence the way ancient actors and ancient historians are regularly defined as either "pious" or "Hellenized," the latter term being synonymous with either "liberal" or "skeptical" for many commentators. This system of categorizing misrepresents the Judean society.
5. Because of these combined questionable premises, the very criteria guiding the selection of the comparative documentary material employed to support the scholar's case also remain positivist. The legalistic approach, in particular, explains the persisting tendency to overemphasize the parallels with the world of the old Greek cities, although recent efforts to integrate material

from Babylonia must be noted. And while each one of these flawed premises has a specific effect on modern analysis, in some instances they combine and reinforce each other, resulting in a “paradigm” generated by their cumulative effect.

4.1. *Positivist Reading of the Sources*

In a typically positivist manner, Bickerman crafted his historical outline with details gleaned selectively from diverse sources, treating them as though they were complementary factual databases, in complete disregard for their respective intrinsic literary qualities. Similarly, in line with his *Quellenforschung* training, he explained the differences between the various sources, as well as what he thought were inner contradictions within each, as evidence that the ancient authors themselves had combined several sources in their accounts. Although scholars now pay greater attention to the specificities of each work, as a rule the ancient sources are still basically read in a literal way. As noted above, the most striking product of Bickerman’s *Quellenforschung* method is his influential theory about the Seleukid and Ptolemaic “parties.”¹²¹ But of the ancient authors, only Josephus and Jerome talk of “parties,” and it is no coincidence that they wrote in imperial times.¹²² Since Bickerman, students of Roman historiography have demonstrated the extensive authorial interventions of Roman historians in their sources,¹²³ and we may reasonably think that Josephus and Jerome reread their Hellenistic sources (1 Maccabees and Daniel, respectively) through the lens of the Roman civil wars of late Republican and imperial times. Their Judean “parties” therefore do not reflect independent evidence but denote their mistaken projections from one context to the other. While Dov Gera has questioned their existence by reexamining each case empirically, I argue that these alleged parties may be dismissed altogether, both on the basis of literary arguments and because they have no place in the current understanding of the political culture of Hellenistic societies outside the context of the Greek poleis.¹²⁴

The enduring positivist reading of 1 and 2 Maccabees (and Josephus) may partly be related to the disciplinary background of historians of the Seleukid period. Until recently it was admitted that the analysis of inscriptions and authors like Diodorus Siculus and Strabo did not require sophisticated literary tools.¹²⁵ Significantly, the recent impetus toward applying the technique of discourse analysis to the study of inscriptions has prompted Seleukid scholars to propose discourse analyses of 2 Maccabees as well.¹²⁶ It is the purpose of this book to show that the tools required for analyzing that text are of a totally different nature. In a recent study, Ian Moyer has demonstrated that the Delian Sarapis aretology, recounting how a certain priest won a trial against his own enemies and those of the god, is informed by the Egyptian mythical pattern of the struggle between Osiris and Seth.¹²⁷ I argue that this sort of inquiry into the non-Greek intertextual references

of texts written in Greek is what is needed in our case, which obviously requires some acquaintance with the local cultures of the Hellenistic world, as I shall explain below (§6).

4.2. *The Legalistic Conception of Institutions: The “Charter” Theory*

Among the Hellenistic scholars of his generation, Bickerman was a leading proponent of the legalistic conception of the relations between kings and local communities. According to his surrender-and-grant theory,¹²⁸ local communities automatically lost their political identity by right of conquest and were reinstated through royal charters. He believed that this is what happened in Judea in 200/198 B.C.E. and identified Antiochos III’s decree about Jerusalem (*Ant.* 12.138–44) as one such “charter.”¹²⁹ As we saw above, this means that this legal document transformed “Jewish” cultic customs into the constitution (*politeia*) of Jerusalem. Precisely because Mosaic law had acquired legal validity, Jason needed a royal derogation to install his *politeuma*, endowed with a Greek “constitution.” Moreover the Mosaic law was abolished overnight when Antiochos IV created the polis of the Akra and was then restored overnight by his successor.

Bickerman’s charter theory has enjoyed enduring popularity because it enables scholars to rationalize away a wide range of “religious” issues¹³⁰—from the imputed consequences of Jason’s Hellenizing reform to Menelaos and Antiochos IV’s supposed “prohibition of the Jewish observances.” However, not only has the surrender-and-grant model, of which the charter theory is part, been questioned at root, but the legalistic approach underpinning it has also come under sharp criticism by an increasing number of Hellenistic scholars because it unthinkingly apprehends the nature of the Hellenistic kingdoms through the lens of the modern Western state.¹³¹ In its ideal description, this state model is characterized by centralized and standardized administrative structures that are independent from the local social networks. In addition, the relations between the central power and local elites are mediated by a set of objectively defined laws, and the central government makes decisions according to rational motivations and implements them through top-down procedures.¹³² In contrast, the stately culture of the Hellenistic kingdoms was closer to what Joseph Manning has called the “bureaucratic premodern state,”¹³³ wherein the administrative and political structures were organically embedded in the social system, law was customary, and decision making was the outcome of pragmatic negotiations framed by local custom between the central (imperial) power and the local elites, a procedure neatly encapsulated by the phrase “empire as negotiation.”

In recent years students of the Hellenistic kingdoms have insisted that no attempt was made to standardize their provincial organization according to a pre-conceived model. In each province the local political and administrative traditions were respected insofar as they were compatible with the interests of the central

power. At the same time they were progressively modified for adaptation to the political culture of the central power. Not only were changes negotiated, but it was the primary interest of the local elites to adapt to the imperial culture, so as to ensure good relations with the imperial power and strengthen their leverage in local affairs. Parenthetically, the process of Hellenization of the Hellenistic East is now analyzed according to this model.¹³⁴ In addition, although kings could meddle brutally with local affairs to protect their own interests, their interventions most often consisted in replacing recalcitrant local leaders with more compliant rivals, without modifying the local anatomy of the political order.¹³⁵ Only in the old Greek poleis were royal interventions likely to entail a change of *politeia*, in particular from oligarchy to democracy, because of the specific political culture of Greek society. Otherwise, kings by no means meddled with those local customs that regulated the relations between men and gods.¹³⁶

Bickerman's charter theory is underpinned by the modern delineation of the semantic field of politics—an order defined by an objective set of laws regulating the public sphere and liable to modifications by rational decision: that is, precisely the substance of the legalistic approach. It is now the widely shared view that the latter is inadequate for fully comprehending not only the Hellenistic kingdoms but also the Greek polis.¹³⁷ If we accept these revised premises, we must exclude the supposition that the Mosaic law became a “political constitution” that could be canceled and restored overnight by royal fiat. In other words, the current perception of the ancient political culture rules out the path posited in the frame of the Bickerman-Tcherikover paradigm as the best means for rationalizing the “religious persecution.” Furthermore, the model of “empire as negotiation” also precludes the tragic-misunderstanding thesis. Precisely because of the negotiation process, kings were necessarily aware of the implications of their decisions on the local social order—and this must surely include their effects on what we today call religion.

4.3. *The Essentialist View of Culture: Hellenization*

As just suggested, the concept of empire as negotiation has bearings on our understanding of the process of institutional Hellenization—that is, the transformation of a city of non-Greek political tradition into a Greek polis (or politicization). According to our revised paradigm, instances of institutional Hellenization were mostly if not always initiated by the local elites, and rather than follow a standardized model, they accommodated local traditions.¹³⁸ This was true in particular in the realm of the relations between men and gods. Recently Rolf Strootman has analyzed the institutions of poleis in Babylon and Jerusalem according to this revised model.¹³⁹ But in order to refute the modern comments about the cultural and institutional Hellenization of Jerusalem in a comprehensive manner, we need to add the issue of religion.

4.4. *The Instrumentalist Conception of Religion: Piety versus Impiety and “Hellenism” versus “Judaism”*

The instrumentalist conception of religion is the natural complement of the legalistic conception of the Hellenistic state culture. In the case of the Bickerman-Tcherikover paradigm, it is furthermore inseparable from the essentialist conception of culture, because it upholds that the author of 2 Maccabees saw the crisis as a conflict between “Judaism” (a “religion”) and “Hellenism” (a “culture”).

In the wake of theoretical studies in the anthropology of religion, students of the ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern religious systems have long since admitted that these were neither a matter of beliefs nor of private choice,¹⁴⁰ in contrast to the religious experience of modern Western societies. Most scholars dealing either with 1 and 2 Maccabees or with the Judean rebellion tend to reason with this modern conception in mind. The differences between the two models and their consequences for the study of the ancient literary works and the historical events are examined in detail elsewhere in this book,¹⁴¹ and so I will only summarize the issue here. In a nutshell, the basic question concerns the different ways in which the semantic fields of religion, politics, economy, and culture are construed in modern Western and preindustrial societies.

The modernist approach typically involves an instrumentalist conception of religion, whereby the social elites and political leaders manipulate religion as a tool of political, social, and economic control. By this logic, Jason and Menelaos are presented as exclusively concerned with furthering their political and economical interests, and whatever religious measures they take are therefore subordinated to these goals or are merely unintentional consequences.

Moreover, scholars endorsing the instrumental approach have gone so far as to claim that the “Jewish Hellenizers” willfully embraced Greek religious rites in becoming citizens of the polis of Antiocheia and undid their circumcision in order to attend Jason’s *gymnasion*. Their behavior was the natural consequence of what instrumentalists see as their “cultural” choice to become Hellenized, which shocked “pious Jews” because it contravened the Mosaic laws.¹⁴² This contention not only rests on a blend of legalistic and instrumentalist assumptions but moreover equates Hellenism with the enlightened and rational “religion of the philosophers.” This indeed was what Bickerman claimed, overlooking the fact that in Hellenistic times the Greek themselves were very conservative in their religious praxis.¹⁴³ No Greek city—let alone the partisans of Jason and Menelaos—ever embraced the “religion of the philosophers.”¹⁴⁴ In particular, it is inconceivable that a significant number of the Judeans who attended the *gymnasion* undid their circumcision for “cultural” reasons—most certainly not the priests, Jason and Menelaos included. Even Bringmann’s instrumentalist logic rules out this possibility. By dissimulating their circumcision, priests would have been debarred from entering the temple *temenos* because their new state made them impure, and therefore they

would have lost their main source of income—unless we want to claim that such subjects had no scruples about trespassing basic rules of purity; but this requires taking the instrumentalist argument very far indeed, although we have evidence that rules of purity were scrupulously respected by the citizens of the Greek poleis themselves.¹⁴⁵

The alternative construction of the semantic fields of religion and politics proposed in this book pivots on the idea that in ancient Judea the notions of piety and impiety had political connotations. Therefore in 1 and 2 Maccabees, the systematic characterizations of Judas and Simon Maccabee as pious men, and accordingly of Jason and Menelaos as impious, are contentious constructs on the part of the authors and not objective descriptions of reality. To claim that one leader is pious and another impious was to acknowledge the former as a legitimate ruler and denounce the latter as illegitimate. In light of this, there is no reason to believe that Jason and Menelaos were not likewise dutiful in their roles as high priests, at least in the minds of their partisans.

Finally, if we reject the modernist construction of the semantic fields of religion and culture, problems arise with the custom among scholars of translating *Ioudaïsmos* and *Hellēnismos* as “Judaism” (a religion) and “Hellenism” (a culture).

4.5. *Using Documentary Sources as Comparative Evidence: Greek Cities versus Babylonian and Egyptian Temples*

From the above it becomes clear that these outdated premises—legalism, essentialism, and instrumentalism—form a nexus coherent enough to offer a paradigm. Hence, the alternative paradigm of the bureaucratic premodern state, with its own nexus of methodological assumptions, entails revising some aspects of the comparative method in use since Bickerman to contextualize the testimony of the ancient literary works. In particular, the nature and geographical scope of the comparative data needs to be redefined.

For Bickerman the Judean events constituted a case study to test his propositions for Seleukid institutions.¹⁴⁶ Accordingly, he focused primarily on documentary evidence from the Seleukid empire to validate the historical plausibility of the literary sources on the rebellion, making only few references to Ptolemaic papyri. Furthermore, despite his tenet that Greek poleis and native *ethnē* (polities) were treated differently by Hellenistic kings, his claim that Antiochos III’s “charter” turned Mosaic law into Jerusalem’s *politeia* in the (erroneous) sense of a “political constitution” may explain why he chose inscriptions concerning the old Greek cities as his main source for comparison.¹⁴⁷ Bickerman’s premises are questionable, however. Although it is undeniable that the world of the Greek poleis may provide useful comparative material, the legalistic approach tends to blur pivotal differences between the cultural traditions of an old Greek polis and those of a non-Greek society centered on its temple—the point being that political institutions themselves are

part and parcel of any society's cultural tradition. If instead we shift our focus from the formal definition of the "constitution" to the identity of the elites who were the king's interlocutors, a more interesting source of parallels becomes other non-Greek societies in which temples and priestly elites had a similar status. In this perspective, Ptolemaic Egypt becomes as relevant as Seleukid Babylonia.

As it happens, in the last decade studies have been paying greater attention to non-Greek political models as sources of comparison. Already in the late 1970s, Fergus Millar had made a pioneering use of non-Greek material for comparative purposes. In tune with the scholarly concerns of his days, however, his focus was the impact of Hellenization on the cultural and religious life of non-Greek communities,¹⁴⁸ and the geographical scope of his survey was accordingly the Syrian area, of which the Judean cultural and cultic system is considered a subgroup. In recent years, the availability of studies on Hellenistic Babylon accessible to non-Assyriologists has enabled scholars to realize that that city is particularly relevant to the study of Jerusalem, given their striking similarities of sociopolitical organization and the presence of a Greek polis in both.¹⁴⁹ Since Millar's days, the shift of focus from "culture" to institutions reflects a change in the understanding of the processes of cultural encounter that are lumped under the term "Hellenization."

As noted above, Ptolemaic Egypt cannot be overlooked if our goal is to cast light on the relations between the kings and temples. Recent studies on the relations between the Ptolemaic dynasty and Egyptian temples greatly facilitate comparison with Jerusalem.¹⁵⁰ In my historical reconstruction of the relations between the Seleukids and the Jerusalem temple under Antiochos III, Seleukos IV, and Antiochos IV, I appeal to both Babylonia and Egypt for comparison.¹⁵¹

It is of course no coincidence that the ancient Near East as a whole—long adopted by biblical scholars to contextualize their research—rather than the Seleukid empire is the geographical area that, in my view, constitutes the natural social and cultural environment from which comparative material for the study of Seleukid Judea should be drawn.

A. The Olympiodoros and Tyriaion Inscriptions. As noted, a shift of focus to the ancient Near East does not invalidate the relevance of Greek inscriptions, as confirmed by two recently published texts that shed outstanding light on the events of Judea on the eve of the rebellion. One is a fragmentary inscription from Marisē (the capital of Idumea) documenting Seleukos IV's appointment of one Olympiodoros as provincial high priest (or some equivalent title) in the satrapy of Koilē Syria and Phoinikē in 178 B.C.E., which sets Heliodoros's visit to Jerusalem (2 Macc. 3) in a new context, vindicating the intuition of several scholars that this episode had to do with taxes.¹⁵²

The Tyriaion (or Toriaion) inscription from Asia Minor for the first time documents the concrete process of raising the status of what was a military settlement

and its adjacent village to that of a polis in its own right. The inscription's discovery offered revealing material for the study of Jason's reforms, particularly as the document attests to the prominent role played by the *gymnasion* in the organization of the nascent civic body.¹⁵³ At the same time, it has been used to emphasize the military character of Jason's *gymnasion*, which signals a substantial innovation relative to prevailing commentaries.¹⁵⁴

Conversely, recent studies have raised questions over whether the war indemnity paid to the Romans by the Seleukids caused financial strictures to the dynasty, thereby challenging one of Bickerman's most influential contributions to the analysis of the economic causes of Seleukos IV's and Antiochos IV's behavior in Judea.¹⁵⁵

4.6. *The Paradigm: From Innovation to Impracticality*

The continued preference for the Greek poleis as a useful parallel is not the most problematic legacy of the Bickerman-Tcherikover paradigm, whose heuristic limits are made evident by two other factors.

First, the lack of a thorough literary analysis of the ancient works continues to hamper a full understanding of the nature and causes of the Judean rebellion. Because of this omission, in too many cases scholars seize on any comparative evidence that they can explain what is actually likely to be a literary construct mistaken for a hard fact. As a result, some of the basic aspects of the historical outline proposed by the paradigm are becoming increasingly inexplicable in light of our growing understanding of the Hellenistic world and of the Seleukid empire in particular. The most blatant deficiencies of the paradigm are the implicit belief that "Hellenized" means "religiously liberal" and the ensuing claim that Menelaos purloined sacred vessels to pay tribute arrears; and the further claims that Antiochos IV plundered the temple of his peaceful subjects simply to replenish his coffers, that the Judean cultic customs were the object of a formal prohibition by decree, that the Judeans were forced to participate in Greek rites, and that Antiochos was unaware of the consequences of his decisions on his subjects (the popular tragic-misunderstanding thesis).

The limits of the paradigm's practical application are particularly well illustrated by two articles published in the early 2010s by Robert Doran and John Ma, whose reflections respectively make a genuine attempt to incorporate aspects of the updated picture of the Seleukid empire while at the same time keeping within the parameters of the old paradigm.¹⁵⁶ In particular, the two articles are predicated on Bickerman's view that the Mosaic laws were transformed into Jerusalem's "constitution" by Antiochos III's grant of a "charter," and in a way they exemplify the potential pitfalls of basing a comparative approach on epigraphic material stemming from old Greek cities while sticking to legalistic premises.¹⁵⁷ Within these constraints, the two authors seek to break the current deadlock regarding who

instigated the “prohibition of Jewish rites” by proposing rational interpretations of the “prohibition” while at the same time refraining from imputing responsibility for it to Antiochos IV. As we saw above, so far all the rationalized (and instrumentalist) interpretations have put the blame on the “Jewish Hellenizers.” Eventually, however, both Doran and Ma seem compelled to maintain the implausible argument of the tragic misunderstanding to explain the king’s behavior.¹⁵⁸ This is not to say that the attempt to decode and make sense of the persecution accounts is mistaken in itself. My point is that these attempts will remain fruitless as long as they are framed by the Bickerman-Tcherikover paradigm.

The second aspect of the paradigm’s counterproductiveness is that available documentary evidence that might undermine the paradigm’s premises tends to be overlooked. Thus Bickerman claimed that the military settlers installed in the Akra by Antiochos IV merged with the “Jewish Hellenists” to form the new civic body controlling the territory of Judea during the years of the “political repression,” a contention that is readily accepted¹⁵⁹ because it provides an explanation of how the colonists could have access to the temple, and thus makes them ostensibly responsible for introducing foreign rituals. However, not only is there no epigraphical evidence that military colonists received the same status as the local privileged elite upon their arrival, but there is plenty to indicate the contrary—a fact simply disregarded in order to keep the Bickerman-Tcherikover paradigm viable.¹⁶⁰

The second factor involves a blend of Bickerman’s heritage and the enduring prejudice about the ability of the author of 2 Maccabees to understand the world in which he lived. In 2 Maccabees 4:11, we read that Jason “pushed aside the royal concessions [*philanthrōpa basilika*] to the Judeans which were put in place through John the father of Eupolemos.”¹⁶¹ Since Bickerman, the consensus has been that the cancelled *philanthrōpa basilika* were those granted by Antiochos III’s decree (Bickerman’s charter). But precisely what concessions were granted? As we saw above, Bickerman’s charter theory led him to focus on the political significance of Antiochos III’s decree, and moreover to contend that the latter concerned the laws of Moses. Yet, in papyri and inscriptions from the Ptolemaic and Seleukid realms, the phrase *philanthrōpa basilika* primarily refers to tax privileges: that is, either exemptions or remissions granted by kings. Although Bickerman was perfectly aware of this meaning—he completed his *Institutions des Séleucides* shortly before his monograph on the Maccabean rebellion—he somehow dismissed its pertinence in 2 Maccabees 4. In subsequent years, the usefulness of Bickerman’s charter theory for rationalized (instrumentalist) reconstructions of the Judean events explains why, instead of discarding Bickerman’s thesis on the basis of the documentary evidence, scholars have continually attempted to adjust it apace with our changing comprehension of the relations between Seleukid kings and local communities¹⁶²—in my view with scant success.

I believe an additional reason why the fiscal connotation of *philanthrōpa basilika* is persistently overlooked in the context of 2 Maccabees is the ingrained conviction that the work in question is theological history. Moreover, the *philanthrōpa basilika* are mentioned in the very passage (2 Macc. 4:7–15) in which the author speaks of the conflict between *Ioudaïsmos* and *Hellēnismos*. That said, this is also the passage in which he denounces Jason's (in his view) outrageous proposal to Antiochos IV to increase the tribute rate (4:7–9). Moreover, the main topic of Antiochos III's decree is not "constitutional" arrangements but tax exemptions. To my knowledge, the place of the fiscal issue in the present episode has never been seriously explored,¹⁶³ but even to begin such an inquiry one must accept the idea that the author of 2 Maccabees did in fact pay attention to fiscal issues and was not concerned exclusively with "religious" matters. This requires a proper understanding of his use of rhetoric—in other words, our inquiry must start with a comprehensive literary analysis of the work, using the appropriate literary and sociolinguistic tools.¹⁶⁴

5. THE LITERARY ANALYSIS OF 1 AND 2 MACCABEES: A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL SURVEY

Of course, numerous available literary analyses of 1 and 2 Maccabees by biblical scholars have disclosed scores of intertextual connections between these works and earlier Judean traditions,¹⁶⁵ implying that their authors were not impervious to contemporary techniques of literary elaboration. One therefore wonders why these literary investigations have had such a limited impact on those commentators who have mined 1 and 2 Maccabees for their historical reconstruction of the uprising. While the disciplinary gap between biblical scholars and Seleukid historians is obviously a factor, this cannot be the whole answer.

On the positive side, there are two particular fronts on which the identification of intertextual motifs in our texts has had an impact on the work of modern historians. One is the theme of temple plunder central to the story of Heliodoros's visit to Jerusalem (2 Macc. 3): ever since this theme was identified as a well-documented literary topos in pre-Hellenistic and Hellenistic times, historians have been more willing to read a matter of tax litigation into the Heliodoros episode.¹⁶⁶ Similarly, it is now well established that the accounts of the Maccabean wars in 1 and 2 Maccabees cross-refer to tales of war known from the Judean tradition. And while biblical scholars continue to debate whether the template is Joshua's conquest of the Promised Land, or David's wars, few historians today would take the accounts of 1 and 2 Maccabees at face value.¹⁶⁷

While these particular issues have a fairly narrow focus, other topics with farther-reaching implications for the interpretation of the Judean events as a whole continue to receive a literal reading. This is particularly true of the persecution accounts, but

the continued conviction that the author of 2 Maccabees perceived the crisis as a conflict between “Judaism” and “Hellenism” also plays its part. Moreover, as the case of the *philanthrōpa basilika* above suggests, items of information volunteered by the ancient authors that could be of interest to historians get lost because the literary dimension of the works is overlooked. This enduring divide between literary and historical investigations is in part due to the historians’ insistence on 1 and 2 Maccabees as linear Hellenistic historiography, like Diodorus Siculus.¹⁶⁸ That said, to my mind the major obstacle to a mutually beneficial dialogue between biblical scholars and historians lies in the working premises of the former. First, it seems that many biblical scholars themselves do not believe their investigations in 1 and 2 Maccabees can have any bearing on historical inquiries: they see literary and religious traditions as one thing and history as quite another. An extreme example is Steven Weitzman’s downplaying of the potential implications that his remarkable literary analysis of the persecution accounts could have on historical reconstructions of the period. Although he demonstrated that these accounts are essentially an elaborate literary construction, he framed his literary analysis with a reference to Hayden White’s theory of “text as a literary artifact,”¹⁶⁹ and he concluded that his analysis¹⁷⁰

does not solve the enigma of Antiochos’ persecution. . . . The real Antiochus almost certainly acted in ways that justified his reputation. But that Antiochus remains inaccessible, his behavior impossible to understand within the political and cultural norms of the Hellenistic world.

This position is clearly conditioned by the scholar’s familiarity with the entrenched paradigm, when instead his shrewd literary deconstruction of the accounts should invite a fresh inquiry into the underlying events and break the current deadlock afflicting their historical investigation.

The reason for this critical divide between the literary and historical studies of 1 and 2 Maccabees is, I repeat, the absence of a thorough analysis of their literary composition. Basically, it is essential to identify the structural coherence of a given work in order to understand its author’s intentions correctly. Together with the correct identification of the author’s rhetorical codes, identifying a structural logic is in turn a prerequisite for assessing whether or not the descriptions found in the sources are reliable facts, and ultimately for reevaluating the factual outline on which modern historical reconstructions are predicated. Before proposing my alternative interpretation of 1 and 2 Maccabees, I will give an overview of the current state of research into their respective literary composition. (See Chapter 1 for a fully detailed discussion of 2 Maccabees.)

5.1. A Brief Overview of the Literary Composition of 2 Maccabees

The first breakthrough in the literary analysis of 2 Maccabees came in the early 1970s, when George Nickelsburg demonstrated that the main unit of the work

(3:1–15:36) was informed by a narrative pattern well known to biblical scholars from the book of Deuteronomy, which includes the four components of sin, retribution, reconciliation, and salvation.¹⁷¹ This “Deuteronomic” pattern, as it was then called, was the ground to Nickelsburg’s innovative classification of 2 Maccabees as “theological history,” which quickly became a premise widely shared among scholars. Subsequently, Robert Doran improved Nickelsburg’s investigation by arguing that the work is composed of three successive stories of temple liberation (3:1–40, 4:1–10:9, 10:10–15:36), each one structured by the narrative pattern identified by Nickelsburg. Arguing that the sin-retribution motif at the core of the narrative pattern is also found in the Greek culture, Doran further compared 2 Maccabees with accounts of miraculous temple liberations stemming from major Greek temples, and dubbed 2 Maccabees “temple propaganda.”¹⁷² Finally, Jan Willem van Henten combined his forerunners’ insights, applying further fine-tuning to argue that 2 Maccabees comprises two (and not three) successive and symmetrical stories of liberation (3:1–10:9, 10:10–15:36).¹⁷³ Each of these, he asserted, comprises a story of martyrdom and culminates in the institution of a commemorative festival, and moreover is subdivided into two parts, each subsection corresponding to a different Seleukid king.

It would seem, therefore, that advances are being made in the research into the literary composition of 2 Maccabees. However, as we saw from my historiographical overview, the equivocal definition of 2 Maccabees as “theological history” (or “temple propaganda”) has hindered fruitful interaction between biblical scholars and historians. Since this classification is based on the author’s use of both the sin-retribution (or measure-for-measure) theme and the four-part narrative pattern deriving from it, we need to examine these closer. According to the modernist understanding of “religion” as a separate semantic field, being a “pious-minded” or “theologically”-minded person means to be primarily engaged in speculations about the relations between the divine world and men in such matters as idolatry, purity, sacrifices, and the like, and to be indifferent to the “political” and “social” matters that are of concern to modern historians. As our case study of the *philanthrōpa basilika* above aimed to suggest, this is a misrepresentation. Because the measure-for-measure equation apparently presupposes “belief” in God, and moreover seems to us a naive form of causality, we tend to imagine that ancient authors exclusively used it to reflect upon abstract religious tenets.¹⁷⁴ But in the ancient Near East—or in the Greek cultural area, for that matter—there was no need to demonstrate God’s (or the gods’) power in history.¹⁷⁵ In societies in which not to believe in God (or the gods) was not an option,¹⁷⁶ that was stating the obvious, and ancient authors knew better. Rather, the measure-for-measure scheme was a weapon in polemics. Admittedly, biblical scholars working on 1 and 2 Maccabees have finally acknowledged this polemical function in the last decade, but they still tend to restrict its scope to the realm of “theological” concerns. Thus

József Zsengellér has argued that the purpose of 2 Maccabees was to promote “the sole legitimacy of the Jerusalem temple,” its author—described as a “skilled theologian”—using as his theological basis three Judahite texts that “together presuppose the coexistence of potentially different understandings of the temple.” 2 Maccabees “is a special case of temple propaganda, [in that] it proclaims the holiness of the temple, but is dependent upon the holiness of the temple.”¹⁷⁷ In turn, Beate Ego has argued that the author wrote at a time when it was necessary to proclaim anew that “the God of Israel is the only true God,” in the face of “Antiochus IV’s claim of being a god.”¹⁷⁸ Again, this is far too restrictive.

Let us take the subtheme of God’s chastisement of the villains. If its intention is not to demonstrate God’s righteousness, then the focus of the story is not God but the villain.¹⁷⁹ This means that the aim of the author is either to show that *NN* is a villain or to show that even God—and not only *NN*’s human opponents—deems him to be a villain. Going one step further, we may assume that this pattern was not used only negatively, to stigmatize evildoers, but could also be employed positively, to show who enjoyed God’s support: that is, to indicate who was the legitimate ruler. Indeed this narrative function is documented in conjunction with the Judahite¹⁸⁰ royal ideology.¹⁸¹ In conclusion, I argue that in 2 Maccabees the narrative pattern that numerous scholars mistake for “theological history” is instead put at the service of dynastic history, which means that, like 1 Maccabees, it is effectively dynastic history.

5.2. *The Literary Composition of 1 Maccabees*

While biblical scholars seem to readily accept that the author of 1 Maccabees was a “pro-Hasmonean” historian and yet had “theological” concerns, to my knowledge no one has made the leap toward concluding that these two facets are also interconnected in 1 Maccabees.¹⁸²

According to a view accepted since the early days of modern historiography, 1 Maccabees is a linear chronicle composed of four parts: first, the introduction, which is taken to include the section on Mattathias in chapter 2 (1 Macc. 1–2); second, the Judas section (3:1–9:22); third, the Jonathan section (9:23–12:53); and fourth, the section on Simon (chs. 13–16).¹⁸³ The fact that the Mattathias section is lumped together with the introduction exposes the *extratextual* viewpoint from which the text structure is analyzed, since only the supposedly historical careers of the three Maccabean brothers are accorded the status of separate sections.¹⁸⁴

Since the 1980s three scholars have tackled the literary composition of 1 Maccabees and the related question of its purpose. Using a *Quellenforschung*-inspired method, Nils Martola distinguished between the author’s original scheme and the extant one, which derives from subsequent additions.¹⁸⁵ In its original state, the work told the story of the liberation of Jerusalem. After a short prologue (1 Macc. 1:1–10), 1 Maccabees 1:11–64 forms the first main section, exposing the “origin of an

imbalance” due to the apostasy of the people. The second section runs through 1 Maccabees 2:1–14:15. Once the supposed later additions are removed, the “original” work can be seen to recount the restoration of balance, whose main focuses are, first, the liberation of the temple (4:36–59), and second, the liberation and purification of the citadel (13:49–52).¹⁸⁶ In sum, in Martola’s view the pro-Hasmonean slant of the book stems from the additions.

In his turn, David Williams employed rhetorical criticism to divide the work into three sections. The first runs from the beginning to Antiochos IV’s death (1:1–6:17), and the second to the end of Simon’s Eulogy (6:18–14:15), whereas the third (14:16–24) may be an addition.¹⁸⁷ Williams reveals three interlaced themes in the first and second sections: the pro-Hasmonean stance and the “theological focus” of the work, which he dubs “double causality” (i.e., human and divine), in both sections, whereas the liberation of the temple and citadel¹⁸⁸ appear in sections one and two, respectively. Next, the third section focuses on the establishment of Simon’s high-priestly line. The theme of double causality in the two first sections furthers the “pro-Hasmonean advocacy” of the book, since God cooperated in the Hasmonians’ victories. In contrast, the liberation theme is a distinct thread of its own.

As we can see, while both Martola and Williams identify the same two motifs, namely the temple liberation and the pro-Hasmonean slant (i.e., dynastic history), they keep them distinct. Martola’s distinction between two redaction layers is an extreme way of maintaining the divide between religion (the apostasy, the temple, and the purification of the citadel) and politics (the Hasmonians). Although Williams’s “double causality” yokes “theology” and the Hasmonians, the temple remains a distinct theme. By observing that “authorial intention [may] account for only a part, and not the whole, of a text’s meaning,”¹⁸⁹ Williams insinuates that the author may have had a unitary purpose in mind—that is, either the temple or the Hasmonians—but inadvertently ended up with two.

Moreover, while the sections delineated by Martola and Williams, respectively, cut across the basic narrative units structured around the Maccabean characters, neither scholar addresses the question of how the two composition principles might be articulated with each other. Finally, Williams explains that the structure of the second section is more complicated to grasp than that of the first, because the historical material becomes more complex: “For instance, there is only one king [Antiochos IV, in the first] but several royal figures in the latter part of the book.”¹⁹⁰ Thus, in his mind, the text is a transparent window on extratextual reality, and neither Martola nor Williams seems to suspect a literary pattern structuring the work’s composition; nor does either one of them veer from the notion that 1 Maccabees is a linear chronicle.

The first genuine breakthrough came in 2007, when a short paper by Zsengellér suggested a connection between temple liberation and the Hasmonians.¹⁹¹ Draw-

ing on Martola's and Williams's studies of 1 Maccabees and also on Doran's definition of 2 Maccabees as temple propaganda, Zsengellér delineates three sections in 1 Maccabees. These respectively deal with, first, the defilement of the temple (1 Macc. 1); second, its purification and restoration (chs. 2–4); and third, “how the religious restoration inspired the liberation of the people and the country, the installation of a new priesthood” (chs. 5–16).¹⁹² In contrast with earlier studies emphasizing the “theological” divergences between 1 and 2 Maccabees,¹⁹³ he argues that the two promote the belief in “the sole legitimacy of the Jerusalem temple” (monotemplism), and as a consequence 1 Maccabees is as much “temple propaganda” as 2 Maccabees. Served by the fact that 1 Maccabees is almost unanimously held as a work of political (pro-Hasmonean) propaganda, he combines the two threads, arguing that¹⁹⁴

this monotemplistic commitment also reinforces the pro-Hasmonean propaganda of the book. The repetition of the heroic deed of Phinehas, the intervention for the sake of the people in time of battle and need, and the restorers of the genuine cult in the sole legitimate temple help to prove the legitimacy of the new high priesthood of the Maccabees/Hasmoneans. This could have been the main purpose of the book.

Whereas Doran was unwilling to contemplate the potential political implications of defining 2 Maccabees as temple propaganda, Zsengellér goes much further here. Nonetheless, he stops short of claiming that both 1 and 2 Maccabees are at the same time “temple propaganda” and have a genuine political content.¹⁹⁵ His depiction of how the temple theology promoted by the two works served the “propagandistic efforts” of the Hasmonians has an instrumentalist overtone: its purpose was to emphasize “the holiness of the Jerusalem temple . . . as a symbol of holiness and unity [in order to] bring together the different religious groups” around the dynasty, but this aim ultimately failed.¹⁹⁶ In short, whereas the content is theological, the political intent is extratextual. Moreover, Zsengellér eschews the question of the unitary structure of 1 Maccabees. His literary analysis fails to explain how the apparent linear structure of 1 Maccabees, with its units depicting the deeds of the successive Maccabean leaders, and the structure of “temple propaganda,” combine to form a well-integrated work.

Thus, at this point in the research on the literary composition of 1 and 2 Maccabees—and hence the basic purpose of both works—two key questions remain unsolved: How do the themes of dynastic and temple history merge? And how are the literary units corresponding to each combined in the overall composition of the two works? The answer I develop in this book is that the two themes may be brought together seamlessly by replacing the concept of temple liberation instead with that of temple foundation—or rather, in our case, refoundation. Second, I argue that the narrative structures of both 1 and 2 Maccabees are cyclical and not linear. These are the premises on which my literary analysis of the two works is predicated.

6. THE LITERARY ANALYSIS PROPOSED IN THIS BOOK

The narrative pattern of temple foundation is well known from Mesopotamian royal building inscriptions and from the Judahite/Judean traditions relating to the foundation of the Jerusalem temple by King Solomon and its refoundation in Persian times. I argue that it informs both 1 and 2 Maccabees, by which I mean that the story of the liberation and purification of the temple central to the Jewish Festival of Hanukkah (the “Dedication”) is recast in these two works as a narrative of temple refoundation. It has long been established that the narrative template of temple building was an important vehicle of royal ideology both in Mesopotamia and Judah, the act of building (or rebuilding) the House of the patron deity having an intrinsic legitimizing function—for aspiring kings and usurpers alike. Being thus shaped by the same narrative pattern, 1 and 2 Maccabees must have the same basic subject matter, namely the Hanukkah story recast as a temple refoundation account, which in this specific narrative form necessarily has a legitimizing function. In other words, 1 and 2 Maccabees recount the charter myth of the Hasmonean dynasty. Moreover, the fact that the account of 2 Maccabees is informed by a traditional Judahite narrative pattern is a clear indication that the work was written in Jerusalem, and more precisely within the Hasmonean court itself. I argue that 1 and 2 Maccabees are not opposed, as has been widely surmised until now, but parallel, complementary works that can only gain from being studied together.

There are wide-ranging implications to this identification of the scheme of the temple-building account in 1 and 2 Maccabees. First, we must definitively discard the implicit premises in most modern analyses of 2 Maccabees that religion and politics are distinct matters and that focusing on the temple is the hallmark of a religiously minded individual. Founding the temple was a royal prerogative, and therefore all discourse about the temple necessarily bore political implications. In particular, recounting an act of temple foundation (or refoundation) was an expression of political allegiance toward the founder. In parallel, the way that the books’ authors employ the notions of piety and impiety needs to be read in the same light. In both 1 and 2 Maccabees, praising the piety of a leader (Judas and Simon Maccabee) is a token of their respective authors’ political support, while imputing impiety or wickedness to a leader (in our case, both the rival high priests and the Seleukid kings) is tantamount to denying his political legitimacy. Such descriptions are tendentious arguments therefore, and not intended as objective descriptions of reality. The modern belief that the Judean civil strife opposed “Jewish Hellenizers” and “pious” opponents is based on a misreading of the rhetorical devices inherent to the two works and must be jettisoned altogether, along with the notion that Jason or Menelaos was a religious reformer, or that both were. Finally, with regard to the cultural devices employed in the texts, the persistent description of the author of 2 Maccabees as “pious” must likewise be discarded:

insofar as not being “religious,” in the sense that we today understand this word, was not an option in any society of the time in the entire Mediterranean and Near Eastern area, describing an individual as “religious” (or “pious”) has poor heuristic value. If anything, not only does it thoroughly misrepresent the author’s intellectual and political project, but it blinds us to what is a distinctly rational analysis of the Judean crisis. As just noted, his focus on Judas’s piety actually exposes him as a Hasmonean partisan: it is evidence of his political agenda and has nothing to do with being “pious” in the modern sense of the word.¹⁹⁷

Second, the primary function of a set narrative pattern is to encode (emplot)¹⁹⁸ and communicate a message. The fact that 1 and 2 Maccabees are informed by a distinct narrative pattern signifies that they cannot be read as linear descriptive accounts like those of Diodorus. First, the use of a narrative pattern turns the entire work into a coherent semantic field. All the narrative components of 1 and 2 Maccabees, and certainly all the important ones, fulfill a function within this preset pattern and therefore need to be read in this light. Moreover, the authors of 1 and 2 Maccabees use the cultural and narrative codes that were commonly accepted in the Judean literate circles of both pre-Hellenistic and Hellenistic times to give a meaningful interpretation of the events narrated—for instance, that piety is a condition of the ruler’s legitimacy. These codes were underpinned by a symbolic perception of reality by which the world was centered on the Jerusalem temple. By this logic, only events related to the temple—and by extension to the way of life linked to the temple—were deemed meaningful and therefore worth recounting. (While this perception of reality is indeed the hallmark of religious conservatism, it connotes Judean society as a whole and not specific individuals.) However, as I will contend, this perception of reality does not preclude our authors’ having a thorough understanding of the world around them. It merely implies that the literary translation of their experience was mediated by more elaborate narrative codes than is the case in the modern Western discourse about reality—and in modern historiography.¹⁹⁹ To some extent, these narrative codes are also different from those familiar from Greco-Roman historiography and therefore demand an even greater process of estrangement from modern scholars. Finally, my claim that our authors’ construction of causes and effects is basically rational does not automatically mean it is also objective: political bias is always present, but the same may be said for Polybius and Tacitus.

Although our two authors had equally rational perceptions of the causes and nature of the rebellion against Antiochos IV, their respective accounts diverge in their chronological and topical emphases. With its focus on the origins of the crisis prior to the rebellion, 2 Maccabees points to three decisive “causes” (or at least what the author sees as such): the destabilization of the high priesthood that followed from Onias III’s deposition and the correlative pretension of the Seleukid kings to meddle with the appointment of the new high priests (a political issue);

Antiochos IV's demand for an increased tribute rate (an economic issue); and the establishment of the *gymnasion*, which obliquely refers to a comprehensive reform in the status of Jerusalem (primarily a political issue, probably also an economic issue, and possibly also a matter of purity). For its part, 1 Maccabees more specifically foregrounds issues related to the later establishment of a military settlement in Judea: the presence of foreigners in Jerusalem (a political issue as well as, apparently, a matter of purity); the construction of the Akra (a political and military issue, alongside a matter of purity); and the land confiscations (an economic issue, alongside a matter of purity). 1 Maccabees also repeatedly stigmatizes the tax demands of the Seleukids, the issue being apparently political rather than strictly economic. (Paying the tribute was a mark of subjection; and refusing to pay it, a claim to autonomy.) Conversely, addressing the cultural and literary conventions informing the ancient accounts greatly facilitates the task of debunking the myth of religious persecution—and its delusively rationalizing recasting as “prohibition of the Jewish observances.” What has been perceived as religious persecution in the later tradition (of which Josephus is an early witness) is, I argue, actually a description of a military repression, written according to the required narrative codes of the time. These various topics will be tackled in detail in this book.

The above outline aims to show how the perception that the ancient authors themselves had of the causes and nature of the rebellion does not detract from the historical understanding that we might expect from the finest Greek historians of the time. What distinguishes the accounts of 1 and 2 Maccabees is the literary means that each employs, and not the analytical capacity of its author. The purpose of this book is to present a historical reconstruction of the Judean rebellion against Antiochos IV that takes as its starting point the testimony of the authors of 1 and 2 Maccabees themselves, as it emerges from my revised literary analysis of these works. The analysis of the events that is put forward by these authors turns out to be perfectly compatible with a pragmatic interpretation of the causes, nature, and course of the rebellion, and may be validated by documentary material (in particular, the Olympiodoros inscription).²⁰⁰ My thesis is that the decisive factors that triggered the rebellion were the policy of tax increase implemented successively by Seleukos IV and Antiochos IV, as well as the political destabilization that ensued from the toppling of the Oniad dynasty under and at the initiative of Antiochos IV (and not of Jason, as we shall see). Whereas the latter factor explains the power struggle between leading priestly families, the former explains the popular participation in the rebellion itself. In contrast, since the alleged “prohibition of the Judean customs” has no factual basis, it must be removed from the list of factors. Moreover, although the initial stage of the rebellion seems to have been followed by a massacre and harsh repressive measures (the historical core underpinning the persecution accounts), it is hard to determine whether this wave of repression sparked the rebellion anew, or whether the resistance to the Seleukid reaction was

continuous. In the former case, the repression may be seen as a secondary factor of the rebellion, but not in the latter.

. . .

When Bickerman wrote his *Gott der Makkabäer* his challenge was to use the Maccabean episode as a case study to test his picture of the organization and operation of the Seleukid state adumbrated in his *Institutions des Séleucides*. Presently, the new challenge is to devise a genuinely interdisciplinary approach incorporating the updated insights not only of biblical scholarship and Hellenistic studies but also of literary criticism and the anthropology of religion. The scope of the comparative material must be widened from the Seleukid empire to the entire ancient Near East, with a privileged emphasis on Babylonia and Egypt. Moreover, the need to explore the cultural and rhetorical codes that were familiar to ancient Judeans, in particular those related to royal ideology, means that the corpus of comparative material cannot be limited to works dated to Hellenistic times but must reach back to Achaimenid and pre-Achaimenid times. Incidentally, given that the literary pattern of temple building and its organic association with royal ideology are familiar to biblical scholars, one wonders why it has not yet been identified in 1 and 2 Maccabees. The possible reasons for this omission are dealt with elsewhere in this book.²⁰¹

Taking up Bickerman's lead, my own historical analysis will hinge on a revised literary analysis of the ancient sources, mainly 1 and 2 Maccabees, cross-checked against our knowledge of the Hellenistic world.²⁰² Bickerman achieved the scholarly ideal of offering a historical reconstruction that was both plausible for his time and faithful to the ancient sources. The instrumentalist school that, since Bringmann, has created and promoted what I call the "Bickerman-Tcherikover paradigm" doubts the analytical skills of the ancient authors—in particular that of 2 Maccabees—while showing complete disregard for their interpretive frameworks. Although Bickerman's ideal of a perfect coincidence between a modern historical reconstruction and its literary sources is nowadays considered illusory, I aim to show that the interpretations of the crisis proposed by the authors of 1 and 2 Maccabees themselves are eminently tenable starting points for historians seeking a "rational" explanation for the rebellion. Moreover, the emended factual outline that automatically results from my revised literary analysis will make it much easier to propose a historical reconstruction based on the updated methodological premises of our current understanding of the Seleukid empire: the workings of empire as negotiation (and not the legalistic conception of institutions); the new understanding of the process of Hellenization, in particular of institutional Hellenization (and not the essentialist view of culture); a view of religion integrating its political and economic dimensions (without being instrumentalist).

As a study appealing to an interdisciplinary inquiry, this book is aimed both at Seleukid (Hellenistic) historians and at biblical scholars interested in the texts of

Achaimenid and Hellenistic times. I define myself as a Hellenistic historian. For biblical studies, especially of pre-Hellenistic times, I benefited tremendously from private conversations with scholars trained in these fields. They generously shared their knowledge with me and guided me toward the most recent bibliographical material. Although I have no illusions of having overcome all the pitfalls of interdisciplinary inquiry, it is my hope that the outcome of the revised approach presented in this book will open the way for a new paradigm and prompt fresh debate among scholars in the field.

Moreover, the present study aims to make a contribution to the cultural study of the Hellenistic world. Studies of the last decades have pointed to an increasing number of literary texts that, albeit written in Greek and apparently following Greek conventions of style and genre, were shaped by intertextual references to non-Greek literary and cultural traditions.²⁰³ It is my contention that 1 and 2 Maccabees must be added to this growing corpus.

7. SUMMARY OF THE BOOK

The present book is divided into three parts, each opening with a methodological introduction. Part I, “*Ioudaïsmos*: 1 and 2 Maccabees as Dynastic History,” examines the central subject matter and purpose of 1 and 2 Maccabees, which, I argue, is to validate the legitimacy of the Hasmonean dynasty—as argued in Chapter 3, the word *Ioudaïsmos* in 2 Maccabees designates the political order of the Hasmoneans. Part II, “*Hellēnismos*: The Causes of the Rebellion according to the Authors of 1 and 2 Maccabees,” investigates how the two Maccabees authors themselves present and analyze the causes and nature of the rebellion—as we shall see in Chapter 5 the word *Hellēnismos* refers to the situation of total disruption that was caused by Jason, Menelaos, and Alkimos, the political rivals of the Maccabees who are made responsible for the crisis. Whereas parts I and II offer a literary analysis of 1 and 2 Maccabees, Part III, “History: The Judean Rebellion in Historical Perspective, 200–164 B.C.E.,” puts forward a historical interpretation of the causes and nature of the rebellion that is based on it.

The Methodological Introduction to Part I tackles the issue of the relation between religion and politics, with the view to clarify how the notions of piety and impiety in 1 and 2 Maccabees have a political connotation. On the basis of anthropological studies of religion as well as case studies chosen in cognate religious systems from the ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern area, a critical discussion of the modernist definition of religion is offered, and an alternative definition proposed. The proposed axiom is that the ancient semantic fields coincided with occupational and social functions. Instead of talking of the “political and religious prerogatives of the king” and “the political functions of the high priest,” we should delineate the operative semantic categories of ancient Judea in such a way as to

define the “royal powers and privileges” alongside “priestly powers and privileges” as two semantic categories. The theoretical discussion is accompanied by 6 concrete assessment of the respective consequences of the old and the new definition on the investigation of 1 and 2 Maccabees on the one hand and the Judean rebellion on the other. In particular, I argue that the new delineation of the semantic fields may help us understand how the narrative pattern of temple building, which was originally coined as royal ideology, came to be employed in conjunction with the high priest in Hellenistic times. This proposed definition will be the operative tool of analysis used in the rest of the book.

Chapter 1 analyzes the literary composition of 2 Maccabees. The main purpose of this chapter is to substantiate my claim that 2 Maccabees is dynastic and not “theological” history. It is argued that the measure-for-measure scheme is used as a polemical weapon at the service of dynastic interests. The analysis of the narrative structure of 2 Maccabees is complemented by a discussion of the concept of cyclical time. I show that the hypothesis of a cyclical composition casts light on the overall structural coherence of the work, which all attempts based on a linear reading have thus far failed to do.

The three remaining chapters of Part I are concerned with the narrative pattern of temple foundation. Chapter 2 may be seen as a complement to the theoretical Introduction to Part I, in that it offers a detailed investigation of the pattern. Through a topical analysis of the formal structure of its classical form, it is shown how the narrative pattern of temple foundation brought together speculations about the cosmic order and an ideal representation of kingship and the social order, the temple and the king serving as mediators between the two. The function of the pattern was to assert the legitimacy of kingship, or rather, of the ruling king, by showing that the social order of which he was the guarantor was the mirror of the cosmic order. When native kingship was replaced by alternative forms of political and social organization, the narrative pattern retained its validating function for the new orders thanks to the gradual adaptation of its narrative components to the new social reality. The chapter includes a diachronic survey of this progressive adaptation, first to the division of power between a provincial governor and a high priest of hereditary right under the Achaimenids and later to the establishment of the high priest as sole ruler in early Hellenistic times. Cultural considerations substantiate my claim that 2 Maccabees stems from Judea and not the Greek-speaking diaspora. Whereas the narrative pattern of temple building is documented in Mesopotamia, northern Syria, and Judah/Judea, it was alien to Greek traditions of political thought. In particular the description of Jerusalem and Judea found in the Letter of Aristeas, a work written in Alexandria, follows a distinct, typically Greek scheme.

The last two chapters of Part I further make clear that both 1 and 2 Maccabees could have been written only at the Hasmonean court. Chapter 3 analyzes how the

literary pattern of temple building informs the two stories of the temple rededication in 1 and 2 Maccabees. Furthermore, it is argued that, far from meaning “Judaism”—a translation that anachronistically presupposes that the concept of religion constituted a separate semantic field in the Judean society of Hellenistic times as it does in modern Western societies—the concept of *Ioudaïsmos* is used in 2 Maccabees to capture in a single word the entire semantic field covered by the traditional narrative pattern. Whereas set narrative patterns traditionally used to be epitomized by a synecdoche, one component of the pattern standing for the whole, the author’s choice of encapsulating it in an abstract term such as *Ioudaïsmos* was a remarkable intellectual innovation. In addition, whereas the message of the narrative pattern summarized in the term *Ioudaïsmos* is fundamentally political, *Ioudaïsmos* also colors it with an ethnic slant.

Chapter 4 examines the closing narrative units of 1 and 2 Maccabees, namely Simon’s conquest and purification of the Akra (whose impurities were a threat to the temple) in 1 Maccabees and what is presented as Judas’s “second refoundation” of the temple in 2 Maccabees. It will be argued that these sections are also informed by the narrative pattern of the temple-building account, albeit in an untypical way, with the narrative of 1 Maccabees further hinging on the basically similar narrative pattern of palace building (Simon establishing his palace in the Akra). As might be expected, the closing sections are where the two authors emplotted what most probably was their main political message: to legitimize the combined exertion by the Hasmoneans of the high priesthood and royallike prerogatives (in particular military power). The specific episodes selected by each author to encode this message—Simon’s purification of the Akra in 1 Maccabees and Judas’s “second temple refoundation” in 2 Maccabees—seem to be the decisive factor explaining the diverging topical emphases of the two works. In particular, it explains why each work stresses a distinct chronological phase (1 Maccabees on the consequences ensuing upon the establishment of a military *katoikia* [settlement] and 2 Maccabees on Onias III’s deposition and the politicization of Jerusalem prior to the rebellion). Thus the discrepancies between the two works hinge on a distinct narrative focus rather than on a genuine difference in political or religious sensitivity (or both).

Part II of the book investigates how the authors of the two works themselves present and to some extent analyze the causes and nature of the crisis, from Onias III’s eviction to the military repression. The Methodological Introduction to Part II deals with the correlation between historical experience and the literary transcription of it from a theoretical point of view, using the notions of cultural and narrative codes borrowed from structuralist semiotics. These codes were determined by the perception of reality that the Maccabees actors shared with the rest of their society, which may be described as a “symbolic universe.” This is a matter not of rhetorical manipulation, nor of consciously motivated bias, but of ethnopo-

etics. Specifically, this approach explains why the temple is so prominent in 2 Maccabees. Chapter 5 examines the narrative and rhetorical tools that the authors used to delegitimize Jason, Menelaos, and Alkimos, the political rivals of the Maccabees, by making them the embodiment of all the misfortunes that befell the Judeans. As might be expected, their portrayals exploit the same ideological paradigm as that used to assert the political legitimacy of the Maccabees/Hasmoneans, namely the narrative pattern of the temple-building account: whereas Judas refounds the temple and Simon completes its refoundation by cleansing the Akra threatening its purity, the rival high priests contribute to its destruction, Jason by founding an antitemple (the *gymnasion*) and Menelaos by stealing the holy vessels. The term *Hellēnismos* will be read anew in light of this new interpretation of the symbolic meaning of the *gymnasion*: whereas *Ioudaïsmos* means “the legitimate social order attuned to the divine order of things that was founded by the pious Judas when he refounded the temple, and in which the dynasty of the Hasmonians ruled,” *Hellēnismos* means “the illegitimate social order opposed to the divine order of things that was instituted by the wicked Jason when he founded the *gymnasion*.”

Chapter 6 tackles the myth of the “religious persecution.” The books of Daniel and 1 and 2 Maccabees are identified as primary accounts, whereas Josephus is derivative. The literary analysis discloses the elements of literary elaboration and argues that the historical events lying at the core of the persecution accounts are the atrocities of the military repression. What have been taken as two separate episodes—a military suppression and a religious persecution—were actually one and the same.

Chapter 7 reviews the causes of the rebellion pointed out by the authors of 1 and 2 Maccabees, respectively, as summarized above. Methodologically, this chapter has a pivotal function between the literary analysis of the two works and the historical reconstruction of the causes and unfolding of the rebellion that is the object of Part III of the book. It aims to demonstrate that the two Maccabees authors had a fairly rational understanding of the factors of the crisis by applying to the decoding of their respective causal analyses the notions of cultural and narrative codes discussed in the Methodological Introduction to Part II.

Part III puts forward a historical interpretation of the causes and the unfolding of the Judean rebellion under Antiochos IV. In order to adumbrate its context properly, it is necessary to start our inquiry from Antiochos III’s settlement for Jerusalem in 200/198 B.C.E. After a summary of the relevant data from parts I and II of the book in the Introduction to Part III, Chapter 8 surveys the Seleukid conquest and domination of Koilē Syria and Phoinikē under this king (200–187 B.C.E.). The political and fiscal bearings of Antiochos III’s decree are discussed in detail. A survey of the leading Judean families is also included, with the view to refuting both Bickerman’s influential thesis of the Ptolemaic and Seleukid parties and the

theory that there were social and cultural differences between the Maccabees and the “Hellenizers.”

Chapter 9 tackles Seleukos IV’s policy in Judea and Koilē Syria and Phoinikē (187–175 B.C.E.). This king initiated wide-ranging revisions of Antiochos III’s fiscal settlement in the province, which were pursued under Antiochos IV. A preliminary discussion refutes the accepted view that the policies of Seleukos IV and Antiochos IV were determined by the financial burden of the Apamea treaty. The main thrust of the chapter is to propose a new interpretation of the Heliodoros story of 2 Maccabees 3 in the light of the Olympiodoros inscription (the Heliodoros Stele), which documents Seleukos’s appointment of a provincial high priest. It is argued that the inscription provides a decisive clue that Seleukos IV engaged in a major administrative and fiscal overhaul in the satrapy. On the basis of recent studies arguing that Josephus’s story of Joseph the Tobiad genuinely documents the fact that Antiochos III had conceded the right to levy the provincial tribute to the Ptolemies in the early second century B.C.E., it is argued that the primary purpose of Seleukos’s fiscal revamping was to put his grip back on the tribute revenues. This move may have been coupled with a reform aimed at drawing new taxes from the temples’ revenues, as suggested by the nomination of the provincial high priest. These aspects seem variously to form the background of the Heliodoros story. In particular, the quarrel between Onias III and Simon the temple *prostatēs* (an official of sorts) that forms a subplot in it most probably reflects the tensions that arose from the new fiscal demands, with Onias III—who as the high priest was responsible for paying the tribute—apparently refusing to comply with the tax increase.

Chapter 10 argues that the reforms that occurred in the early years of Antiochos IV’s reign (175–ca. 172 B.C.E.) are the direct follow-up to Seleukos IV’s bold fiscal policy. The intrinsic connection between Onias III’s deposition and the increased tribute demands are analyzed in detail, and contrary to what the author of 2 Maccabees claims, it is argued that both moves were instigated by Antiochos IV, and not Jason. This interpretation is supported by comparative material from Ptolemaic Egypt, where Ptolemy II implemented a complex set of reforms that tightened the royal grip on the revenues of the temples while involving a progressive change of the priestly personnel. The establishment of Jerusalem as a polis is also examined in detail. The Tyriaion inscription documenting the establishment of a polis in Asia Minor and the evidence relating to a community of *politai* (citizens) in Seleucid Babylon are surveyed, with the view to assess whether they may cast light on Jason’s reforms in Jerusalem.

Chapter 11 tackles the Judean rebellion and the phase of repression that followed it, down to Antiochos IV’s death (169/8–164 B.C.E.). The reconstruction of the events is based on the premise that a genuine popular rebellion broke out during Antiochos IV’s campaign in Egypt. That is, Antiochos IV’s assault on Jerusa-

lem was a response to the revolt, and not the cause of it. Therefore the conflict must be described as a “Judean rebellion,” and not as “Maccabean uprising.” The existence of this rebellion was erased from the record of 1 and 2 Maccabees because of the authors’ pro-Hasmonean bias: their conceding that Antiochos’s attack was justified would have weakened the legitimacy of the Hasmonean usurpation of power. The chapter puts forward an outline of the rebellion based on a revised reading of 1 Maccabees 1:20–2:48 and 2 Maccabees 5:1–6:11. The fate of the temple is discussed separately. No detailed chronological outline is proposed, since it is impossible to determine whether Antiochos stormed Jerusalem after his first campaign in Egypt or after his second. Nonetheless the preliminary section of the chapter suggests a new methodological approach to the chronological issue, concluding that the second campaign offers a somewhat more plausible context.

8. TECHNICAL ISSUES

A few words are necessary about the translations used and spelling matters.

A. Translations. Unless otherwise stated, all the English quotations from 1 and 2 Maccabees follow Goldstein’s translations,²⁰⁴ first as an homage to a scholar who by his comprehensive introductions to his translations gave a new impulse to the study of these texts, and second because Goldstein elegantly assumes the inescapable fact that all translation is interpretation. Precisely because of that assumption he helped me understand these texts better, even when I disagreed. The quotations from biblical texts follow the New Revised Standard Version. In all translations borrowed from other sources, modifications in the spelling of names for the sake of consistency with the present text will not be pointed out.

B. Spelling. I speak of “Judeans” (and not “Jews”) both for the inhabitants of Judea and for their diasporal communities. This is consistent first with my standpoint that history of the ancient Judeans needs to be normalized and next with my working premise that “religion” (which the term “Jews” connotes) is not a separate semantic field in Hellenistic times. Similarly, “Jerusalem temple” is written lowercase, as a sign of normalizing its status. Finally, “Law” is capitalized when it is equivalent to the Hebrew Torah and lowercased in other instances.

The name of the territory of the Judeans changed over time. I speak of “Judah” (adj. “Judahite”), “Yehud” (adj. “Yehudite”), and “Judea” (adj. “Judean”) to refer to the pre-Persian, Persian, and Hellenistic eras, respectively. The combinations “Judah/Judea” (“Judahite/Judean”) and “Yehud/Judea” (“Yehudite/Judean”) are used to refer to transperiod time spans.

The spelling of most ancient Greek personal and geographical names uses a mixed system, as this is increasingly customary in Hellenistic scholarship. The

usual Latinized spelling is upheld for names that are part of the general knowledge of educated modern classes. Thus, "Herodotus," "Josephus," "Polybius," "Cyrus," "Darius," and likewise "Nabonidus." For toponyms, note "Dura-Europos" and "treaty of Apamea." In contrast, names falling within the purview of specialized scholarship are transliterated. Note in particular "Antiochos" (not "Antiochus"), "Seleukos," "Menelaos," "Alkimos," "Ptolemaios" (but "Ptolemy" for kings of Egypt), "Hekataios" of Abdera, "Seleukids," "Achaimenids" and also *gymnasion*. Finally, an Anglicized spelling is adopted for the following names: "Maccabee" (not "Makkabaios"), "Jason" (not "Iason"), "Ptolemy" (referring to a king). Note the mixed system used for "Judas Maccabee" in order to avoid possible confusion between the personal name and the name of the Kingdom of Judah. A mixed system will also be used for a few other names (e.g., "John Hyrkanos").

The interdisciplinary scope of this book brings together methodological tools and sources familiar either to historians of the Seleukid empire or to biblical scholars but not necessarily to both. Since it potentially addresses readers from various disciplines, the need was felt to provide basic explanations in all the fields.