

Antiochus IV and the Jews

by E. S. Gruen

Erich S. Gruen, the author of "Hellenism and Persecution: Antiochus IV and the Jews," considered theories of scholars about the reasons Antiochus IV may have had for imposing his notorious hellenisation policies upon the Jews, although under previous Seleucid rule, the Jews had been treated with favour. Gruen's paper is included in "Hellenistic History and Culture," edited by Peter Green. [Green, Peter, editor. Hellenistic History and Culture. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.]

Erich S. Gruen wrote:

The reign of Antiochus IV brought momentous upheaval to the land of the Jews. Judaea had, for nearly a century and a half, enjoyed a relatively untroubled existence under the suzerainty first of the Ptolemies, then of the Seleucids. But turmoil struck in the 170s B.C., followed by civil strife and then a hideous persecution. Antiochus IV Epiphanes, it appears, endeavored to extirpate Judaism altogether from the Holy Land. That endeavor, stunning and memorable, stands in dramatic contrast to all that had gone before. Early Greek attitudes toward the Jews, insofar as they can be discerned, were more often favorable than unfavorable. The Jews, in turn, became increasingly familiar with and adaptive

to Hellenism. Seleucid rule in Palestine had been respectful and protective of Jewish institutions. Antiochus' reversal of form thereby becomes the more striking – and the more baffling.

The issue has ramifications well beyond the circumstances and events of the persecution. The Jews, to be sure, played only a small part on the grand stage of the Hellenistic world – or even in the vast realm nominally under the hegemony of the Seleucid kings. An imbalance of information, it can be claimed, brings undue notice to the Jewish nation, obscuring the fact that in the sphere of high politics and amidst the titanic clashes of the Hellenistic monarchies the Jews were hardly more important than the denizens of Pontus or Cyrene. True enough – up to a point. Yet no apologies need be made for reopening the subject. It carries significance on a broad front and for substantial reasons: not only because of the long-range religious and cultural influence of Judaism for which this persecution – and the reaction it provoked, the Maccabean revolt – proved to be a pivotal moment in history, but also because the episode presents our best-documented example of the tensions between Hellenism and native traditions in the Near East, and the strains inherent in imperial rule over disparate societies in the Hellenistic Age. The drive to resolve this intractable puzzle remains potent, and justifiably so: why did Antiochus IV break sharply with the long-standing policy of both the Ptolemies and the Seleucids in Palestine and engage in a brutal repression with such fateful consequences for Jewish history and for Hellenism in the East?

It will be prudent first to review the salient facts. Not all, of course, can be detailed, and many are controversial as to precise chronology and meaning. But an outline of the principal events leading to and surrounding the persecution is vital.

The Seleucids gained supremacy in Palestine through the victories of Antiochus III in the Fifth Syrian War at the beginning of the second century B.C. The king entrenched his success by showing favour to the Jews for their assistance against his Ptolemaic rivals. He expressed gratitude through a number of measures that bestowed privileges and promised tangible assistance. These included aid in rebuilding the war-battered city of Jerusalem, repair of the damaged temple, the restoration of exiles, subsidies for sacrificial expenses, various exemptions from and reductions of taxes, an endorsement of traditional Jewish religious prescriptions, and an express declaration that the Jews were to govern themselves under their own ancestral laws and institutions. Those benefactions set the tone for three decades of cordial collaboration between the Seleucid regime and the Jewish nation. Greek poleis flourished in Palestine, and Jewish intellectuals felt the influence of Hellenic culture. Appointment of the high priest, it appears, was subject to the approval of the Seleucid monarch. But that office remained in the hands of the Oniads, the family that previously controlled it; and its occupant in the early third century, Simon the Just, both cooperated with Antiochus III in implementing the restoration of Temple and city and received high praise in the contemporary work of Ben Sira, a prominent advocate

of traditionalist Jewish values. Mutual advantage in the relations between Jewish leaders and the Seleucid overlord persisted in the years of Onias III, successor to Simon the Just, and Seleucus IV, heir to Antiochus III. Jerusalem, so the author of II Maccabees reports, enjoyed complete peace and exemplary administration of the laws through the piety of Onias and the generous subsidies of Seleucus.

The serenity did not last. Trouble began late in Seleucus' reign, stemming from individual ambitions and family rivalries within the Jewish state. A quarrel erupted between the High Priest Onias III and a certain Simon, financial overseer of the Temple. The latter, so the hostile account in II Maccabees implies, sought to extend his responsibilities to regulation of the market, thereby prompting appeal to the king's representatives and a suggestion that the funds contained in the Temple treasury be made available to the Seleucid regime. The climax of the clash is told in the wonderful tale of Heliodorus, the royal minister who endeavored to confiscate the Temple funds. Heliodorus, impervious to human pleas, was turned back at the Temple gates by the arrival of a magnificent horse which kicked him and two gloriously handsome young men who beat him to a pulp – causing the wretched minister to be carted off in a litter acknowledging the sovereignty of the Jewish god. The story, of course, is apocryphal. But there is no reason to question the underlying facts and circumstances: a split in the Jewish leadership, appeals to the arbitration of Seleucus, and the attractiveness of Jewish finances for the Seleucid monarch who still had the burden of a heavy indemnity owed to Rome. But he evidently stopped short of confiscation – doubtless a matter of policy, not the result of intervention by two angelic youths and the hooves of a golden horse.

Civil strife, however, intensified. Simon escalated his attacks upon Onias III, and one of the High Priest's supporters was murdered, thus causing him to seek the intervention of Seleucus. The timing proved unfortunate for Onias. His trip to Antioch came at or very near the time that Seleucus himself was assassinated in 175, the throne passing now to his brother Antiochus IV, newly arrived in Syria after nearly fifteen years as a hostage in Rome. Worse still for Onias, his removal to Antioch left him vulnerable at home. His own brother Jason seized the occasion to aim for the High Priesthood. The new ruler in Antioch concurred. Jason shrewdly offered cash, a bribe as represented by II Maccabees, in fact a promise to increase revenues through higher taxes. That proposition would appeal to Antiochus, who needed funds to bolster his image and to finance his ambitious plans.

The Jewish leader, who had already changed his given name from Jesus to Jason, had a further proposition that Antiochus would find attractive. What he now suggested was a dramatic advance in the Hellenization of Jerusalem. He offered yet more cash for the authority to institute a gymnasium and an ephebate and to register the "Antiochenes" in Jerusalem. What is meant by that last phrase is much disputed and need not be resolved here. Scholars have interpreted it either as the installation of a Greek politeuma of Hellenized Jews within the city of Jerusalem or as the wholesale conversion of Jerusalem

into a Greek polis, a new "Antioch-at-Jerusalem." It is hard to imagine just what would be meant by the latter. Certainly Jerusalem did not adopt a full panoply of Greek political institutions, nor did she abandon her traditional structure of governance. The "Antioch-at-Jerusalem" comprised, at most, a select body of individuals keen on the promotion of Hellenism. The discernible consequences lie in the sphere of culture rather than politics. The gymnasium soon materialized, attracting the elite of Jerusalem's youth and even enticing many in the priestly class who became patrons of the palaestra. For the author of II Maccabees that constituted the apogee of Hellenism in Jerusalem.

The euphoria did not last. Jason held sway as High Priest for little more than three years. He had entertained Antiochus lavishly at Jerusalem, producing even a torchlight parade in his honor to show Jewish support for the king's prospective conflict with Egypt. He displayed continuous dedication to the furtherance of Hellenism, even dispatching an embassy to Tyre with cash to finance sacrifices to Heracles at the quinquennial games attended by the king. And in 172 or 171 he sent another mission to provide funds urgently requested by Antiochus, presumably for purposes of mobilization against the Ptolemies. The High Priest had acted with exemplary loyalty and cooperation. It was not enough. Internal rivalries in Judaeen ruling circles resurfaced. Menelaus, the envoy sent by Jason with revenues for the king, lusted after supreme power himself. He took a leaf from Jason's book, promised Antiochus more money than his superior had provided, and won the king's consent for his own appointment as High Priest. The new appointee was outside the family of the Oniads which had held a monopoly on the office, thus marking a sharp break with Jewish tradition. Antiochus, however, was on the brink of a major and expensive campaign. The intricacies of Jewish political rivalries did not much concern him. Augmented revenues were decisive.

Menelaus' tenure as High Priest intensified turmoil and civil upheaval. The new High Priest, we are told, acted in an arbitrary and tyrannical fashion, even expropriating gold plate from the Temple treasury – a credible report in view of the income he had contracted to raise for the crown. Jason was forcibly exiled from Judaea and sought refuge in Transjordan. Menelaus, brother of that Simon who had harassed the earlier High Priest Onias III, now finished his brother's job, arranging for Onias' assassination. He accomplished the deed, so II Maccabees reports, through the connivance of Andronicus, one of the king's chief ministers. Reaction from the populace was sharp and unusually aggressive: not only indignation at the murder of Onias but a growing resentment at the heavy exactions imposed by Menelaus. Popular feelings burst to the surface. They issued first in a petition to the king to punish Onias' assassin, and later in a lynching of Menelaus' brother Lysimachus. The latter had plundered the treasury, probably to pay arrears owed to Antiochus. Pressure extended even to the Jewish Council of Elders, which began proceedings against Menelaus and brought charges before Antiochus. The king intervened twice in this tumultuous series of events: to order the execution of Andronicus, accused assassin of Onias, and to acquit Menelaus of the charges leveled against him. Antiochus

would have preferred a more stable situation in Judaea, but his attention was concentrated upon Egypt. Menelaus, at least, was beholden to the crown and more likely to remain loyal than any alternative leaders. The result was to leave Menelaus in power but also, no doubt, to harden Jewish resentment against the Seleucid throne.

Antiochus had gathered resources and recruits for an assault on Egypt. The king conducted two major campaigns, the first in 170/69, the second in 168, with the intent of bringing the Ptolemaic realm under his suzerainty. The initial thrust earned considerable success, a smashing victory over Egyptian forces, capture of territory, and the enthronement of a young Ptolemy who would be a client of Antiochus Epiphanes. The blatant power play, however, encountered stiff resistance in Alexandria. Antiochus returned to Syria in late 169, perhaps to build additional resources and fire power. He readied another invasion for spring 168, which resulted in notable advances for the Syrian cause. Egyptian opposition crumbled, Antiochus seized the ancient city of Memphis, became Lord of Upper Egypt, and set his sights on Alexandria itself. It was a high-water mark for Seleucid authority in the region. But not for long. The colossus from the west had just concluded a decisive victory over Macedon at the battle of Pydna. News of that victory released the Roman mission headed by C. Popillius Laenas and charged with terminating the Sixth Syrian War. Popillius arrived in Alexandria at the opportune moment. Antiochus' forces had just reached the outskirts of the city at the suburb of Eleusis. In one of the most celebrated episodes of antiquity, the Roman envoy confronted Antiochus Epiphanes and delivered the *senatus consultum* that demanded an end to hostilities. The king hesitated and requested a recess for consultation with his staff. Popillius Laenas, in a stunning display of arrogance, took a stick, drew a circle in the sand around Antiochus, and asked for a reply before he stepped out of it. This time, it was clear, the Roman meant business. Antiochus meekly evacuated his troops from Egypt and his fleet from Cyprus. The "Day of Eleusis," as it came to be known, cast a dark cloud over Seleucid aspirations and the reputation of Antiochus Epiphanes.

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What impact did these dramatic events have upon the history of Palestine and the nation of the Jews? A contemporary Jewish source provides the most direct testimony, in the form of prophecy – which its author knew to have been fulfilled. The Book of Daniel reports Antiochus' endeavors in the Sixth Syrian War, his devious dealings with the Ptolemaic royal house, and the two campaigns against Egypt, each followed by an assault upon Judaea. Those statements can be fleshed out by information in I and II Maccabees and in Josephus. The specifics of chronology remain very much in dispute, but the general outlines are relatively clear.

The mixed successes of the first Egyptian campaign brought Antiochus back home in late 169. The need to shore up his finances seemed especially critical. The Temple at Jerusalem proved to be an inviting target. Since the High Priest Menelaus had himself requisitioned some of its wealth for the Seleucid cause, Antiochus did not scruple to march troops into the holy city, enter the Temple, and cart off priceless treasures to Syria, thus causing widespread lament and embitterment.

The enriched resources enabled the king to undertake his second invasion of Egypt in spring 168. But his absence then gave occasion for renewed civil conflict in Judaea, this time at a yet higher level of violence. A report reached Palestine that Antiochus had been slain in battle, thus inspiring dissidents to grasp at opportunity. Jason returned from exile, crossing the Jordan with a thousand men, and attacked Jerusalem. The regime of Menelaus had doubtless suffered opprobrium and unpopularity because of the High Priest's compliance with Antiochus' looting of the treasury. Menelaus, so Josephus remarks, had the backing of Judaea's premier commercial magnates, the family of the Tobiads, whereas the bulk of the populace stood by Jason. But Jason squandered his advantage. He took control of the city, forcing Menelaus and his supporters to seek refuge in the citadel, but wreaked vengeance for his setbacks by conducting murderous purges of his fellow citizens. The slaughter generated a sharp reaction that drove Jason back to Transjordan and sent his fortunes into a tailspin. He concluded his career as a wretched outcast in Sparta, where he perished unburied and unmourned. Menelaus resumed control of his war-torn nation.

The "Day of Eleusis" fell upon Antiochus Epiphanes in the summer of 168. The king had to beat a retreat from Egypt; he had heard, also, of the upheaval and violence that wracked Palestine in his absence. Antiochus, so the Jewish sources assert, returned to Jerusalem in a fury, ordering his soldiers to conduct a massacre in the city, the outcome of which, according to II Maccabees, was the death of 40,000 Jews and a like number sold into slavery. His authority was to be established unambiguously and ruthlessly. Before

withdrawing to Syria, the king installed officials, presumably with garrisons, to keep the Jews under heel: Philip in Jerusalem and Andronicus at Mount Gerizim in Samaria. They would also provide a bulwark for the regime of Menelaus.

Those measures were only the beginning. Antiochus prepared even more drastic moves toward the subjection of Judaea. Some time in 167 he dispatched Apollonius, commander of mercenaries from Mysia, with a force of 22,000 men, to terrorize the populace of Jerusalem. His orders, according to II Maccabees, were to massacre all adult males and sell women and children into slavery. Such instructions, of course, cannot possibly have been carried out, since Jews continued to inhabit the city. But rumors of wholesale terror may well have been encouraged, thereby to cow the populace into submission. Apollonius stayed his hand for a time, lulling the Jerusalemites into false confidence, then launched an attack on the Sabbath when unsuspecting crowds had gathered on his invitation to review a military parade. Numerous innocent citizens were slain, the city ransacked, and parts of it set on fire. The temporary terror was then succeeded by a more permanent presence. Seleucid forces occupied a citadel, the Akra and installed there a military colony, an "abode of aliens" according to I Maccabees, a place for "a sinful race and lawless men." In all likelihood, the garrison expanded with the addition of renegade Jews, the "Antiochenes" enrolled by Jason as citizens of the polis or politeuma a few years earlier; and foreign settlers, the "people of a foreign god" as designated by the author of Daniel. The Akra would serve as a rampart of Seleucid strength in Jerusalem for the next quarter of a century. Dissident Jews took the only recourse remaining to them: flight, escape to the desert and mountains, and preparations for guerilla resistance.

Antiochus IV Epiphanes now readied his most extreme measures. Installation of the physical presence of Seleucid force would be followed by direct interference in the spiritual realm. All previous policy by his predecessors was cast to the winds. To the shock and consternation of the Jews, Antiochus seemed determined to stamp out their religion itself. The king implemented this extraordinary scheme through a series of drastic decrees in the latter part of 167. If the author of I Maccabees is to be believed, Antiochus laid the basis for his moves with a broad edict, issued throughout his realm, which commanded conformity in law and religion. Its authenticity, certainly in the form given, is questionable. But it may well represent a general call for allegiance in the Seleucid kingdom. In any case, Antiochus directed subsequent measures quite specifically at Jewish practices, in damaging and disastrous fashion. He forbade burnt offerings, sacrifices, and libations in the Temple; he ordered the erection of altars, shrines, and images, the sacrifice of pigs and other impure animals, the elimination of circumcision, the burning of the Torah, and a range of activities that would require violation of Jewish practices and profanation of religious life. The dictates applied not just to Jerusalem but to the towns of Judaea generally, and evidently also to Samaria. Disobedience brought the death penalty.

Nor did the king confine himself to proclamations. He saw to their implementation. His

agents entered the Temple, defiled it with illicit intercourse, piled unclean offerings upon the altar, and compelled Jews to eat pagan sacrificial victims and to parade with wreaths of ivy at Dionysiac festivals. The Temple itself was now rededicated to Zeus Olympios and the sanctuary at Mount Gerizim to Zeus Xenios. The fateful day of the "abomination of desolation," probably the introduction of a pagan altar into the Temple at Jerusalem, was the fifteenth day of Kislev, December of 167. Ten days later came the first sacrifice of a pig on that altar, an act of unspeakable desecration for the people of Judaea. There was valiant resistance among many of the citizenry. But the soldiers of Antiochus ruthlessly punished dissent, torturing and executing those who preferred martyrdom to capitulation. The measures of the king were devastating and calamitous. They represented a total reversal of Seleucid policy—and a watershed for Jewish history. It is hardly surprising that scholars through the ages have offered a wide variety of explanations for this astounding turn of events – or that the puzzle remains unresolved. A review of the proposed solutions will be salutary; to be followed by a new attempt.

A favorite answer prevailed through most of the earlier scholarship, and still claims adherents: that Antiochus saw himself as a crusader for Hellenism, and attempted to impose conformity on his realm. On this view, Jewish recalcitrance became a sore point and an embarrassing aberration; the king resorted to compulsion to enforce compliance.

The thesis receives support in certain key texts. First and foremost, the decree of Antiochus, cited above, declaring to his entire kingdom that all were to become one people and each would abandon his own customs. That explanation is buttressed by two subsequent passages in II Maccabees. The order to enforce Antiochus' extremist measures against the Jews in 167 includes a sanction for executing those who did not choose to convert to Greek practices. Also, a later letter by Antiochus V, reversing his father's policy, describes it as seeking a transformation of Jews to the ways of Greece. Josephus adds a letter of Epiphanes, responding to a petition from the Samaritans, which acquits them of charges leveled against the Jews, since they elected to live in accordance with Hellenic customs. From the perspective of two and a half centuries later, Tacitus offered a similar interpretation: Antiochus strove to stamp out the Jewish superstition and to introduce the institutions of the Greeks.

How plausible is that motive? Antiochus IV certainly projected himself as a great benefactor of the Greeks. His generosity is well attested and widespread. Benefactions extended to Athens, Delphi, Delos, Argos, Achaea, Arcadia, Boeotia, Rhodes, Byzantium, Chalcedon, and Cyzicus. He earned his reputation as foremost among Hellenistic kings for patronage of Greek cities and cults. Antiochus' assiduous efforts in this regard, of course, carried practical value, lending substantial prestige to the king in the international world of the second century. But dedications in shrines and subsidies for public events or institutions at various ancient Greek sites by no means betoken a drive to spread Hellenism to the Near East. The equation is facile and misguided.

The royal edict recorded in I Maccabees that required all nations to forsake their own traditions and become one people carries little credibility, at least in that form. Still less credible is the author's immediately subsequent statement that nations everywhere complied with the directive. The available evidence shows the contrary to be true. Eastern cities and territories under the suzerainty of the Seleucid kingdom continued to mint coinage with local symbols and types; the great temples at Uruk and Babylon betray no trace of Hellenization; and the priests and officialdom of the ancient sites retained native titles and responsibilities.

The king, so some have argued, promoted his own worship as an incarnation of Zeus Olympios and visualized imposition of a syncretistic cult that could unify the peoples of his dominion. However, that notion also finds little support in the ancient testimony. Antiochus did pay special attention to Olympian Zeus, and he employed the title of Theos Epiphanes for his own epithet; but there are no grounds to infer that the monarch identified himself with Zeus Olympios, let alone that he strove to employ ruler cult as a means of consolidation in his realm. The worship of that deity in Seleucid lands preceded Antiochus IV, and the king showed favor to a variety of gods and cults. The fact that the worship inaugurated in the Temple at Jerusalem in 167 was that of Zeus Olympios does not imply unity and uniformity. For at the same time Antiochus ordered the sanctuary at Mount Gerizim to be dedicated to Zeus Xenios. In any event, the establishment of the new cult came late in the series of events, at the time of Antiochus' most savage repression; it does not exemplify a long-standing policy of Hellenization to which the Jews objected. Nor had the king determined to eradicate Judaism as an aberration. His measures applied only to Judaea and Samaria. Nothing suggests an extension to the Jews of the Diaspora. We can then safely and happily discard the notion of Antiochus Epiphanes as crusader for Hellenism, driven by the resolve to have Greek civilization penetrate throughout the Near East, or to unify his holdings through a cultural and religious homogeneity that was upset by recalcitrant Jews. Ideological fervor did not characterize the schemes of Antiochus IV.

A more plausible approach prefers pragmatism to ideology. The king, on this analysis, concerned himself more with concrete advantages than with lofty goals. The question of money arises repeatedly in the story, a motivating force and a determining factor. A crushing indemnity had been assessed against Syria by Rome in 188, thus putting severe strain on her resources and limits on her aspirations. Income from Judaea represented a critical source of revenue. That fact manifests itself in the reign of Seleucus IV, when the Jewish minister Simon offered to release cash from the Temple for the king, and when Heliodorus considered forced entry into the sanctuary for the same purpose. Antiochus' ambitious ventures, it could be argued, helped give rise to conflict within Judaea, as rival leaders bid for his favor through offers of increased tribute and immediate cash subsidy. The king backed first Jason, then Menelaus, for the tangible returns that would support his aggressive expansionism. Hostility within Judaea to Menelaus and his party only bound Antiochus more closely to them. Expropriation of funds from the Temple, with Menelaus'

direct assistance, gave the Seleucid monarch the boost needed for his renewed invasion of Egypt. The backlash against Menelaus, however, caused consternation. Jason's attempted coup threatened not only Menelaus but the pro-Seleucid elements in Palestine generally. Antiochus, after his forced evacuation of Egypt, had no choice but to shore up the regime of Menelaus with every means available; hence the citadel, the garrison, and the intimidation of the populace. But Menelaus needed more to retain his hold on power: a thorough cowing of the opposition. This would strengthen the hand of Menelaus' followers by giving them control of the cult and protect Antiochus' interests by keeping his partisans in central authority. So Menelaus persuaded his patron to crush dissidents through religious oppression. The motives that drove Antiochus were practical and political: cash for his military adventures and security for his position in Palestine. Such, in brief, is the gist of the pragmatic thesis, recently and forcefully argued.

The case clearly has merit – up to a point. Additional cash was always welcome. Higher tribute payments would fuel Seleucid schemes of aggrandizement. And Antiochus' seizure of Temple funds in 169 surely had the Egyptian venture in view. But financial considerations do not tell the whole story, and it would be hazardous to place too much weight upon them. The indemnity imposed by Rome had evidently not crippled Seleucid resources. Antiochus, as we have already noted, was liberal in his benefactions; much of the Greek world profited from his gifts, donations, and subsidies. Further, one must recall what is often forgotten: Antiochus had paid off the last instalment on the indemnity in 173 – four years before his assault on Jerusalem. Financial demands from Rome were no longer at issue, and the kingdom was solvent.

The political motivation is as fragile as the economic. Conjecture has it that Antiochus committed himself to Menelaus as the principal bastion of strength for Seleucid interests in Palestine and that the offensive against Jewish traditions aimed to smash Menelaus' rivals and to keep him in power. A single statement in Josephus alone can be cited. And it applies to the year 163, after the death of Antiochus Epiphanes, in the midst of the Maccabean rebellion. Lysias, chief minister to the new boy-ruler Antiochus V, advised the king to authorize the slaying of Menelaus, who, he claimed, had persuaded Epiphanes to force Jewish abandonment of their ancestral faith and was thereby the source of troubles for the Seleucid realm. That text cannot, in fact, bear the weight set upon it. Lysias had his own reasons for seeking the elimination of Menelaus, and the young monarch was in no position to check the accuracy of his allegations. One may doubt, in fact, that Lysias even charged Menelaus with having instigated the religious persecution. Josephus plainly drew his data from a parallel passage in II Maccabees. Lysias there also prods the wrath of Antiochus V against Menelaus, denouncing him as responsible for all the troubles in the kingdom. But nothing is said in that passage about Menelaus prompting religious repression; this was an inference added by Josephus. Nor is it likely that Menelaus, a Jew from the upper echelons of society, and one well aware of the proclivities of his countrymen, would foster a policy calculated to spark explosive upheaval – an upheaval that

threatened to sweep him away with the debris. Persecution of the faithful hardly seems a prudent means to secure Menelaus' hold on power. Quite the contrary. Pragmatic politics cannot explain the decision.

A very different theory has Antiochus look not to Greeks or to Jews, but to Romans. Therein lay his inspiration. The Seleucid had resided for more than a dozen years in Rome, technically as a hostage for the good behaviour of his father and his brother, in practice treated as an honored guest. Those years allowed for observation and instruction. The later actions of the king in his own homeland have been traced to events and institutions experienced in Rome. The establishment of a polis or an enclave of "Antiochenes" in Jerusalem in 175 had, it can be argued, certain analogies with Roman extension of citizenship to Italian communities or segments of Italian communities. Antiochus conceived the idea, with Roman practice in mind, to grant privileges to "Antiochenes" in various cities who would serve as centers of loyalty to the Seleucid regime. The later introduction of a garrison, the Akra, in 167 had as its goal protection and enhancement of the "Antiochenes" in Jerusalem, while adding new soldier-settlers who would also obtain citizen privileges. And the outlawing of the Jewish religion, with the accompanying measures of persecution and ferocious repression, also has a Roman analogy: the fierce measures taken by the government against the Bacchanalian cult in 186—one of the years in which the Seleucid prince resided in Rome. The senate and magistrates demolished places of worship, punished the sect's adherents, and severely curtailed its activities. Antiochus, like his former mentors, could claim to be suppressing degenerate rites and restoring a purer, pristine religion.

The idea is ingenious and alluring, but also fanciful and farfetched. Nothing in the evidence suggests that the stay in Rome had so profound an impact on Antiochus' actions and policies. It is difficult to imagine that the young hostage would have gained so intimate an acquaintance with the principles of Roman colonial policy – or indeed that he had access to the decision-making process that implemented it. The conjecture that Antiochus created the "Antiochenes in Jerusalem" as a form of Roman citizen colony, founders on the fact that the initiative for the move came not from Antiochus but from Jason, the Jewish would-be High Priest—a man who had never had experience of Rome. As for the presumed parallel between suppression of the Bacchantes and the assault on Judaism, differences loom much larger than similarities. Most significantly, the Romans professed to be cracking down on an alien creed, foreign to national traditions, whereas Antiochus imposed an alien creed while seeking to eradicate a national tradition. No testimony alludes to the desire or even the claim to revive ancestral practice in a purer form. And if experience of the Bacchic affair had an influence on Antiochus' policy, it is most peculiar that among the grievous burdens imposed on the Jews was the obligation to don ivy wreaths and join the procession at the festival of Dionysus! The Roman hypothesis can be confidently abandoned.

Ancient testimony on the king includes numerous incidents of eccentricity and oddity. The monarch who could lavish gifts upon communities in most grandiose fashion also disported himself in most unlikely ways. Observers wondered about his sanity. And jokesters played with his epithet, changing Epiphanes to Epimanes ("madman"). Antiochus regularly violated court etiquette and took pleasure in roaming the streets, exchanging shoptalk with artisans and craftsmen, conversing and carousing with commoners and riffraff. He showed up unannounced at parties, sometimes to take personal charge of the entertainment, bringing his own instrument and musicians, while astonished guests headed for the exits. He could be equally amusing on public occasions. The Roman experience may not have inspired persecution, but it did inspire mimicry. Antiochus delighted in shocking onlookers by removing royal attire, donning the white toga of a Roman candidate, and circulating among the public to solicit votes as if running for the aedileship or the tribunate. And he would carry the charade to its conclusion, performing like a Roman magistrate, presiding over lawsuits, and delivering judgments in mock solemnity. The king was endlessly inventive in surprising his countrymen. He snubbed friends but stopped strangers in the street and plied them with gifts. He embarrassed the highborn with childish toys, but would transform an unsuspecting commoner into an instant millionaire. His visits to the public baths gave occasion for revelry and practical jokes, which included the pouring of priceless ointment that had Antiochus and his fellow bathers slipping and sliding in hilarious frolic.

Should one then abandon rational explanations for the assault on Judaism? Perhaps it was just another example of aberrant behavior by a monarch who gloried in the unorthodox and the bizarre? That would be an easy solution, but not a very satisfactory one. The political, diplomatic, and military successes that stand to Antiochus' credit belie the representation of him as a demented crackpot. Moreover, the ruthless and thorough measures taken to stamp out Judaism possess a character altogether different from the quirky, idiosyncratic, playful, and topsy-turvy behavior designed to shock and amuse. An answer to the puzzle must be sought elsewhere.

An influential scholarly thesis affixes blame not on Antiochus, but on the Jews – or rather a segment of the Jews. Initiative for the reform movement came from the Jewish leadership itself and reflected internal conflict within its ranks. This was no Seleucid scheme. Jason brought the idea of a gymnasium and ephebate to Antiochus. As delineated by the author of I Maccabees, it represented the efforts of lawless Jews to ingratiate themselves with the peoples surrounding them, for their separation had been the source of much suffering. This set the Hellenizing trend in motion and also produced a rift between the Hellenizers and the traditionalists in Jewish society. Antiochus was the beneficiary rather than the instigator. Conversion of Jerusalem into a Greek polis or politeuma delivered a heavy blow to Jewish conservatives, effectively undermined ancestral practices, and stimulated other Jews to curry Seleucid favor by moving still further away from tradition. Hence Menelaus obtained power as a more "radical Hellenizer," generating a split with the

faction of Jason. The extremist actions alienated much of public opinion in Judaea, making Menelaus ever more dependent upon Antiochus for his authority. Menelaus' urging, therefore, brought about the Seleucid garrison in Jerusalem, the intimidating terrorism of Apollonius, and even the sweeping prohibition of Jewish religious practices. The apostates pressed for abolition of Mosaic law and all ancestral ordinances ranging from dietary restrictions to circumcision. The insistence on full-scale assimilation would entail either forced conversion or elimination of their opponents. The "abomination of desolation" climaxed a concerted campaign to dissolve Judaism in its conventional form and replace it with a syncretistic worship suffused with Greek ideas and adapted to the Hellenistic world. The contest throughout represented a fundamental struggle between Judaism and Hellenism.

The matter is, however, not so straightforward. Divisions among the leadership certainly plagued the course of Jewish history in this period. But did they open a genuine cleavage between Judaism and Hellenism? Did the escalation of tensions reflect an increasing push toward Hellenization that energized the support and encouragement of Antiochus? Did the initiative for change consistently come from Jewish reformers or apostates who were responsible not only for the injection and augmentation of Hellenism but for the persecution of Jews who clung to the old ways? Those issues merit serious review.

One might expect to find the confrontation of Judaism and Hellenism as a central and repeated theme in the contemporary or near-contemporary Jewish literature. In fact, it is almost altogether absent. The work of Ben Sira, composed in the early second century, reiterates traditional precepts and denounces those who yield to the temptations of wealth, who fall away from righteousness, who oppress the poor, who abandon fear of the Lord or the teachings of the Law. But he nowhere contrasts Jews and Greeks, and gives no hint that a struggle for the conscience of his fellow countrymen was being waged by Hellenizers and conservatives. Nor does the Book of Daniel provide comfort for the theory. Written at the very time of the Maccabean revolt, the work's apocalyptic visions set the experience of the Jews squarely in the context of battles among the great Hellenistic powers: divine intervention and a last judgment will deliver the Jews from the foreign oppressor. This is not a cultural contest for the soul of Judaism. Similarly, I Maccabees, although composed well after recovery of the Temple and the entrenchment of the Hasmonaean dynasty, does not express the discord as one between Judaism and Hellenism. The absence of this polarity becomes more striking.

The phrases do appear in II Maccabees, our fullest source on the relevant events. The author describes Jason's innovations as bringing his fellow Jews to a "Greek way of life." And the implementation of his reforms constitute the high point of "Hellenism." The order to enforce the new cult in 167 authorized the king's agents to execute those who refused to convert to "Greek ways." And, as earlier noted, Antiochus V's letter referred to Jews who resisted change to "Greek practices." A few passages also designate "Judaism" as the

principle upheld by rebellion against the Seleucids. But the author nowhere juxtaposes the two phrases as opposites. The fact deserves emphasis. Were Judaism and Hellenism incompatible?

Jason introduced a gymnasium and the ephebate to Jerusalem, and he arranged for the registration of persons as "Antiochenes" in the city. None of these measures involved elimination or alteration of religious rites. Nothing in the Hebrew Scriptures forbids gymnasia, military training for youths, or enrollment as citizens of a polis or politeuma. Although the author of II Maccabees brands the innovations as unlawful, he also provides material for his own refutation: the priests themselves welcomed the gymnasium and were eager to participate in exercises in the palaestra. They evidently did not consider it inconsistent with their sacerdotal functions. Even Jason's closest allies would not cross the line from Hellenistic reform to religious compromise. The envoys he sent to Tyre with cash for sacrifice to Heracles at the quinquennial games declined to contribute to the pagan festival. They shrank from idol worship and kept to the Law. The measures of Jason's High Priesthood stopped short of interference with traditional religion. The motive for those measures is accurately described in I Maccabees: a desire to foster good relations with neighboring peoples, isolation from whom had been the source of much evil. The cultivation of Greek ways need not undermine the practice of Judaism.

Factional quarrels within the Jewish establishment brought turmoil and division. But where is the evidence that factions divided on the issue of Hellenism? Menelaus, it is commonly assumed, outbid Jason for Seleucid favor by out-Hellenizing the Hellenizer. The assumption lacks all foundation. Personal rivalry and political ambition alone can be inferred from the texts. Jewish sources brand Menelaus with venality, corruption, ruthlessness, treachery, murder, even sacrilege for expropriating Temple funds—but not with Hellenism. Menelaus may indeed have had little sympathy with the Greek institutions sponsored by his rival Jason. Antiochus found him serviceable as a conduit for cash and an enforcer of loyalty in Judaea. The king did not require Hellenic credentials from his Jewish supporters.

The actions taken by Antiochus against the Jews belong in an entirely separate category. He seized moneys from the Temple after his first Egyptian campaign, with the collaboration of Menelaus. And after the second campaign, he implemented those extreme measures, ranging from the massacre of citizens to the prohibition of religion, that put all previous behavior in the shade. What reason is there to believe that the party of Menelaus put him up to it? Once the putative link between Menelaus and Hellenism is severed, the main prop for the conventional theory falls. That Menelaus exerted any influence over Antiochus may be seriously questioned. One item only suggests it: Lysias' later allegation to young Antiochus V that Menelaus bore responsibility for all the realm's troubles, an allegation intended to justify his elimination. The statement lacks both specifics and objectivity. Lysias had an ax to grind and no facts to provide. It is unlikely in the extreme that Menelaus prod-

ded the Seleucid ruler to eradicate Judaism and terrorize its adherents. The one relevant piece of testimony points in the opposite direction. Three years after the outbreak of the Maccabean revolt, Menelaus helped to arrange an amnesty for the disaffected rebels and to restore to Jews the privilege of adhering to their dietary laws. The man responsible for the repression of Judaism would hardly have been used as intermediary for reconciliation.

Blame for the persecution can be lifted from the shoulders of the Jews themselves. They aggravated their own difficulties with internal divisiveness, but the divisions did not break down neatly into Hellenizers and traditionalists. Personal and familial quarrels played a role, as did private ambitions and possibly political sympathies. But the idea of a stark confrontation between Judaism and Hellenism should be discarded—and with it, the thesis that ardent Hellenizers prodded the king of Syria into persecuting their coreligionists, banning their creed, and inflicting an alien cult upon the temple. II Maccabees, in fact, reckons the Hellenizers as among the victims of the king. Apart from Lysias' partisan and tainted allegation, our evidence is unanimous: it is Antiochus Epiphanes who must take responsibility for the savage onslaught against Judaism.

Where then to turn for an answer? Until the final, ferocious act of the drama, the king had played a relatively passive or evenhanded role. Jason instigated the Hellenistic reform, Antiochus merely endorsing and benefiting from it. He benefited further when Menelaus contracted to raise the tribute and thereby won the Seleucid's backing as High Priest. Antiochus intervened when requested in immediately subsequent years, acquitting Menelaus at his trial, but condemning his own minister Andronicus. He did not pursue an activist policy in Palestine. Even the sequestering of funds from the Temple in 169 may have come at the suggestion of Menelaus, who had exploited that source once before, and now accompanied the king in stripping most of what remained. In any case, the objective was war on Egypt, not punishment of Jews. Antiochus had hitherto taken only a secondary interest in Palestinian affairs. But the measures implemented after the second Egyptian campaign created a wholly new situation. They cannot be explained in terms of Hellenization, intra-Jewish rivalries, or even pragmatic advantages. Stationing of a garrison, mass executions, terrorism, prohibition of the faith, and sweeping persecution shifted matters onto an altogether different plane. They did not evolve smoothly or logically out of what came before. Something happened in 168 to convert Antiochus Epiphanes into a rampaging monster.

II Maccabees offers an ostensible explanation. Jason raised an insurrection in that year, while Antiochus was campaigning in Egypt. The attempted coup against Menelaus ignited a civil war in Judaea. When news reached the king, so reports the text, he reckoned it as rebellion, flew into a fury, and made Jerusalem a prize of war. There followed the succession of terrorist measures that culminated in the "abomination of desolation." The rage of Antiochus is plausible enough, but cannot suffice as explanation. Rebellion in his rear might inspire retaliation and subjugation; but it hardly accounts for the brutally thorough

and detailed prescriptions which, if adhered to, would be tantamount to the abolition of Judaism. Those measures ran the risk of alienating even the king's staunchest supporters in Judaea. Investigation reaches an impasse. One eminent scholar announced despair, and declared an understanding of Antiochus' deeds to be beyond reach.

The despair may be premature. One contemporary source addresses the question directly, and must be attended to. The author of the Book of Daniel asserts that "the king of the north" in his second invasion of the south will suffer a different outcome from the first. The ships of the Kittim will come against him, causing the king's withdrawal. He will then loose his wrath upon the Holy Covenant, taking care only for those who forsake that covenant. His armed forces will defile the sanctuary and the pious, and he will impose the "abomination of desolation." Interpretation of the text is not controversial. Daniel plainly refers to Antiochus Epiphanes' second campaign against Egypt, its abortive conclusion when Rome intervened, the ignominious retreat, and then the oppressive and devastating measures inflicted upon the Jews.

The explanation has both psychological and political plausibility. Antiochus was compelled to abandon his Egyptian adventure at Popillius Laenas' brusque command and infamous swagger stick. Not only did the withdrawal terminate Antiochus' long-cherished dream of extending suzerainty over the Ptolemaic realm; it also came under humiliating circumstances that threatened to shatter the king's reputation throughout the lands of the Near East. The rage of Antiochus IV is readily intelligible. It could not, of course, be vented against Rome. But the upheaval in Judaea came at a convenient time and offered a suitable target. The introduction of a garrison and the intimidation of the populace by state terrorism had a larger design than simply to punish the Jews. It would announce Antiochus Epiphanes' resumption of control to the diverse peoples and nations nominally under the Seleucid regime. The "Day of Eleusis" was to be buried under a barrage. Antiochus would answer any potential questions about his withdrawal from Egypt by taking the offensive in Palestine.

The initial measures, however, did not suffice for the king's purpose. He determined to stamp out Judaism. The reasons can hardly have been religious or ideological. Nor can an outburst of anger explain the sweeping actions that took place a year later. Judaea would serve as a conspicuous showcase for Seleucid power. The antiquity of the Jewish faith and the tenacity with which its adherents clung to it were well known to Greeks and natives alike in the Near East. Whether they voiced approval or disapproval, they acknowledged the strength and endurance of Jewish traditions. Eradication of the creed and forcible conversion of the faithful would send a message throughout the ancestral kingdom of the Seleucids – the message that Antiochus had accomplished what no ruler before him had hoped to achieve: the abandonment of Jewish belief at Seleucid command. Antiochus Epiphanes would put the "Day of Eleusis" behind him for good.

The concern for image and reputation can be illustrated further. In the immediately sub-

sequent year Antiochus staged a dazzling demonstration at Daphne, a suburb of Antioch. Invitations were issued to towns all over the Greek world, in order to ensure a diverse and widespread audience. The king put on a splendid show: a grand parade of armed forces including both nationals under his control and mercenaries in his pay. Infantry, cavalry, chariots, and elephants marched in procession. More than 50,000 men displayed armor, weaponry, and handsome accoutrements. The nonmilitary aspects of the parade were equally impressive: 800 epebes with gold crowns, 1,000 cattle for sacrifice, numerous images of gods, lesser divinities, and heroes, 200 women sprinkling perfume from gilded jugs upon the crowd of onlookers, and vast quantities of silver and gold plate – much of it from Egypt – carted by the attendants of the king. As is obvious, Antiochus presented a pageant to exhibit the power and wealth of his kingdom, a signal to the Hellenic world of east and west that he had withdrawn from Egypt only to collect resources of awesome extent for even greater ventures. Projection and propaganda dominated. The spectacle was very much in character. It fitted Antiochus' repeated practice of dedicating objects and bestowing gifts upon shrines and cities of Hellas to advertise his means. The calculated elevation of his stature evidently worked. A Greek inscription from the Near East hails him as "savior of Asia," and Diodorus identifies him as the strongest of all kings in his day. Antiochus exploited the image in the closing years of his life to overawe his subjects, consolidate his realm, and engage in further aggrandizement.

Persecution of the Jews belongs in this category. The complicated tale had many facets. Inner turmoil began with clashing ambitions among the Jewish leadership, contests for power entangled by the introduction of Hellenic institutions and aggravated by financial obligations to the Seleucids. Those elements can explain the civil strife, the fierce divisions, and the compromise of traditions that characterized relations between the warring factions and the king. But the savagery and repression of 167 require a different explanation. Here responsibility rests with Antiochus Epiphanes. The persecution did not grow out of factional quarrels, ideological divisions, or financial needs. It served the ends of the king as a display of might, a sign that he had suffered no setback, indeed had emerged with greater strength. The international image of the ruler and his dominion were at stake. Antiochus victimized the Jews in a Seleucid power play.

But the power play, in the end, backfired. Antiochus acknowledged his error too late. The persecution galvanized Jewish resistance, issuing in the Maccabean revolt that ultimately liberated the victims and gave independence to the nation.