

Preface

“Josephus and the Maccabees” was the theme of the conference organised by the Josephus Research Institute in Komárom on 11–12 April 2024. Although several conference proceedings on the Maccabees have been published in recent years,¹ the conference in Komárom sought to put this topic in a new perspective, with the speakers considering Josephus’ works as the primary starting point of research. Josephus’ portrayal of the Maccabees is fascinating not only because he himself was a descendant of the Maccabees (cf. *Vita* 1,4; *Ant.* 16.187), but also because, apart from the books of the Maccabees, his account is our most important source on this period in Jewish history. The organisers of the conference would like to thank J. Selye University and the “Beyond Canon” project of the Regensburg University Centre for Advanced Studies for their support.

The diversity of papers in English and German in this volume demonstrates the richness of the subject and the potential of this perhaps slightly non-traditional approach.

The first paper in this volume was not presented at the conference. At our request, Steve **Mason** has written an exciting introduction on earlier scholarship, how the different historians used the Hasmonean legacy from the 1850s to the 1950s. This chapter merges a methodological question about the possibilities of history-writing in general with a substantive one: How have the Hasmoneans been treated in the history of research. Looking at the use of the Hasmoneans in the different and changing contexts of the 1850s–1950s, it is easy to see how the values and discourses of the times influenced the narratives.

Steve **Mason**’s second study is also concerned with the incorporation of the Hasmonean legacy into historical narrative, but now in the 1st century C.E., here he explores the question of how Josephus used the Hasmonean tradition in his works. His question touches on the cornerstones of Josephus’ narrative: Were the people of Judah really to be either the implacable enemies or the friends of Rome? How did Josephus relate to the early Hasmonean leaders and rulers, and why did he relate differently to the later members of the dynasty? To whom does Josephus address his writings, and whom does he consider to be his target audience?

¹ E.g. *The Books of the Maccabees: History, Theology, Ideology*. JSJSup 118. Edited by Géza Xeravits – József Zsengellér. Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2007. *Die Makkabäer*. WUNT 382. Edited by Friedrich Avemarie – Prerdrag Bukovec – Stefan Krauter – Michael Tilly. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017. *The Books of the Maccabees. Literary, Historical, and Religious Perspectives*. Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 328. Edited by Jan Willem van Henten. Leuven – Paris – Bristol: Peters, 2022.

In her study, Tal **Ilan** explores the question of the popularity of the Hasmoneans in the period after the fall of the Jewish state, but she focuses on the choice of personal names rather than the works of historians – with good reason to assume that some kind of sympathy or popularity played a role in the choice of names. Her work thus touches on a stratum that is not influenced by the work of storytellers and redactors of later periods, but reflects directly on the everyday realities of the time, and gives a vivid account of the popularity of the first two generations of Hasmoneans in later centuries. In the second half of her study, Ilan reassesses a newly published short inscription in Hebrew, showing that the reign of Hyrcanus II was still used as a chronological reference point by the author of the inscription almost a hundred years after his death.

Martin **Meiser**'s study deals with an evergreen theme, the portrayal of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 2 Macc and Josephus. We know that the Seleucid ruler is a dreaded villain hero in the history of Judaism, but the same person can be portrayed in many different ways. Antiochus certainly remains a villainous character, but it is important to note the expressions the author uses to describe him and what these expressions mean to the author in other contexts. This latter question can obviously only be examined in the case of Josephus, who also applies to his opponents the adjectives he uses for Antiochus.

Viktor **Kókai-Nagy** takes up Mattathias, the ancestor of the Hasmoneans, as his topic. The father of the Maccabean brothers plays a central role in 1 Macc, just as he does in Josephus' description of him. No doubt Josephus uses 1 Macc 2 as his source, but he also paints a very specific picture of Mattathias' role in the success and legitimacy of the Hasmonean dynasty. The author seeks to answer the question of what message Josephus wanted to convey to his readers through the figure of Mattathias.

The founding event of the Maccabean era is the rededication of the Temple and the miracle of the oil, the memory of which lives on in the celebration of Hanukkah. In addition to the descriptions in the books of Maccabees (1 Macc 4:36–9; 2 Macc 10:1–8), Josephus, of course, also records this event. In his study, József **Zsengellér** compares the relevant source texts to see whether Josephus was familiar with the descriptions in the Books of Maccabees and, if so, how far they differ in their emphasis and evaluation of the story.

David **Cielontko** studies the death narratives of Eleazar Avaran, son of Mattathias and brother of Judas, based on 1 Maccabees and Josephus' *Jewish War*. The comparative analysis of the stories of the death of the Maccabean brother offers an opportunity to examine Josephus' use of the biblical text and highlights the different ways in which the narratives are presented in their own literary contexts.

István **Karasszon** examines the question of martyrdom, one of the most discussed topics in the literature on 2 Macc and Josephus, from the perspective of the history of tradition. Both authors wanted their readers to understand the cause and

purpose of suffering. Karasszon seeks to establish how their writings used motifs from Jewish holy scriptures to depict dramatic events.

Letter of James, 4 Maccabees and Josephus have much in common. Karl-Wilhelm **Niebuhr** focuses on these texts in an effort to answer the question of Jewish self-understanding in Hellenistic-Roman culture, including references to the Torah, the basis of this self-understanding. A fundamental problem for all three authors was how to present the validity of the Torah in the Jewish diasporic situation, while not questioning the Torah's identity-creating significance.

With the text of *Contra Apionem*, František **Ábel** explores the representations of Jewish culture, especially in terms of social identity, and thus reveals Josephus' relationship to the Maccabean movement. His main question is: Can Jewish social and ethnic identities be evaluated as a kind of *politea*, which presupposes a particular way of life?

