

Antiochus Epiphanes:
From 1 Maccabees to Isaiah to *Haazinu* (Deut 32)

Daniel R. Schwartz

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Antiochus Epiphanes:

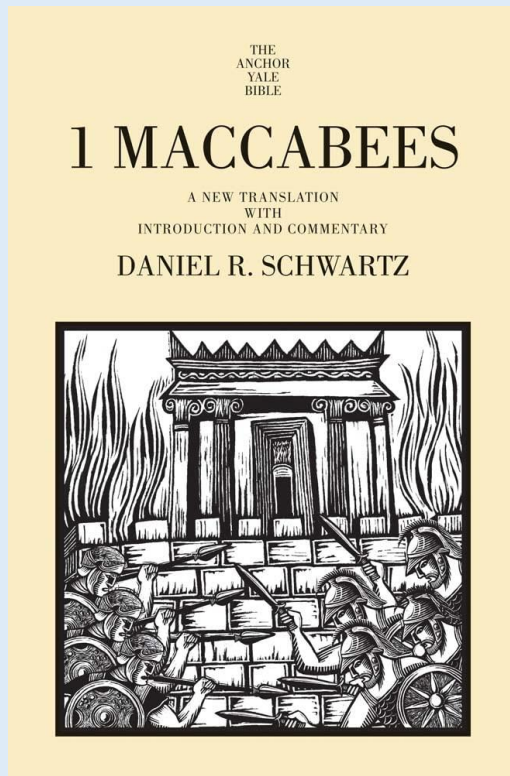
- > Seleucid king from 175 BCE
- > persecution of Judeans/rebellion from 168 BCE
- > died late in 164 BCE – when too Judah Maccabee retook Jerusalem and restored the Temple



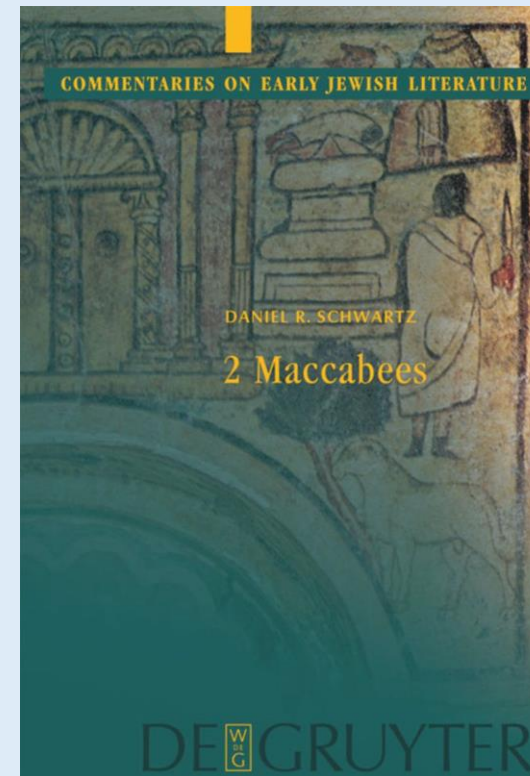
Two Very Different Books of Maccabees

Hebrew, Judean, state-oriented, about how the Hasmoneans defeated the Greeks

Greek, diasporic, religion-oriented – about how Jews remained faithful to “Judaism” despite persecution



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1 Maccabees 1

¹⁶When Antiochus's kingdom was securely established, he undertook to rule as king of Egypt too, so as to be king of both kingdoms. ¹⁷So he invaded Egypt with a strong army, including chariots and elephants, and with a great fleet. ¹⁸He waged war against King Ptolemy of Egypt, and Ptolemy was overawed by him and fled; many fell mortally wounded. ¹⁹And he took the fortified cities of the land of Egypt, and despoiled the land of Egypt.

²⁰Then Antiochus turned back after smiting Egypt, in the hundred and forty-third year, and came up against Israel and Jerusalem with a strong army. ²¹He invaded the Temple arrogantly and took the golden altar and the candelabrum and all its appurtenances, ²²and the Table of the Presence and the libation cups and the bowls and the golden censers and the curtain; and the crowns and the golden decoration upon the façade of the Sanctuary—he stripped them all off. ²³And he took the silver and the gold and the precious vessels, and he took the hidden that he found. ²⁴After taking it all he departed for his own land; **he did *phonoktonia*** and spoke with great arrogance.

Etymology of *phonoktonia* (φονοκτονία): *phonos* = murder; *kton...* = kill

Revised Standard Version of v. 24:

Taking them all, he departed to his own land. He **committed deeds of murder**, and spoke with great arrogance.

New English Translation of the Septuagint of v. 24:

And taking everything, he left for his own land and **carried out murder** and spoke with great arrogance.

Problem

Problem: Why are deeds of murder mentioned only after Antiochus left for Syria? Why complain about him killing Syrians? Or if what is meant is the killing of Jews before leaving Judea – it's out of order. (And it's also disproportionate to complain at such length about the theft of items from the Temple and only then to mention murders. Cf. Basel newspaper article about tram collision that caused a delay in the system . . .)

Many scholars have noted this problem.

Solutions that have been suggested

- a. Translate the text as is but notify the reader, in a note, that the words “and did murder” are out of place and belong before v. 21 (so Kahana).
- b. Omit the problematic words (so Oesterley) or bracket them (so Schunck), notifying the reader in a note that they are out of place or an interpolation.
- c. Change the order of the verbs in v. 24, so as to have him “do murder” before leaving (so Artom).
- d. Leave the verbs in order but translate with a past participle (he left “having committed massacres” [so Abel, Penna, Goldstein]).
- e. Insert “before” or “prior” so as to clarify: “before he left he worked a bloodbath” (Nelis).
- f. Have some unnamed agent “take it all and go back to his land,” thus allowing Antiochus himself to remain in Jerusalem for the massacre (so the 1980 Einheitsübersetzung).

The fact that so many scholars have felt the need to deviate from the received text, which is in very simple Greek, confirms it's a serious problem. But the fact that all their solutions, which are based on the etymology of *phonoktonia*, require doing violence to the Greek text means that another approach might be better. (Cf. James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Hebrew*, on "the etymological fallacy").

DRS, "Antiochus Epiphanes in Jerusalem," in: *Historical Perspectives: From the Hasmoneans to Bar Kokhba in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. D. Goodblatt, A. Pinnick and D. R. Schwartz; Leiden 2001), 45-56

"Antiochus the Naval," *Shnaton: An Annual for Biblical and Near Eastern Studies* 13 (2002): 185-197 (in Hebrew).

How is *phonoktonia used* in Greek?

Phonoktonia does not appear in regular Greek dictionaries. Only in a huge one, and there it refers only to the Septuagint, in which it appears only once, here in 1 Macc 1:24. But there is a little more evidence for the cognate verb *phonoktoneō*, which translates the Hebrew root *ḥnf* (חנ"פ).

- Num 35:33: "...ולא תחניפו את הארץ אשר אתם בה כי הדם הוא יחניף את הארץ..." ("You shall not **pollute** the land in which you live, for blood will **pollute** the land")
- Psalm 106:38: "ותחנף הארץ בדמים" ("and the land became **polluted** by blood")

In both cases, *ḥnf* means "**to pollute**," which is less specific than "to murder"

That's a verb. We need a noun to translate "did *phonoktonia*." That noun would be *ḥonef*. So let's hypothesize that the original Hebrew of 1 Macc 1:24 said Antiochus: "did *ḥonef*."

That would solve or alleviate our original problem: it's a general reference to being bad ("doing pollution"), not specifically to murder.

But there's more. For once you have an hypothesis about a Hebrew word used in the original, it can be worthwhile, especially if it's a rare word, to see where else it appears in ancient Hebrew texts, especially in the Bible.

Honef (חֹנֵף) appears only once in the Hebrew Bible: Isaiah 32:5-6, in the contrast of a bad king to righteous king:

Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule in justice . . . The *naval* will no more be called noble (*nadiv*), nor the knave said to be honorable. For the *naval* speaks *nevala*, and his mind plots iniquity, to practice ungodliness (*la'asot honef*), and to utter error concerning the LORD . . .

הן לצדק ימלך מלך... לא יקרא עוד לנבל נדיב ולכילי לא יאמר שוע, כי נבל נבלה
ידבר ולבו יעשה און, לעשות חֹנֵף ולדבר על ה' תועה

That is, the *naval* king does *honef* and also speaks wrongly about God.

Those are the two ways 1 Macc 1:24 characterizes Antiochus – he did *honef* and spoke arrogantly.

So 1 Macc 1:24 assumes readers will realize that, in summarizing Antiochus's doings in Jerusalem, it condemns him as a *naval*, the opposite of a just king.

What does *naval* mean?

Brown, Driver, Briggs, *A Heb. and Eng. Lexicon of the O.T.*: “*foolish, senseless, esp. of the man who has no perception of ethical and religious claims, and with collat. idea of ignoble, disgraceful.*”

Even-Shoshan, *Concordance*: שפל מידות, איש בליעל
(of low moral character, wicked)

Not just 1 Maccabees

That 1 Maccabees portrayed Antiochus as a *naval* is supported by the fact that 2 Maccabees does too. I.e., it must have been current among Jews of the second century BCE.* But 2 Maccabees depends for this not on Isaiah, but on *Haazinu*.

*Probably Daniel 11:32 too, where Antiochus יחניף.

There's ample evidence that 2 Maccabees follows *Haazinu* (Deut 32) in interpreting the story.

The story of 2 Maccabees is one of God who protects His covenantal partners (ch. 3) until they sin (ch. 4), whereupon He hides His face from them and they suffer at the hands of a wicked king (ch. 5-6) until the spilt blood of martyrs (chs. 6-7) atones for their sin and “conciliates” God, who then steps in (ch. 8), crushes the Jews’ enemies, esp. Antiochus (ch. 9) and Nicanor (ch. 15).

2 Macc 7:6 cites Deut 32:36; 5:17 echoes Deut 32:20, 27-28 (*hester panim*: God hides face, arrogant foreigner doesn't understand); 5:12–13 echoes Deut 32:25 (killing of all ages, inside and outside); 7:33 and 8:29 echo Deut 32:36 (God will become conciliated with His servants – ועל עבדיו יתנחם)

And the wicked people that God allows to persecute the Jews while He hides His face is a *naval* (Deut 32:21):

הם קנאוני בלא אל
כעסוני בהבליהם,
ואני אקניאם בלא עם
בגוי נבל אכעיסם

They have stirred me to jealousy with what is no god;
they have provoked me with their idols.
So I will stir them to jealousy with those who are no people;
I will provoke them with a *naval* nation.

Presumably that *naval* people's king too would be a *naval*.

Conclusion

1. No need to emend text of 1 Macc 1:24 or to deviate from plain translation.
2. Rather, we must realize that Jews of the Hasmonean period understood their suffering under Antiochus in light of the biblical model of a *naval* king. For 1 Maccabees, which is the Hasmoneans' court history, it's just the story of a wicked foreign king, like the one of Isaiah 32:5-6, opposed by heroic Jews. There's nothing in 1 Maccabees to suggest that the Jews' sins brought on their suffering, or that their atonement brought about the improvement of their situation – and “God” isn't mentioned in the whole book. The *naval* who persecutes the Jews is simply wicked, and has to be overcome by Hasmonean power.
3. 2 Maccabees, in contrast, which is a book about “Judaism,” tells a story about sin; God's hiding of his face (*hester panim*) that allows Antiochus to persecute the Jews; atonement (via martyrs); and therefore reconciliation and restoration. The *naval* who persecutes the Jews is doing God's work, and as in *Haazinu*, and what eventually stops him is the Jews' atonement for their sins, which allows God to resume His providential protection of them.

That is, 1 and 2 Maccabees tell very different stories – one Judean, one Jewish

Thank you very much.