

The Hellenization of the Hasmoneans Revisited: The Archaeological Evidence

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Abstract

The archaeological excavations of the Hasmonean palaces in Jericho and the numismatic evidence on the Hasmoneans are examined in order to understand the Hasmonean rulers' approach to Hellenistic culture. They enable us to see not only the extent of Hellenistic influence, but also how and why Hellenistic markers were used. Hellenistic art, swimming pools, bathhouses, and symbols on the coins that represent victory, success, government and power, shaped Hasmonean cultural and political identity. At the same time, however, their scope, meaning, and use were limited by the observance of ritual purity and the maintenance of local ethnic identity. Certain Greek symbols were altered to reflect Jewish religious messages. Thus, the Hasmoneans' adoption of Hellenistic culture, while balanced, mainly served political ends.

Keywords

Hasmoneans, Palaces, Coins, Hellenism, 1 Maccabees, Seleucids, Cultural Adoption

1. Introduction

In modern scholarship, Hellenism denotes "Greek ways". Hellenization is the adoption of Greek culture (including language and religion) by non-Greeks. Following the conquests of Alexander the Great, the East was ruled by Macedonian kings who encouraged the arrival of new populations of Greek origin, took for granted the superiority of Greek culture, and favored Greek administrators, friends and courtiers. Hellenism, however, had no specific substance but was a cultural trend that could be adopted in diverse ways (Sherwin-White & Kuhrt, 1993: pp. 141-187; Levine, 1998: pp. 16-25. Cf. Rajak, 1990: pp. 263-265)¹. The

¹The noun *Hellenismus*, first occurs in 2 Maccabees (4:10, 13; 11:24), meaning "the Greek way of living." The author also invented another novel noun, *Ioudaismos* (2:21; cf. 8:1; 14:38). However, he never juxtaposes these two nouns. See Habicht, 2006: 92.

relationship between Hellenism and Judaism and the manner in which Jews were influenced by Hellenism has been the subject of many monographs over the last several decades (Lieberman, 1950; Tcherikover, 1959; Hengel, 1974; Kasher, 1990; Gruen, 1998; Collins, 2000; Levine, 1998; Bar-Kochva, 2010; Habicht, 2006). A critical issue in the relationship between the two is the Hasmoneans' attitude towards Hellenism. This is because the Hasmoneans fought against the Seleucid and established an independent political Jewish state with distinctive Jewish/Judaeen ethnic identity², despite the dominance of Hellenism in the Near East. It is intriguing to see to what extent the Hasmonean rulers who struggled with the Seleucids in the military and political spheres approached Hellenistic culture³.

The Maccabees rose to power in the wake of the conservative Jews' struggle against the Jewish Hellenistic reformers headed by Menelaus. The Seleucid troops of Antiochus IV had enforced Hellenization (2 Macc 4:10; 6:9; 11:24) and prohibited basic Jewish religious practices. The military resistance and diplomatic maneuvers of Judah Maccabee and his brothers, Jonathan and Simon, led to an independent Jewish state in the shadow of the diminishing power of the Seleucid Empire.

Since the Maccabees were religiously observant Jews rebelling against enforced Hellenization, one might assume that they rejected at least some of the components of Hellenistic culture. Some attention has been paid to the attitude of the Hasmonean rulers, especially John Hyrcanus (135-104 BCE) and Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 BCE), towards Hellenism, mainly based on the writings of Flavius Josephus. Some scholars pointed to their positive inclination, as evidenced by the Hasmonean adoption of Greek names, Greek mercenaries, Hellenistic models of warfare, monarchic rule—which also meant establishing a non-Davidic royal dynasty, the reign of Queen Salome Alexandra, perhaps directly influenced by that of the Ptolemaic Cleopatra (Schalit, 1972: pp. 283-284; Rappaport, 1991; Bar-Kochva, 1989: pp. 69-81, 432-437; Shatzman, 1991: pp. 11-35; Geiger, 2002) and the fact that Judah Aristobulus styled himself *philhellené*⁴.

It could be argued that the adoption of Greek ways by the later Hasmoneans represents a reversal of Maccabean ideals. To give one example, according to Tcherikover the Hasmoneans were first and foremost military leaders. They

²See, for example, the conversion of the Idumaeans and Ituraeans to Judaism by John Hyrcanus and Judah Aristobulus: *Ant.* 13.257-8; 13.318. On the Hasmoneans' stress on Jewish collective identity, see Regev, 2013: pp. 266-292.

³Scholarship on the history of the Hasmoneans focuses on political and military issues, neglecting the cultural ones. See the recent monographs of Rappaport, 2013 and Atkinson, 2016.

⁴*Ant.* 13.318. The title is typical of non-Greek rulers who supported Greek cultural values, including the Nabataean king Aretas III (Kasher, 1990: pp. 134-136). However, Aristobulus is also praised by Timagenes of Alexandria, as cited by Strabo, for converting some of the Ituraeans and acquiring their land. We gain the impression that his attraction to Hellenistic culture was not at the expense of his commitment to Jewish identity and ethnic identity. In fact, the very concept of mass conversion may have been inspired by the Hellenistic concept of *politeia*. See *Ant.* 13.319; Cohen, 1999: pp. 109-139.

acted like Hellenistic kings, enjoying banquets, taking mistresses, and persecuting relatives they believed to be disloyal. Tchericover designated their rule as a secular one and argued that the life in their courts were similar to those of the Seleucid kings in Antioch (Tchericover, 1959: p. 252). Nonetheless, it is commonly concluded that while the Hasmoneans conformed to the conventions of the Hellenistic world, they also observed Jewish law—e.g., no graven images on their coins (Tcherikover, 1959: pp. 250-253; Rappaport, 1991: pp. 489, 502; Rajak, 1990: pp. 277-278).

In this article I will discuss the evidence for the adoption by the Hasmonean rulers of Hellenistic culture. The architecture and various installations (baths and swimming pools), findings such as pottery and wall decorations in their palaces in Jericho, and the symbols on their coins provide us with data about the Hasmoneans' approach to Hellenism. I will present the archaeological evidence and examine not only their dependence on "Greek ways," but also the place of Hellenism within the broader cultural perspective of the Hasmonean palaces and coins. The question therefore is not only to what extent they were influenced by Hellenism, and what aspects of Hellenism in particular, but also how the Hellenistic markers were used: what motivated the Hasmoneans to employ them and were there any cultural or religious constraints that limited the effect of Hellenism?

2. The Hasmonean Palaces in Jericho

Ehud Netzer excavated the remains of four Hasmonean palaces in Tulul Abu al 'Alayiq, west of ancient Jericho. According to Netzer, the Buried Palace was built by John Hyrcanus in ca. 125-115 BCE (Coins of John Hyrcanus were found in the ritual bath A(A)209-A(A)243); the Fortified Palace, built by Alexander Jannaeus in ca. 93-86 BCE, was constructed on the ruins of the Buried Palace, but was very badly preserved; and the Twin Palaces were built by Queen Salome Alexandra (76-67 BCE) for her two rival sons, Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II (Netzer, 2001: pp. 2-6, 301-310). Netzer's chronology was contested by others, based on the pottery, dating the Buried Palace to Jannaeus (Magness, 2003: p. 422), but this need not concern us here. Several examples of Hellenistic culture can be seen in these four structures.

2.1. Art

The southern wing of the Buried Palace contained a small *triclinium* A(A)38 (estimated width 6.5 m), which was decorated with stucco and frescoes, with drafted blocks of marble and imitation alabaster (Kelso & Baramki, 1955: p. 9 and Plate 9; Rosenberg, 2008: pp. 299-301). Fragments of fresco decorations were found in the Fortified Palace (Netzer, 1999: pp. 20-21, fig. 26). In the Eastern Mansion of the Twin Palaces, remains of stucco decorations painted in red, black, and white were found in the *triclinium*, as well as traces of fresco on the walls, and painted fragments on the floor. A red-painted decorative groove was found in one of the bathroom suites (Netzer, 2001: pp. 164, 310). These are the

first manifestations of such wall decorations in Jewish sites⁵. One mosaic was found in bathroom A(B)43 near the bathtub (Netzer, 1999: p. 30).

The architectural decoration in these palaces includes Doric capitals, perhaps part of a *ditylos-in-antis* entrance in the Buried Palace, and a Doric colonnade, including capitals and entablature (a frieze carved with triglyphs and metopes) in the Pool Complex. Doric capitals and column drums were also found in the Twin Palaces and the remains of a *ditylos-in-antis* were excavated in the entrance. Peleg-Barkat (2013: pp. 236-241; 2015: pp. 326-328) noted Alexandrian influence in the Hasmonean palaces.

These findings should be compared to the more elaborated ones in the palace of Hyrcanus the Tobiad (early second century BCE), a rich Jewish-Ptolemaic landowner and former royal tax collector in Araq el Amir in the Transjordan. His palace features columns with Corinthian capitals and other columns decorated with lions, as well as *acroteria* in the form of eagles (Will & Larché, 1991: pp. 219-221, 243-245, 280. Cf. *Ant.* 12.228-236).

We also have historical evidence of Hasmonean art and decoration. Simon built a monumental tomb for his father and brothers in Mode'in. It consisted of seven pyramids topped by trophies of armor and ships, inspired by Hellenistic (and Roman) monumental art—patterns also used by Seleucid generals. Simon thus employed Hellenistic models to commemorate his Maccabean family⁶. This attests to the adjustment, adaptation, and creative appropriation of Hellenism.

2.2. Architecture

The palaces contain only a few features of Hellenistic architecture. Netzer suggests that the inner courtyard of the Fortified Palace was surrounded by a peristyle (Netzer, 1999: pp. 18-21; 2001: pp. 305-306). At the center of each of the Twin Palaces was a courtyard of 10 × 9.3 m. which, via *distyle in antis*, led to a *triclinium* of 6 × 6.5 m (Netzer, 1999: pp. 23-28; 2001: pp. 3, 148, 306-310). All four palaces lack many elements of the Hellenistic monumental approach: a peristyle court, large ceremonial halls, and more elaborate decorations.

The Hasmoneans' use of public spaces and monumental architecture is quite restrained; indeed, reception, dining, and banqueting areas were extremely limited in the Twin Palaces (and probably also in Jannaeus' Fortified Palace). Moreover, unlike Herod's First Palace in Jericho, the Buried Palace and the Twin Palaces lacked a peristyle court, which was extremely common even in modest Hellenistic palaces⁷.

⁵Painted and gilded stucco was also found in the (non-Jewish) villa in Tel Anafa that dates to the last quarter of the second century BCE (Berlin, 1997: pp. 26-29).

⁶1 Macc 13:27-30. Cf. the account of Josephus in *Ant.* 13.211, where the trophies and carved ships are omitted and the emphasis is on the roofed colonnades. Fine, 2005: pp. 61-65 stressed the aniconic character of the monument. For Greco-Roman parallels, see Sievers, 1990: pp. 106-107 and references. The monument was still familiar to Eusebius, *Onomasticon* (ed. Klostermann, p. 132).

⁷Compare the large peristyles in the simple palaces of Pergamon and in the court with the rooms on all four sides in Aigai, Macedonia (Nielsen, 1994: pp. 82, 106-109). On Herod's first palace in Jericho (the so-called gymnasium excavated by Pritchard, see Netzer, 1991: pp. 234-235, 627; Netzer, 2006: pp. 45-49. Compare the survey of Hellenistic features of the Hasmonean palaces in Nielsen, 1994: pp. 155-160.

2.3. Pools

The Hasmonean palace complex in Jericho included eleven pools. Two small bathing and swimming pools, AC44 and A(C)94, measuring ca. 8.8×8.2 m and maximum depth of 3.7 m, are located west of the Buried Palace. They were surrounded by a paved garden decorated with mosaics and walls adorned with frescoes (Netzer, 1999: pp. 10-11; 2001: pp. 2, 57-59). A small pool A(C)161 (3.6×3.6 m, and 3.9 m depth) was later added (Netzer, 2001: p. 63). Subsequently, when the Fortified Palace was built, Pool A(C)90 (8.8×7.7 m) was added, following the removal of AC44 (Netzer, 2001: pp. 67-68).

The Pool Complex in the Hasmonean Garden east of the Buried Palace was contemporaneous with the Buried Palace and contained two pools, (A(B)101), each measuring 18×13 m. A large Pavilion surrounded by porticos in Doric style was constructed south of the southern pool. A small pool, A(B)399 (4×3.4 m), was uncovered near the Pavilion. The garden around the pools was surrounded by colonnades. At later stages, storerooms were built in the Western Garden (west of the pools) and a *triclinium* was added. The pools and the Pavilion were probably used for games and recreation, and the Pavilion may have served as a *triclinium* or reception hall (Netzer, 2001: pp. 88-91, 303-305). North of the pools was a large garden measuring 61×71 m, surrounded by colonnades (Netzer, 2001: pp. 136-139 and plan 25). An additional small pool A(B)125 was constructed in Stage 6 (during the days of Hyrcanus II) in the Western Garden (Netzer, 2001: pp. 98-99).

Each of the Twin Palaces had a separate garden or court with a swimming pool located in the center. The Western Court included Pool AE103 (8×7.85 m). The Eastern Court included Pool A(L)330 (6.8×6.8 m), and Pool A(L)255 (20.2×12.5 m), along with a *triclinium* (AL94) with couches (Netzer, 2001: pp. 172-174, 185, 189, 31).

Such swimming pools were characteristic of Hellenistic palaces, as evidenced by the Seleucid palace in Ai Khanoum in Bactria (second century BCE) and the Palazzo delle Colonne at Ptolemais in Cyrenaica. Furthermore, an enormous pool is mentioned in classical sources in relation to the palace of Gelon in Acragas, Sicily, dating from the fifth century BCE. Small pools dating from the fourth century BCE have also been found in the Royal Palace in Pella, Macedonia (Nielsen, 1994: pp. 79, 92, 100, 127, 150). Similar pools were common in Roman villas (von Stackelberg, 2009). Herod, who later made use of some of the Hasmonean pools, built an extremely large pool (B107, 90×42 m) east of the Sunken Garden of the Third Palace in Jericho, and additional pools at Masada, in Lower Herodium, and at the promontory palace at Caesarea Maritima⁸.

These pools, and especially the Pool Complex, were not merely recreational facilities, but also displayed royal power, success, and Hellenistic civilization by

⁸Netzer, 1991: pp. 481-482, 647; 2001: pp. 317-319; 1999:102-103; Gleason, 1998, respectively. The Hasmonean gardens (Netzer, 2001: pp. 95-98, 128-135) also resulted from Hellenistic monumental inspiration (although the concept is originally Persian). See Nielsen, 1994: pp. 27, 133, 138-139, 150, 164-171; Macdougall and Jashemski, 1981; Farrar, 2000: pp. 25-27. Cf. *Ant.* 12.228-236.

imitating the pools of other Hellenistic kings⁹. They manifested the special traits of royal ideology—luxury (*truphē*) and hospitality.

2.4. Hot Baths

Four Greek hot baths containing bathtubs and heating installations were discovered in the Hasmonean complex. In the Buried Palace, bathtub AA24 and furnace AA50 were located near bathroom AA24, in the Northern Wing of the palace (Netzer, 2001: p. 35). In the Western Mansion of the Twin Palaces, a hot tub was found in Room A(E)51; its waters were probably heated by means of a metal cauldron, traces of which were found in ritual bath AE45 (Netzer, 2001: pp. 157-161). A similar bathhouse suite (AE62) existed in the Eastern Mansion, containing a bathtub and a service room (AE44), with a furnace for heating the water for the bath (Netzer, 2001: pp. 170-171). Bathing in the palaces was not designed to impress visitors, but rather was intended for the enjoyment of the royal residents. In contrast, in Hellenistic and Roman domestic buildings bathhouses were usually located close to a peristyle courtyard (especially in Pompeii) and were used to receive guests (Trümper, 2010: p. 544).

An additional bathhouse was constructed outside the palace buildings, in the Western Garden, at a later stage: Bathroom A(B)43 included a bathtub and cauldron (as well as an exceptional heated ritual bath with a cauldron). Another heating chamber A(B)76, apparently containing a cauldron, was installed north of the pools (Netzer, 2001: pp. 101-105, 122). Here the Greek style of bathing was available to guests, demonstrating that later Hasmoneans, probably Hyrcanus II, improved upon the bathing habits common to Hellenistic culture. It is noteworthy that the earlier Hasmoneans refrained from public bathing.

Terra-cotta bathtubs were found in Mycenaean palaces and were already common in fifth-century BCE Athens and fourth-century middle-class houses in Olynthos (Cook, 1959). Private, domestic, heated bathtubs for immersion have been found in Italian villas from the second century BCE (Trümper, 2010: pp. 536-539). The Hasmonean bathtubs and heating installations attest that they had adopted the Hellenistic custom of bathing for pleasure, relaxation, and comfort, a status symbol typical of the late Hellenistic period (Yegül, 1992: pp. 4-6; Trümper, 2010: p. 543). Surprisingly, contemporaneous bathhouses found in Judaea and the Galilee were more elaborate. Seven bathrooms were found in Gezer, three of them containing two bathtubs each. In Beth Zur a combination of sitz bath and basin was found, as well as several baths in a single room (although these may have been public bathhouses, or *balenia*). In Tel Anafa, the private bathhouse contained three rooms (but only one bathtub) and under-floor heating (Hoss, 2005: pp. 39, 42, 52, 124-25, 133, 144-45). The simplicity of the Hasmonenan bathhouse complexes, their location, and the fact that, apart from a single and much later one, they were intended for private use, attest to the relatively limited adoption of Hellenistic (and originally Greek) bathing habits.

⁹Compare the political use made of gardens in the late republic, in von Stackelberg, 2009: pp. 72-80. Note Julius Caesar's invitations to the *plebs urbana* to a feast in his private garden to celebrate his Spanish triumph (Val. Max. 9.15.1).

2.5. Non-Hellenistic Features: Ritual Baths and Common, Local Pottery

The palaces also displayed a material culture of non-Hellenistic features, and two of them may actually have implied the rejection of Hellenistic culture while stressing local or ethnic Judean identity.

Twelve ritual baths (*miqva'ot*) as well as four adjacent baths without steps (used to “purify” the water of the neighboring baths, for ritual immersion, termed “treasury” in scholarship) were found in the entire complex: In the Buried Palace, ritual bath A(A)209 and an adjacent “treasury” A(A)243 were found (Netzer, 2001: pp. 38-43). This was the earliest ritual bath on the site, perhaps even the most ancient bath ever found in Judea. The Eastern Mansion had two ritual baths. The Western Mansion had three ritual baths (Netzer, 2001: pp. 153, 157, 161, 167, 170). Outside the palaces in the Eastern Garden, there were two ritual baths next to storerooms and industrial facilities (Netzer, 2001: pp. 130-131, 134-135). The Pool Complex contained a small ritual bath (Netzer, 2001: pp. 89, 91, 305-306), and three baths were found in the Western Garden near the Pool Complex (Netzer, 2001: pp. 102, 105-106, 117). It seems that after swimming in the pool, the Hasmoneans and their guests immersed themselves in the ritual bath. The proximity of the ritual baths to the pools also indicates that the pools were not designated for ritual purification. Furthermore, the hot baths were located in proximity to ritual baths and the bathers may have purified themselves after a hot bath.

The Hasmoneans' consistent observance of ritual purity in both the private and public domains may be related to the fact that they were priests (and high priests). They had to partake of priestly gifts, heave offerings (*terumat*) in a state of purity, and practice ablutions before leaving Jericho to visit or serve at the Temple. The source of the impurity they were required to shed, however, may be related to a rejection of Hellenism. Other evidence shows that in the early Hasmonean period Jews, and probably also the Hasmoneans themselves, regarded gentiles as defiling, as attested in 1 Maccabees 1:37; 4:36, 41, 43; 13:47-48, 50; 14:7, 36 (Schwartz, 1991; Klawans, 1995). If the Hasmoneans purified themselves from Gentile impurity, which probably resulted from idolatry, this means that their Hellenization had strict constraints.

Palaces normally contained splendid vessels for feasting and banquets, designed to flaunt wealth and royal status. However, the pottery in the Hasmonean palaces was locally made and indicated very little Hellenistic influence. Moreover, there was a near total absence of imported fine wares. Vessels that are extremely prevalent at Hellenistic sites as well as in the Herodian palaces—Eastern Sigillata A, Rhodian amphorae, mold-made lamps and fusiform unguentaria—were missing¹⁰. A few red slipped wares may have provided an alternative to

¹⁰Bar-Nathan, 2002: pp. 119, 121-122, 193-198. One base of an amphora was found in the Hasmonean bathhouse [Pool A(B)9]. Nonetheless, if it was found *inside* the bath, this might not be “a clean Hasmonean context.” Another four or five fragments were found in disturbed stratigraphic contexts, such as the moat fill. See Bar-Nathan, 2002: p. 131, n. 7. Note that the pool complex continued to be used by Herod. Several types of vessels demonstrate the limited influence of Hellenistic tradition in both technique and form, and imitate certain types of bowls, globular lagynos, biconical and pyriform jugs, and perhaps also kraters and casseroles. See Bar-Nathan, 2002:37, 45, 46, 49, 74, 76, 78, 197.

Eastern Sigillata vessels (Bar Nathan, 2002: pp. 37, 46, 55-56, 95-96, 119-120, 122-124, 196, 197). Unlike the Hellenistic vessels, the Hasmonean bowls and plates were unslipped (Bar Nathan, 2002: pp. 79-80, 82-83, 86, 91). The esteemed inhabitants ignored or rejected genuine Hellenistic pottery. The other Hellenistic features discussed above as well as the royal status of the palace inhabitants indicate that the lack of imported vessels was not the result of poor commercial trade with Hellenistic potters in the surrounding *poleis*. The paucity of pottery made by Hellenistic potters was a conscious decision (*pace* Bar-Nathan, 2002: p. 198).

It is intriguing that although the Hasmoneans imitated the grandeur of Hellenistic swimming pools and the convenience of hot baths, they did not employ basic Hellenistic domestic vessels such as amphoras—indeed amphoras were rejected by the entire population of Jerusalem in the Hasmonean period (Finkielsztejn, 1999)—as were Eastern Sigillata. This indicates that the adoption of “Greek ways” was selective. Since these vessels were produced by gentiles, and were associated with food, I suggest that they were rejected due to purity concerns (Bar Nathan, 2002: pp. 197-199). The Hasmoneans observed ritual purity and kept themselves apart from the impurity of the gentiles. For some reason, swimming pools and hot baths were not associated with such impurity, although they were less common among the Greeks and reflect a deeper interaction with Hellenistic culture.

3. The Symbols on Hasmonean Coins

Hasmonean coinage, from the reign of John Hyrcanus to that of Mattathias Antigonus (40-37 BCE), included several icons or symbols characteristic of Hellenistic coins, especially those used by the contemporary Seleucid kings. A list of parallels was drawn up by Kindler (1993. Cf. Rajak, 1990: pp. 270-271). Here I would like to not only point to the adoption of Hellenistic features, but to show that some adjustments were made in the form of these symbols, and that certain symbols may have had a different meaning when depicted on Jewish coins. The numismatic evidence therefore demonstrates how Hellenistic attributes were used and processed by the Hasmoneans. In order to decipher the meaning of the symbols we should pay attention to their context, namely, with what other symbols or inscription they appear. The altered context of a given Hellenistic symbol from Greek to Judean/Jewish may attest to the fact that the Hasmoneans transformed the meaning of this particular symbol (cf. Tilley, 1989; Hodder and Huston, 2003: pp. 45-74, 156-205).

In the Hellenistic world, coins were more than money. They advertised the ruler’s achievements, or any omens, legends, or prophecies that attached to him, in an effort to enhance his personal prestige and ensure the public’s loyalty to his successors (Hadley, 1974; Wright, 2005). The Hasmoneans certainly continued this line of reasoning when they publicized their high priesthood and monarchic rule (in the case of Alexander Jannaeus and Mattathias Antigonus).

Yet they avoided motifs of pagan iconography, due to the Jewish religious prohi-

bition of graven images. As a result, they had space to fill with symbols that in Hellenistic coinage were rather small and secondary to the mythic or human figures. Symbols that were marginal on Hellenistic coins, such as the anchor, the star and the palm branch, were minted on the center of the Hasmonean coins and filled most of their surface. Consequently, their meaning, marginal in comparison to the portrait of the king, Nikē or Zeus, was more significant on Jewish coins. As we shall see, the Hasmoneans utilized some symbols of their Seleucid contemporaries.

3.1. The Wreath

Virtually all Hasmonean coins bear the name of a ruler or high priest encircled by a laurel wreath. On Hellenistic coins the wreath, held by Nike or Victory, symbolized authority and victory¹¹. This decoration typified the coins of Antiochus VI, Alexander Balas, Demetrius II, Antiochus VII, Antiochus VIII, Antiochus IX, and Antiochus XII¹². On the coins of the Seleucids and the Phoenician cities, the wreath appears on the reverse, encircling the king's name and the mythological icons, such as nude Apollo seated on an *omphalos* and holding a bow and arrow, Athena holding a small Nike, or Zeus seated on a throne holding both Nike and scepter (Houghton, 1983: nos. 233, 264, 346 respectively).

The Hasmoneans copied the wreath from their contemporaries¹³, but made several changes. On Hasmonean coins the wreath always appears on the obverse, encircling the inscription with the name of the high priest and *heber ha-yehudim*—a term which, in my view, designated the entire Judean ethnos (Regev, 2013: pp. 186-199)—whereas the symbol (e.g., the cornucopia) appears on the reverse. Thus, the Hasmoneans moved the inscription with the ruler's name and title, as well as the wreath, from the reverse to the obverse. Consequently, both the inscription and the wreath are more noticeable and prominent than on Seleucid coins.

Moreover, on Seleucid coins the wreath encircled the god's icon and his or her association with the king. As such, it relayed a certain religious or cultic message: namely, that the king had been crowned by a god such as Athena, Nike, or Zeus. In contrast, on Hasmonean coins, the wreath appears above the name of the high priest and *heber ha-yehudim*, thus granting them religious authority. The inscription actually took the place of both the king's portrait and the Greek mythological figure, thus emphasizing the prominence of the high priest and *heber ha-yehudim* (the Jewish people)¹⁴.

¹¹Nike holds a wreath on Alexander's coins (Mørkholm, 1991: p. 42), and a wreath and palm branch on Ptolemy I's (Poole 1963: p. 11). Note that Alkimus gave Demetrius I a crown/wreath (*stephanos*) of gold and palm (2 Macc 14:3-4).

¹²Houghton, 1983: nos. 217-219, 232-236, 264-267, 329-331, 335-336, 346-348, 352-354, 404, 409, 412-413, 693, 719, 723-725, 762-765, 835, 850-859, 864. For different types of wreaths, see Mørkholm, 1991: nos. 582-583, 587-590B, 603-605, 612, 614-616, 618-619, 620, 625-626, 633, 636, 644, 654. See also the wreaths of Ptolemy VI (Poole, 1963: p. 81).

¹³Their wreath is composed of two olive or laurel branches tied at the bottom with a ribbon and connected at the top by a single stroke. The wreaths of Mattathias Antigonus are made of ivy (Meshorer, 1982: pp. 63-64). On the various wreaths' features, see Meshorer, 1982: pp. 65-67.

¹⁴According to Meshorer, 1982: p. 64, in Jewish art the wreath symbolized leadership and authority, and was generally employed for the purpose of coronation; it might also have symbolized Temple rituals. It appears extensively on Bar-Kokhba coins. Three decorative wreaths (*zerim*) at the Temple (of the altar, ark, and incense tables) are mentioned in b. *Yoma* 72b.

3.2. The Cornucopia

The cornucopia (in Latin, “horn of plenty,” or abundance) is the most common symbol on Hasmonean coins (Barag and Qedar, 1980: pp. 12-21). All the Hasmoneans used it on some coins of their high priestly office. The cornucopia originated in a Greek myth about Amalthea, a nymph whose horn broke off, subsequently becoming a source of abundant wealth (Barag and Qedar, 1980: p. 15). In the early Hellenistic period, the cornucopia appeared on Ptolemaic coins¹⁵, and those of Alexander Balas, Demetrius I, Demetrius II, Alexander Zabinas, Cleopatra Thea, Seleucus VI, and Antiochus IX¹⁶. It is also found on the coins of Akko-Ptolemais, minted in 131-109 BCE, when the city was autonomous (Kadman, 1961: nos. 11-42). Therefore, we may assume that John Hyrcanus borrowed this symbol from his neighbors, and that it remained popular among his successors.

The closest parallel to Hyrcanus’ cornucopia, which features on its base a flower tied with ribbon, and fruits on both horns (including a symmetrical pair of bunches of grapes), is found only on a tetradrachm, or silver coin, from the city of Lebedus in Ionia, dated to c. 150 BCE. While the coin of Lebedus has an owl and a club between the horns (and an image of Athena wearing a helmet on the obverse), the Hasmonean coin featured a pomegranate under two ears of corn. The ears of corn were an original Hasmonean addition without parallel in Hellenistic coinage (Barag and Qedar, 1980: p. 16).

There are, however, differences between the Hasmoneans’ cornucopia and those of their contemporaries. The coins of Demetrius I and II, Cleopatra Thea/Antiochus VIII, and Antiochus IX, as well as those of Akko-Ptolemais, all feature a single horn. The other Seleucids and the Hasmoneans, however, displayed a double cornucopia (on one type of coin minted by Antigonos, there is only a single horn). Furthermore, on the Seleucid coins with double horns, they are attached to each other from behind, and only part of the horn at the rear is noticeable (sometimes bound by a fillet). On most Hasmonean coins, by contrast, the horns are side by side and unattached, with a space between them that is sometimes filled by a pomegranate or ears of barley. The Hasmonean cornucopia therefore had a distinctive shape¹⁷.

The Hellenistic cornucopia symbolized fertility (Meshorer, 1982: pp. 67-68)¹⁸. The original object—the horn of a bull or a ram—was used as a container, usually for fruits. On some coins of Demetrius I and Akko-Ptolemais, the horn is held by Tyche, and on some Seleucid coins Tyche is seated on a throne holding a scepter (Houghton, 1983: nos. 143-151, 164, 167-168; Kadman, 1961: nos. 45-47).

¹⁵Mørkholm, 1991: nos. 294-205 (Ptolemy II), 307-308, 313 (Ptolemy III), 316 (Ptolemy IV), 322-323 (Ptolemy V); Poole, 1963: p. 98 (Ptolemy VIII); 107 (Ptolemy X). See also Poole, 1963: pp. 42-45 (Arsinoë II), 59-61 (Bernice II).

¹⁶Houghton, 1983: nos. 408; 155-157, 159, 161-167; 874-878; 306-307; 803, 810-811; 376; 884 (respectively). See also Kindler, 1993: p. 109.

¹⁷On Hyrcanus’ (very rare) coin type with the helmet on the obverse, the arrangement of the cornucopia resembles the Seleucid style.

¹⁸For the history of the cornucopia and its meaning, see Goodenough, 1953-1968: vol. 8, pp. 106-114; Barag and Qedar, 1980: pp. 15-16.

We may surmise, then, that the horn was related to good fortune and governing authority; it probably also bespoke the success and good fortune of the ruler or the city. On some Hasmonean coins, pomegranates (Hyrchanus I) or ears of barley (Antigonus) appear between the horns, representing the fertility of the soil (and perhaps also of the people)¹⁹.

It must be noted, however, that in ancient Judaism the horn also boasted a more complex religious symbolism (Meshorer, 1982: p. 67): The Shofar, made of a ram's horn, was used in the Temple as a musical instrument. It was also associated with divine proclamation, intervention, and deliverance (Exod 19:16; Lev 25:9; Isa 18:3; Jer 51:27; Zech 9:14). Kings David and Solomon were anointed by oil poured from a ram's horn (1 Sam 16:13; 1 Kings 1:39). In prophetic literature, the horn is a metaphor for divinely granted political success (Ezk 29:1; Ps 89:18; 148:14; Lem 2:3), and the continuation of the Davidic dynasty (Ps 132:17; Ps. 89:25; cf. 1 Sam 2:10). Finally, it also symbolized military power (Deut 23:17; Zech 2:4-5; Daniel 7:7-11; 8:3-4, 6-11). These sentiments correspond to the cornucopia and the Seleucid Tyche seated on a throne and wielding a scepter. It is possible, therefore, that not only did the Hasmonean cornucopia symbolize fertility, abundance, and success in line with Hellenistic culture, but also Jewish ideas of government in accordance with divine will, and perhaps even the fulfillment of the prophetic promises of Israel's deliverance. In short, the horn on the Hasmonean coins combined both Hellenistic political and Jewish religious connotations.

3.3. The Helmet

One rare coin type struck by John Hyrcanus features a crested helmet, replete with a visor and cheek pieces, on the obverse. The helmet had already made an appearance on classical Athenian coins and some of Alexander's coins (Shear, 1933: pp. 249-251, 261-262; Mørkholm, 1991: p. 42), as attested to by the coins of Seleucus I and II and Antiochus I and II, in both the Attic and Corinthian types²⁰. A Macedonian helmet is featured on the coins of Tryphon as well as on a few coins of Alexander Balas and Antiochus VII²¹.

It is customary to regard the helmet as a representation of military victory (Préaux, 1978: vol. 1, p. 185; Pollitt, 1986: p. 28)²². But the military connotation is not conclusive since the helmet also appears on the coins of cities that were not engaged in wars, e.g., Athens in the first half of the second century BCE (Mørkholm, 1991: nos. 609-610). It therefore seems that the meaning of the

¹⁹Pomegranates were symbols of fertility in Greek art (MacDonald, 1922: p. 12). They probably had similar connotations in Jewish art, but may also have symbolized the Temple, since they appeared on its pillars, Jachin and Boaz. See 1 Kings 7:18-20; Romanoff, 1944: pp. 52-53. Barag and Qedar (1980: p. 17) suggested that the cornucopia symbolized the fertility of the Land of Israel.

²⁰Houghton, 1983: nos. 887-888; 47-49, 671-673; 891-893; 455 (respectively). See also the coins of Ptolemy VI (Poole, 1963: p. 82).

²¹Houghton, 1983: nos. 200-203; 818-819. For the coins of Tryphon in which the Macedonian helmet appears with a spike, cheek pieces, and an ibex horn, see Houghton, 1983: nos. 254-263.

²²The head of Athena appears in a crested helmet on Alexander's coins (Mørkholm, 1991: p. 42). Sperber (1965: pp. 86, 88) assumed that the helmeted Hyrcanus coin commemorated a specific victory, most likely the conquest of Samaria.

helmet went beyond mere military victory, and was likely associated with more general ideas of security and material affluence.

The helmet on Hyrcanus' coins was Macedonian, similar to those on the coins of Alexander Balas and Antiochus VII. Unlike others, the helmets of both Antiochus VII and Hyrcanus appear independently, i.e., they were not worn by a goddess or a king. It is very likely that Hyrcanus was directly influenced by Antiochus VII. It should nonetheless be noted that on Antiochus VII's coins, the helmet appears on the obverse, as is customary on Hellenistic coins, whereas Hyrcanus put it on the reverse.

Helmet-type coins may have been among the earliest coins of Hyrcanus, intended to convey the message that the military and political power that once characterized Antiochus VII—who had defeated Hyrcanus, and then forced him to act as an accomplice to his military campaigns (*Ant.* 13.236-252)—was now in the hands of Hyrcanus himself. In other words, the Hasmoneans were not merely *imitating* the Seleucids, but rather usurping them. It is also possible to connect the helmet-type coins to Hyrcanus' later, successful conquests²³.

3.4. The Anchor

The anchor appears on three different royal coin types of Jannaeus. A traditional Seleucid symbol, the anchor was employed by several Seleucid kings, including Seleucus I, Antiochus I, Seleucus II, Demetrius I, Demetrius II, and Alexander Zabinas²⁴. Like the Seleucid version, Jannaeus' anchor was inverted, i.e., turned upwards (Kindler, 1968: p. 190; Jacobson, 2000). Jacobson even argued that Jannaeus used the anchor because it was a Seleucid symbol, i.e., in order to emphasize the legitimacy of his rule to the non-Jewish population. These coins—all of which were of the royal type—bear the Greek inscription “of King Alexander” (Jacobson, 2000: pp. 76, 80).

Generally regarded as a maritime symbol, the anchor's appearance on coins could be related to maritime victories or dominion over the seas. Jannaeus' use of this symbol is usually associated with his occupation of the cities of the coastal plain and their harbors, especially Gaza—note that Jannaeus probably had no fleet (Kanael, 1963: p. 44; Meshorer, 1982: p. 62. Cf. *Ant.* 13.357-364, 395). The Hasmoneans took a special interest in this symbol, since Jews used ships and boats as decorative and commemorative elements on buildings and funerary sites, such as the mausoleum in Mode'in erected by Simon (1 Macc 13:28-30). The pools in the Hasmonean palace in Jericho may have displayed similar expressions of power and success²⁵.

²³Unlike all other Hasmonean coins, this type had a double denomination. Meshorer (1982: p. 67) therefore suggested that it was struck for a special occasion. He also regarded the helmet as symbolizing authority.

²⁴Houghton, 1983: nos. 919-920, 1302-1303; 18-22, 1309; 896-897; 1322; 567-573; 300 (respectively). The anchor was the personal badge of Seleucus I, and figured as the Seleucid state seal (Bikerman, 1938: p. 33; Zahle, 1990: p. 134 n. 4). Note the absence of the anchor on Ptolemaic coinage (Poole 1963).

²⁵On the meaning of maritime symbolism, see Kashtan, 2000: pp. 22-24. In the *Testament of Naphtali* 6:1-10, Jacob and his sons sail on a ship, and the successful voyage, despite a storm *en route*, is a metaphor for the destiny of Israel.

3.5. The Star and the Diadem as Symbols of Kingship

Alexander Jannaeus put a star on two types of royal coin. On Hellenistic coins, the star may have carried astrological connotations, specifically of luck and fate (Meshorer, 1982: p. 60)²⁶. In certain cases, such as those in which a star appears above the diademed head of Antiochus IV or next to an elephant on the coins of Antiochus VI, it may have indicated kingship or military power (Houghton, 1983: nos. 732; 249-250, respectively). On coins from the Greek city of Miletus, the star appeared above a lion (Mørkholm, 1991: no. 571 dated to 200 BCE)²⁷.

Jannaeus' star accompanies his royal title. In the Hebrew Bible, the star is associated with kingship, as in Balam's blessing: "a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel" (Num 24:17)²⁸. Clearly, the verse made its mark on Jewish royal imagery: R. Akiba, who believed Simon Bar-Kosba was the messiah, changed the latter's name to Bar-Kokhba ("the son of star") for this reason (Y. *Ta'anot* 4, 68d; Lamentations Rabba 2:4, ed. Buber, 51a). Possibly the use of the star on Jannaeus' coins was meant to suggest that Balam's ancient prophecy had been realized (Cf. Kanael, 1963: p. 44)²⁹.

The star is encircled by a rounded frame, most likely a diadem, inscribed with Jannaeus' Hebrew name, *Yehonatan*, (Kanael, 1963: p. 44; Meshorer, 1982: p. 61; 1997: pp. 40-41). The diadem—a band of white cloth with decorated edges worn around the head—was the most popular and important of the royal features depicted on Hellenistic coins. First worn by Alexander after he was crowned "king of Asia," after his death the diadem became the symbol of his heritage. Wearing the diadem thus represented royal status (Smith, 1988: pp. 34-38). Yet whereas on Hellenistic coins, the diadem always appeared on the king's portrait, on Jannaeus' coins it *substituted* for his self-portrait; it was, in other words, a visual synecdoche for his kingship (Meshorer, 1982: p. 61). As such, it represents the adaptation of a distinctly Hellenistic symbol into a Jewish context, followed by an artistic innovation—placing the diadem around the star, and writing "Jannaeus the King" around it from the outside.

3.6. The Palm Branch and Hellenistic Victory and Power

One of Hyrcanus' coin types, as well as one type of Jannaeus' royal coins, features a palm branch with an inscription on the obverse. It is a large branch, placed at the center of the coin and absent any other figures. Similar palm branches are also found on the Seleucid coins of Seleucus II, Antiochus V, Alexander Balas, Demetrius II, Antiochus VII, Alexander Zabinas, and Antiochus

²⁶Compare the small star and Apollo (Demetrius II; Houghton, 1983: no. 220) to the image of Zeus holding a star (Antiochus VIII; *ibid.*, nos. 322, 881-882).

²⁷The coins of Ptolemy V had stars on either side of the cornucopia (Poole, 1963: p. 72). The coins of Ptolemy VIII had a star beside an eagle (Poole, 1963: p. 97). Stars are also used as small monograms; (Poole, 1963: pp. 96-97).

²⁸Ancient biblical interpreters also related the verse to kingship. See the LXX to Num 24:17 and CD 7:19-20.

²⁹Note that the star always appears next to a Hebrew or Aramaic inscription, never a Greek one. The notion of kingship it reflected was therefore probably Jewish.

VIII; it also makes an appearance on Tyrian shekels and half-shekels from the Hasmonean period³⁰. The palm branch most likely demonstrated victory or military success. On Alexander Balas' and the Tyrian coins, the palm branch is placed above the shoulder of an eagle, also indicating power or success³¹.

A difference can be discerned between the palm branch on Hasmonean and Hellenistic coins. In the latter the branch is much smaller and held aloft by a goddess, or placed next to a god or above an eagle. Although the Hasmoneans clearly adopted the symbol from the Hellenistic world, the appearance of the palm branch (in Hebrew, *lulav*, used by Jews in the festival of Sukkot/Tabernacles) as an independent symbol on their coins is clearly a Jewish innovation.

The palm branch also played a role in the relationship between Jews and Seleucids during the Maccabean period: Alkimus, the Jewish high priest, sent Demetrius I a palm branch and a golden crown in an attempt to please him and persuade him to support his high priesthood (2 Macc 14:4). Simon also sent a palm branch and a golden crown to Demetrius II as a gift when the king reaffirmed Simon's high priesthood (1 Macc 13:37; [Bikerman, 1938: p. 112](#)). The palm tree symbolizes prosperity in Ps 92:13). In both instances, the palm branch may have reflected kingship or successful rule. The Maccabees, furthermore, celebrated the dedication of the Temple on Hanukkah with palm branches (2 Macc 10:7). When Simon conquered the Seleucid Acra near the Temple Mount, the people celebrated his victory with a thanksgiving demonstration that included the waving of palm branches (1 Macc 13:51). Interestingly, in John 12:13, palm branches also symbolize deliverance. All this leads to the conclusion that the palm branch symbolized both military achievements and successful rule.

3.7. The Role of Hellenistic Symbols

To conclude the numismatic evidence, we have seen that the Hasmoneans adapted symbols used by the contemporary Seleucid kings (and at times also by the Ptolemaics). At the same time, however, they altered some of them stylistically, detaching them from their iconographic and mythological context, and often enlarging the symbol at the center of the coin. In the cases of the cornucopia, the star and perhaps also the palm branch, the Greek meaning was accompanied by genuine Jewish symbols rooted in the Hebrew Bible. The Hasmonean use of Hellenistic symbols was therefore rather selective and creative. They did not just imitate Seleucid or Ptolemaic coins but chose aspects that appealed to them, transforming them as required by Jewish Law or else reinterpreted them according to Jewish tradition. We should bear in mind that most of the people who used Hasmonean coins were Jews, not Greeks, and most of the coin types were inscribed in Hebrew or Aramaic. This audience was probably impressed by the Greek symbols (which were already familiar from the Seleucids) but also interested in Jewish messages.

³⁰[Houghton, 1983](#): nos. 51;794-795; 744-747, 749-750; 751-756, 767-770; 759, 764; 820; 822-824; [Hill, 1965a](#): pp. 233-253, respectively. The coins of Antiochus V were struck in Ptolemais, and those of Alexander Zabinas and Antiochus VII in Ascalon.

³¹See also the Nike with wreath and palm branch on Ptolemy I's coins ([Poole, 1963: p. 11](#)).

3.8. Additional Jewish Aspects of Hasmonean Coinage

Hasmonean coinage was far from being a replica of Seleucid coinage. It had distinctive Jewish markers, some of them exceptional in the Hellenistic world. First of all, most of their coin types bore the title of a high priest, not a king. Even Aristobulus, Jannaeus and Antigonus, who were both high priests and kings, continue to use their priestly title along with the royal one on other coins. The high priestly title in paleo-Hebrew script represented the independence of Jewish religion headed by the Hasmonean high priest. This relative preference for the high priesthood over the crown may be regarded as a reaction to Hellenistic political conventions.

Secondly, the high priestly title was accompanied by the Hebrew title (again, in paleo-Hebrew script, which may have represented the authenticity and antiquity of the Jews) *heber hayhudim*. The mention of the Jewish ethnos emphasized their identity on the Hasmonean coins. In fact, the word *heber* may have referred to the entire Jewish people. Admittedly, coins which bear the name of the community are characteristic of the Greek *poleis*, including those on the borders of the Hasmonean kingdom: “of the people of Ascalon (*askalaōnitōn*), and similarly Gaza (Hill, 1965a: pp. liv, lxix), Ptolemais, Scythopolis; Gadara (Meshorer, 1985: pp. 12, 40, 80), and Sidon (*sidōniōn*) (Hill, 1965b: pp. cvi-cvii, 155-171). Paradoxically, in stressing their local Judean ethnic identity, the Hasmoneans were following the practice of Greek cities!

4. The Hasmoneans' Interaction with Hellenistic Kings in 1 Maccabees

In order to get a better perspective on how the Hasmonean rulers approached and utilized the archaeological evidence discussed here, I suggest looking at the manner in which their predecessors interacted with different—more political—aspects of Hellenism, including certain features of material culture as presented in the First Book of Maccabees.

1 Maccabees was written by admirers of Judah Maccabee and his brothers. It introduces the story of their successful resistance to the Seleucids and the emergence of their political independence. However, throughout the narrative the authors stressed the interaction of the Maccabees with the Seleucid rulers by exchanging gifts and tributes of honor. They also emphasize their rank in the Seleucid royal court and their money and goods. I will review the evidence and attempt to infer the attitude implied by these gestures towards Hellenism as both a political and a cultural phenomenon.

The author of 1 Maccabees described in great detail Jonathan's political role in the court of the Seleucid kings and the military successes of Jonathan and Simon, citing letters from Seleucid officials and treaties with Sparta³². He quoted a long letter from Demetrius I to Jonathan in which the king granted him numerous rights, benefactions, and tributes (10:22-45), although none of these favors ac-

³²1 Macc 9:70-71; 10:4-7, 18-21; 11:6-7, 25-37; 11:41-51, 59-74; 12:19-34, 40-48; 13:35-42; 14:16-23; 15:1-9. For the Romans' letters, see 8:1-32; 12:1-18; 14:25-26; 15:15-24.

tually materialized because Jonathan declined the king's gestures, preferring to ally himself with Balas (10:45-46). The letter, I suggest, was merely included here in order to extol Jonathan's position within the Seleucid kingdom.

The glamour of Hellenistic officialdom is manifested in the rich gifts Jonathan received from the Seleucids. When Balas appointed him high priest and friend of the King, he also sent him a purple robe and a golden crown, the uniform of a royal friend and a Hellenistic priest. The author of 1 Maccabees paid special attention to the manner in which Alexander Balas dressed Jonathan in purple, seated Jonathan beside him, and proclaimed that no one would be allowed to lodge complaints against him³³. Later Balas presented him with a golden brooch such as was customarily bestowed upon persons with the title "Kinsman of the King" (10:89). When Tryphon and the young Antiochus sought Jonathan's alliance, the king (who nominated Jonathan once again as a friend of the king) sent him golden goblets and a table service; he permitted him to drink from golden goblets, to don purple robes, and to wear a golden brooch (1 Macc 11: 57-58)³⁴. Even during the days of independence, when "the people" granted Simon his political authority and high priesthood, the assembly's decree insisted that "he wear purple robes and gold ornaments" (1 Macc 14:43)³⁵. 1 Maccabees also mentions the magnificence and splendor of Simon's court. When Athenobius, the king's friend, was sent to Jerusalem by Antiochus VII, he was astonished by "Simon's splendor, the gold and silver drinking vessels on his sideboard, and his numerous retinue" (1 Macc 15:32)³⁶.

The Maccabees not only received but also sent gifts and tributes to foreign rulers, spending money in order to create political alliances. Jonathan and Simon sent the Seleucids large amounts of money and lavish presents: When Jonathan was invited to meet Alexander Balas and Ptolemy VI in Ptolemais, Jonathan "set out in pomp" and gave the kings and their friends "silver and gold and many other gifts and won their favor" (1 Macc 10:59-60). When he came again to Ptolemais to meet Demetrius II, Jonathan brought him "silver and gold and raiment and many other gifts... and won a favorable reception" (11:24). Later on, Demetrius II acknowledged the golden crown and palm branch that Simon had sent him (1 Macc 13:37)³⁷.

Whether or not the descriptions are historically accurate, they represent a later perspective on the Maccabees by a later author, during the reign John Hyrcan-

³³1 Macc 10:20, 61-63. In comparison, the Jewish high priest wore blue robes and a gold "frontlet" (Goldstein, 1976: p. 400, following Bickerman, 1938: p. 42).

³⁴For the degree of "kinsman" as more senior than "friend" and the golden brooch as symbolizing this rank (Bickerman, 1938: pp. 42-44).

³⁵For Simon is a Hellenistic prince who wears purple and is entitled to mint coins (1 Macc 15:6), see Tcherikover, 1959: p. 250.

³⁶Compare, however, the extremely plain vessels in the Hasmonean palaces, discussed above. On Jannaeus' golden tables, see the later legend in b. *Qiddushin* 66a.

³⁷On the palm branch, see Bickerman, 1938: pp. 111-112. Alcimus also gave Demetrius I a palm branch (2 Macc 14:4). Simon attempted to collaborate with Antiochus VII and sent him two thousand armed men, as well as silver and gold coins to support his siege on Tryphon in Dor, but the king rejected his gesture (1 Macc 15:26).

nus or Alexander Jannaeus, and attest to the Hasmonean approach towards the Hellenistic civilization³⁸. I suggest that these details reflect the spirit of the Hasmonean court. We can see here an inclination towards the Hellenistic world, which may seem improper for Jewish high priests³⁹. But the gifts, tributes, and honors bestowed and accepted, and the wealth of Jonathan and Simon, also reflect the claim to political power expressed by contacts with the Seleucid kings and Hellenistic cultural and political gestures. These are the ways in which rulers and monarchs flaunt their international recognition, success, prestige and authority. In mentioning such gifts, the author of 1 Maccabees wished to stress the ability of Jonathan and Simon to rule.

Furthermore, like any gift or financial transaction, the gifts and money given and received reflect an *exchange*. What is stressed here is the political and cultural sharing—namely, allegiance—with the Seleucids (On gifts and wealth as exchange and as representing allegiance, see [Mauss, 1969](#)). Jonathan, Simon, and the state they governed, we are told, penetrated the Hellenistic civilization and became an integral part of the Seleucid political system. At the time of writing Hyrcanus' or Jannaeus' relations with the collapsing Seleucids had weakened or deteriorated. I suggest that for the author and his contemporary readers, listing these contacts was aimed at legitimizing the values and tendencies of the later Hasmonean rulers: contact with Hellenistic rulers and their culture implies political power, the ability to rule.

5. Conclusion: The Hasmoneans' Use of Hellenism

Hasmonean adoption of “Greek ways” was widespread and included a multitude of instruments, habits, symbols and values: art and wall decorations, swimming pools, bathhouses, helmets, cornucopiae, anchors, stars, diadems, and palm branches, all of them serving as examples of direct and explicit use of Hellenistic culture. However, the Hasmoneans rejected not only pagan graven images, but also foreign pottery. They emphasized ritual purity, most probably viewed non-Jews as defiling, and stressed their own Jewish identity on their coins by inscribing them in paleo-Hebrew script and mentioning the Jewish ethnos.

It is sometimes argued that in evaluating the extent and motivation of their Hellenization, it is appropriate to distinguish between conscious and unconscious influences ([Rajak, 1990: pp. 265-266](#)). I believe that all the examples given here attest to a very conscious process of Hellenization. But the motives for its adoption may be more complex. The evidence of 1 Maccabees shows that the Maccabees interacted with the Seleucids by using Hellenistic gestures relating to power and wealth. I think that this was also their main motivation for embracing the swimming pools and the Greek symbols on the coins. The Hasmonean high

³⁸[Gruen, 1998: p. 9](#) concluded that 1 Maccabees discloses a “complex pattern of reciprocal relations and mutual dependency that undermines the concept of fundamental antagonism.” On the date of 1 Maccabees, see [Goldstein, 1976: pp. 62, 64, 72-73](#) (Jannaeus); [Bar-Kochva, 1989: pp. 152-162, 166-170, 401-402](#) (Hyrcanus).

³⁹[Roos, 2000: p. 289](#) noted that Jonathan and Simon act “more like sacral kings than ruling priests.”

priest and kings were seeking ways to express their political (and religious) independence, their government and their success (Regev, 2013). The only contemporary means for doing so that they were aware of was Hellenistic (in contrast to the old means in the Hebrew Bible). Behaving like a Seleucid or Ptolemaic king was the best way to show that they had succeeded. Once they became like these kings, they would have achieved their political goals.

At the same time, however, the Hasmonean high priests and kings took care to develop the local and specific aspects of their identity as rulers of their own people—the Jews (or Judeans). They stressed their religious and ethnic uniqueness, developing boundaries of ethnicity by creating meticulous purity practices in their ritual baths, and by avoiding Hellenistic vessels. They adjusted Hellenistic symbols that were associated with Greek gods and mythology to the Jewish tradition, and related some of them to idioms taken from the Hebrew Bible. They created an amalgam of Hellenistic and Jewish culture which could be sensed in both their private and public spheres, the palaces and the coins.

The manner in which this blending of conflicting trends was created and its precise motivations and purposes still need further research, hopefully with more evidence at hand. It is also unclear to what extent the demands and needs of their subjects, the Jewish/Judean population, were involved in this complex process. And yet, we were able to point to extensive use of Hellenism in the archaeological record that was directly connected, planned and used by the Hasmonean high priests and rulers, and to show that it was handled with much care and attention.

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