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Commemorative Fictions: Athens (480 B.C.E.), Jerusalem (168 B.C.E.), and Alexandria (38 C.E.)

This article examines the link between narratives transposing traumatic events into fictional story worlds and commemorative settings. The case-study of Athens serves to establish that wartime episodes could indeed be memorialized through fictional narratives and the reinterpretation of traditional myths, which were associated with such settings. Next, it is argued that alongside their recounting in texts referencing the events in a direct (mimetic) way, the inter-ethnic clashes in Alexandria (38 C.E.) and Antiochos IV's storming of Jerusalem (168 B.C.E.) spawned fictional narratives that reshaped the sources into stories of divine salvation in which massacres exist only as threats that are eventually averted, while the Judeans triumph over their enemies. As argued here, it is through this narrative transmogrification that the traumatic episodes were commemorated in festivals, which ostensibly celebrated victories. The texts discussed are Philo's *In Flaccum*, 3 Maccabees, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Masoretic Text Esther, and Judith, and as complements, the *Acta Alexandrinorum* and Chairemon's and Apion's Exodus Stories.

Keywords: Philo, *In Flaccum*; 3 Maccabees; Antiochus IV's religious persecution; Nicanor's Day; Purim

Foundational events spawn multiple ways of recounting and of memorializing them, and traumatic occasions may easily acquire the status of cultural cornerstones, especially (but not only) when they are eventually used to legitimize a subsequent turn of events.¹ This multiplicity of co-existing narratives stems not only from disparate groups advocating their own particular version of the circumstances, but also, more basically, from the necessity to address various intellectual and emotional requirements, and meet diverse prescribed social purposes, which may or may not be linked to collective performances and rituals. To meet these manifold needs, the

1 Section 4 in this article owes much to the discussions raised in the workshop "Transforming Memories of Collective Violence" held in Basel, February 14–15, 2020. I wish to thank the event's participants, and in particular Helge Bezold, Julia Rhyder, and Hervé Gonzalez, for our many fruitful exchanges.

said events are processed through different modes of discourse and shaped according to diverse literary and sub-literary genres, which may be complemented by non-verbal means of memorializing, iconographic or performative, such as dances and other embodied rituals.

Against this backdrop, in the present article I will explore how traumatic events may be refracted through different forms of discourse, and more crucially, through distinct poetic modes. To illustrate this process I will start from the well-studied case of how the Persian wars were memorialized in Athens in the 5th and 4th centuries B.C.E. With this case in mind, I will then turn to the multiple literary reverberations generated by two violent episodes that affected Judeans in different places and times: Antiochos IV's storming of Jerusalem in 168 B.C.E.,² and the later inter-ethnic clashes that shook Alexandria in 38 C.E.

These two episodes are fairly well known thanks to texts of various kinds – for Jerusalem, 2 Maccabees, 1 Maccabees, and Josephus' *Antiquities* 12; for Alexandria, Philo's *In Flaccum* and *Legatio* and an imperial edict issued by Claudius.³ They mention the names of places and people, as well as deeds, in a way that unquestionably references the external world (i. e., the historical reality) and which modern historians have therefore used to reconstruct the chronological and causal sequence of events. Of course, their version of the incidents should not be taken at face value, and the subjective appropriation of reality by their authors, as well as unavoidable distortions driven by political, ideological, or situational motives perforce generate a gap between the texts and "what really happened." Alongside the texts, however, the respective memories of these two historical moments were also channeled through a range of discourses that adopt other, non-mimetic modes. The book of Daniel, which reread the episode of Antiochos IV's assault through the lens of an apocalyptic worldview and assorted poetic codes, readily comes to mind, but here I will focus on two other poetic modes of discourse: the fictional and the mythical. In the related texts, the historical reality is not merely distorted, but is metaphorically transposed into a completely different story world, to the extent that the links between text and historical reality can cease to be recognizable. In this article, I will argue that a number of texts of fictional or mythical content which, on the face of it, speak of other places and/or other times, were in actuality

2 The precise date (169 or 168 B.C.E.) is debated, but this matter does not affect our discussion in this article. For arguments in favor of the later date, see S. Honigman, *Tales of High Priests and Taxes: The Books of the Maccabees and the Judean Rebellion Against Antiochus IV* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 380–383.

3 *P.Lond.* 1912 = *CPJ* II no. 153. Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 19.280–285.

formulated as comments either to the events of Jerusalem in 168 B.C.E., or to those of Alexandria in 38 C.E. Some of these texts were composed by Judean authors, while others were produced by authors belonging to or identifying with other population groups involved in the events, and who borrowed their intertextual reference from different literary traditions, Greek or Egyptian.⁴

In social terms, traumatic events cannot be superseded through abstract words alone, however evocative. They require the institution of commemorative events (festivals) capable of weaving narratives and embodied rituals and to bring the community together and perpetuate the memory of the events down through generations. As I will argue, there are grounds to believe that in the Judean environment, all the fictional texts narrating massacres composed by Judean authors in Greco-Roman times and preserved in the corpora of Christian Bibles – the books of Esther (MT), Judith, and 3 Maccabees – refer to either of the well-identified historical episodes under discussion. I will also contend that Esther and various passages embedded in 1 and 2 Maccabees on the one hand, and 3 Maccabees on the other, may have been associated with commemorative feast days occasioned by these two historical moments, that is, they may have served as etiological narratives.

1. Commemorating the Persian Wars in Athens

To lay out these different claims, I will start with summarizing the multiple discursive reverberations of the Persian Wars in 5th and 4th century Athens. The choice of this case-study is first because it is both amply documented and well studied, but also because it concerns the society of 5th century Greece which, according to the Greek tradition itself, invented the first work of *historia* (Herodotus' *Histories*) precisely to narrate, commemorate and monumentalize the Persian Wars.⁵ But even though there can be no doubt that the *Histories* were known in Athens, the Athenians turned to myth-making and fiction to incorporate into their social fabric the episodes of the

4 My distinction between “fictional” and “mythical” refers to the origin of the narrative patterns and themes which they borrow in an intertextual relationship. In concrete terms, the myths in question are Greek (Athens) or Egyptian (Alexandria), but the heuristic value of this distinction is admittedly limited: it is primarily modern (etic), and leaves open the question of how ancient authors understood what they were doing and how readers would have perceived the said texts.

5 See Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.1.0.

Persian wars that most affected them – notably the victories of Marathon and Salamis, and the Persian sack of Athens in 480 B.C.E.

1.1. Herodotus

The aim of the *Histories* was more than simply to *narrate* the Persian Wars: as the work's short *Proem* makes clear, Herodotus wrote in order for "the fame of the great and amazing deeds of both the Greeks and the Barbarians not to be forgotten" (*Hist.* 1.1.0), a statement unambiguously aimed at placing the Persian Wars on a par with Homer's Trojan War. To better reflect the Panhellenic scope of the event and buttress the parallel with the *Iliad*, Herodotus incorporated multiple viewpoints into his account, including those of numerous Greek cities and of peoples composing the Persian empire.⁶ In the same breath, the *Histories* unravel the author's numerous "inquiries" (*historiai*) into the causes of the war, and also regarding numerous phenomena of various kinds, tackling the scientific issues most debated in his day, a fact that reveals the intellectual ambition of his work.⁷ Relatedly, modern scholars have speculated that, like other philosophers, sophists, authors of medical treatises, and poets, Herodotus gave public readings of his work in Panhellenic gatherings.⁸

While the *Histories* offer the basis for modern historical reconstructions of the Persian Wars, this work is arguably too complex and intellectually challenging, bringing together too many separate voices to be useful as a cornerstone for the commemorative purposes of specific civic communities. The texts produced within Athenian society – the only one for which evidence is available – were of very different kinds.

1.2. Mythical and Fictional Transpositions in Athens

Strikingly, no separate commemorative occasion was created to commemorate the Persian Wars in Athens. Rather, the social significance of the conflict was elaborated through associations with existing narratives linked to three distinct ritual settings.

6 Or at least what is presented as their viewpoints. Here I am not concerned with the plausibility or not of these attributions.

7 See R. Thomas, *Herodotus in Context: Ethnography, Science, and the Art of Persuasion* (Cambridge: University Press, 2000).

8 J. Moles, "Anathema kai Ktema: The Inscriptional Inheritance of Ancient Historiography," *Histos* 3 (1999): 27–69, here 53–56, <http://www.dur.ac.uk/Classics/histos/1999/moles.html>.

The first of these involved the annual public funerals of those fallen in the battlefield, at which occasion a distinguished orator would deliver a funeral oration.⁹ These codified speeches opened with the mention of the Athenian autochthony and three wars from the distant (that is, mythical) past such as the Amazonomachy, illustrating the claim that the Athenians fought for just and pious causes.¹⁰ This formal opening was both a praise to Athenian democracy and a legitimizing narrative for the imperial status of Athens in the 5th century. It was followed by the description of the Athenian victories of Marathon and Salamis, which being allegedly fought on behalf of all Greeks, strengthened this self-serving narrative further.¹¹ In sum, the funeral orations aimed to tie the personal grief of the fallen soldiers' families with the political needs of the city by affirming that all the wars waged by the Athenians defended just causes and democracy.

The memory of the Persian wars was also interwoven into the two major cultic settings of the city respectively honoring Athena and Dionysos. The link with Athena was through cult and myth. While in the 5th century the goddess was revered as Promachos, the one who fought in the first line in Marathon, the Persian wars became the referent of the four (traditional) myths portrayed on the metopes adorning the Parthenon: the three battles against the Amazons, the Centaurs, and the Giants, and the sack of Troy (*Ilioupersis*), which evolved into a patent metaphor for the sack of Athens by the Persians in 480 B.C.E.¹² This mythical transposition helped extract what the Athenians saw as the quintessential meaning of the historical events by retrofitting them with cosmic significance, whereby the Persian Wars reenacted the primordial battle between Order and Chaos. At the same time, the specific myths selected effected an emotionally loaded twist, as the theme of marriage (disrupted and reestablished) runs through them: in this way, the Persian wars became the citizens' victorious struggle to protect their wives and daughters.¹³

9 On the public burial and the funeral oration, see N. Loraux, *The Invention of Athens: The Funeral Oration in the Classical City* (trans. A. Sheridan; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).

10 See Lysias 2.4–19. The other wars were waged against the Thebans on behalf of the Argives; and against Eurystheus, on behalf of Herakles' sons.

11 Lysias 2.20–43. See previous note. The rest of the speech went on listing subsequent wars down to those in which the honored soldiers of the year died.

12 On the metopes, see, for instance, K. Schwab, "A Celebration of Victory: The Metopes," in *The Parthenon: From Antiquity to the Present* (ed. J. Neils; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 159–197, especially 167–168.

13 *Ibid.*, 168.

Finally, the emotional load of the sufferings induced by warfare was addressed in the tragedies staged in the Dionysia festival, the genre which Aristotle described as an instrument of (curative) *katharsis* for the audience.¹⁴ Alongside an exalted description of the battle of Salamis, Aeschylus' *Persians* (vv. 355–430) dwells in a moving way on the anguish of the Persian Mother Queen and brides as the news of the Persians' defeat reaches the court and they are uncertain about the fate of their loved ones.¹⁵ Later tragedies continued to address the theme of war sufferings seen through the prism of women in a more metaphorical way, as their subject matters were inspired by traditional myths.¹⁶ By suppressing the anecdotal aspect of real wartime episodes that dominate mimetic narratives (such as Herodotus' *Histories*) and emphasizing universal themes, these fictional transpositions allowed audience members to project their own sufferings onto the tragedies' storylines, while at the same time extolling the democratic city.

As I will argue next, the respective fictional transpositions of Antiochos IV's crackdown and of the Alexandrian clashes similarly served to extract the quintessential meaning of these events as perceived by the related communities, while playing on the collective and individual significance of these incidents. I will first examine the events of Alexandria, because the argument is, I believe, easier to demonstrate in this case.

2. Alexandria, 38 C.E.: Inter-Ethnic Violence and Literary Invectives

In 38 C.E. an outbreak of violence swept through Alexandria. According to Philo's *In Flaccum*, which is our main source of information on these events, many Judeans who had been living in the city for centuries were massacred by the mob, and the status in the city of those who survived was demoted. This turmoil was followed by the dispatch of two embassies, one Greek and one Judean, to emperor Caligula in Rome. Philo, who was part of the Judean embassy, documented this episode in his *Legatio ad Gaium*. The dispute between the citizens and the Judeans of Alexandria was settled, formally and temporarily at least, by an edict issued by Claudius in 41 C.E., in which the emperor clarified the status and rights of each side in the city.¹⁷

14 Aristotle, *Poet.*, 6, 1449b24–28. On *katharsis*, see S. Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 169–201, 350–356.

15 See C. Dué, *The Captive Woman's Lament in Greek Tragedy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 57–90.

16 In particular, Euripides' Trojan tragedies. On which see *ibid.*, 117–162.

17 See above, n. 3.

2.1. Philo, *In Flaccum*

The rhetorical work *In Flaccum* has been defined as an aretalogy, that is a genre pivoting on the story of misfortune, salvation through divine intervention, and praise to the divine savior.¹⁸ One can expect its presentation of the conflict to be heavily biased, including distortions and omissions. Let us first summarize Philo's account before submitting it to a critical reading and putting forward an alternative historical reconstruction, which is indispensable for understanding the viewpoint of the Greek (and Egyptian) citizens, the Judeans' enemies.

According to Philo, in 38 C.E. King Agrippa of Judea called in at Alexandria on his way to Rome. Shortly after his visit the Alexandrians staged a mock ceremony of welcome in the *gymnasion*, during which simpleton Carabas was dressed up as Agrippa and feted by a crowd feigning to honor him as a king. Soon afterwards, the mob desecrated the *proseuchai* (houses of prayer) of the Judeans in the city by erecting statues of the emperor on them, clearly referencing the imperial cult in which the Judeans did not participate.

According to Philo, a few days later Flaccus determined to destroy the "politeia" of the Judeans (τὴν τῆς ἡμετέρας πολιτείας ἀναίρεισιν, 53) by publishing an edict that defined them as "foreigners and immigrants" (ξένους καὶ ἐπήλυδας, 54). Right on cue, the Judeans were expelled from their houses in four city districts and forced into a tiny area in the fifth district, close to the seashore and a cemetery (55–56). From then on, Philo describes with horrendous details how the Judeans' houses were plundered, and people were harassed, assaulted, or killed with the utmost cruelty (57–96).

Eventually, according to Philo, divine justice intervened, and Flaccus was arrested upon Caligula's order (102–116). Philo narrates how, when the Judeans learned this news, they spent the night chanting and praising God (121–124).

2.2. Philo's Distortions

Various scholars have pinpointed several basic distortions in Philo's account.¹⁹ First and foremost, Philo misrepresents the status of the Judeans

¹⁸ See A. Pelletier, *Philon, In Flaccum: Introduction, traduction et notes* (Les Œuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie 31; Paris: Le Cerf, 1967), 18.

¹⁹ See, in particular, A. Kerkeslager's devastating comparison between Philo's diverging accounts in *In Flaccum* and *Legatio*, in "Agrippa and the Mourning Rites for Drusilla in Alexandria," *JSJ* 37 (2006): 367–400, here 368–373.

in Alexandria in those days when he claims that they enjoyed a privileged status alongside the Alexandrian citizens.

This false claim further explains why he systematically misrepresents the rioters as Egyptians and individuals of low social status (e.g., 33–34, 41). In truth, the venues chosen by the assaulters to humiliate and attack the Judeans – above all, the *gymnasion* – indicates that the perpetrators were in fact Alexandrian citizens, given that Alexandrian citizenship was obtained through enrollment in the ephebate (that is, the training of young men in the *gymnasion*). Moreover, Dionysios, Lampon, and Isidoros – the three Alexandrians who, according to Philo, manipulated the Roman prefect Flaccus (18–24) – were official leaders of the citizens.²⁰ Lastly, Philo systematically downplays the actions and reactions of the Judeans themselves. He obliquely notes that the Judeans reacted to the desecration of their *proseuchai* (48), but omits to specify *how* they reacted, and this omission speaks volumes. Next, his denial that weapons were found in the houses of the Judeans when they were searched is unconvincing (86–94). Finally, despite Philo’s cataclysmic description of how the Judeans were being treated, he gives several clues that the Judean institutions throughout continued to function: the Judeans passed an honorific decree to the emperor (97–101), and later dispatched an embassy to Rome. These elements suggest that, even if we accept Philo’s lurid description of the slaying in 38 C.E., his account of the massacre requires scaling down and, more crucially, needs reassessment as the subjective viewpoint of one of the sides involved in what was more likely inter-ethnic clashes. That said, it remains that the Greeks definitely had the upper hand in these troubles, and the Judeans suffered disproportionately. The trauma properly speaking attached to their side.

2.3. An Alternative Historical Reconstruction

By reading Philo critically and contextualizing the clashes in the Roman reforms that followed the provincialization of Egypt in 27 B.C.E., we may propose an alternative reconstruction of the events of 38 C.E.²¹

Under the Ptolemies, the Judean *politeuma* of Alexandria enjoyed separate institutions, and the social status of its members was presumably close to that of the other Greeks who lived in Alexandria, but were not citizens

²⁰ On Isidoros and Lampon, see *CPJ* II, pp. 66–81.

²¹ On the provincialization, see A. K. Bowman and D. Rathbone, “Cities and Administration in Roman Egypt,” *JRS* 82 (1992): 107–127. For a slightly different reconstruction, see S. Gambetti, *The Alexandrian Riots of 38 C.E. and the Persecution of the Judeans: A Historical Reconstruction* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

of the city. That is to say, they enjoyed certain privileges that the Egyptian population did not. However, the imperial revamping of personal statuses jeopardized this stratification. The year 4/5 C.E. saw the establishment of lists of Alexandrian citizens, and in time these lists became the basis for the consolidation of a hereditary status. Enrollment in the *ephebeia*, the formal institution whereby the adolescent age group underwent training in the *gymnasion*, became a formal prerequisite for the acquisition of citizenship, and was therefore under tight control, all the more since citizens were exempted from the annual poll-tax (*laographia*). According to R. Alston, however, the implementation of the reform on the ground must have been progressive, and the status of the members of the Judean *politeuma* in Alexandria may have remained unclear.²² By 38 C.E. this issue had become a bone of contention, and the ensuing inter-ethnic clashes led to the clarification of the Judeans' status in Claudius' edict.

Alston cogently asserts that the disturbances were indeed triggered by King Agrippa of Judea's call at the city, and that the welcome ceremony by the Judean *politeuma* and the hostile reaction it elicited may be read as a contest for status within the city. By performing their own public albeit separate ceremony in honor of a foreign king, the leaders and members of the *politeuma* ostentatiously asserted that their status was equal to that of the civic body, thereby advancing their pretension to a higher status than that under the Ptolemies. In contrast, the Alexandrian citizens were adamant to assert their exclusive status in the new Roman order. As we saw earlier, by selecting the *gymnasion* as their rallying place, the citizens highlighted the definition of the citizenship that had been enforced by the Roman authorities, and which was based on admission to the *ephebate*.

Moreover, Alston argues that alongside the issues of personal statuses, the spatial reordering of Alexandria by the Roman authorities is key to understanding the riots of 38 C.E. In the same way as Rome and Italy under Augustus were divided into administrative quarters and districts, respectively, Alexandria was divided into five administrative districts labeled by the first five letters of the Greek alphabet, along with assorted suburban districts. With this specific reform, the Roman administration introduced an innovative way of apprehending the urban space in the province. By expelling the Judeans from their houses, desecrating their *proseuchai* across the city, and confining their people to a narrow area, the citizens reasserted their control over the city – based on Josephus, it seems that this area was

22 R. Alston, "Philo's 'In Flaccum': Ethnicity and Social Space in Roman Alexandria," *Greece & Rome* 44 (1997): 165–175.

identified as the original location of the *politeuma* (Philo, *Flacc.* 55; Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.33–37). Likewise, thirty-eight Judean elders were scourged in the Egyptian manner (*Flacc.* 74–75), to signify in a performative way that the Judeans had definitively lost their last privileges, being demoted to the same legal status as the Egyptians.

In sum, when we pay attention to the places within the Alexandrian cityscape that served as venues for the rioters, a very different narrative from that of Philo emerges, and shows it up for what it is, namely a subjective, selective, distorted, and biased account of the entire affair. In a word, Philo put his rhetorical skills at the service of his own community. As a rhetorical weapon, Philo's work was matched by literary (or subliterary) works produced by authors belonging to or identifying with the Alexandrian side. Some of these works clearly belonged to the Greek literary tradition, while others, interestingly, drew from the Egyptian one.²³

2.4. Through a Greek Lens: The *Acta Alexandrinorum*

As long since acknowledged, the so-called *Acta Alexandrinorum* (Acts of the Pagan Martyrs) memorialized the events of 38 C.E. from the Greeks' viewpoint. This collective title refers to a sub-literary genre that offers fictionalized versions of the minutes of trials, though some of them are likely genuine. In particular, the *Acta Alexandrinorum* recorded the trials and executions by Roman emperors of Alexandrian official representatives who came to Rome as official ambassadors. Although most emperors from Augustus to Caracalla in the early 3rd century are represented, the corpus affords ample space to the events of 38–41 C.E., and it therefore seems that the genre itself began here.²⁴

The texts are riddled with anti-Judean remarks that vie with the praise for the glorious city of Alexandria and the dignity of its institutions. The recurring trope in the *Acta* is how the Alexandrian ambassadors bravely defended their beloved city while facing a hostile emperor who, owing to his ignorance and low birth, mistakenly allied himself with the enemies of

23 For a more detailed analysis of the texts discussed in sections 2.4. and 2.5, see S. Honigman, "The Shifting Definition of Greek Identity in Alexandria through the Transition from Ptolemaic to Roman Rule," in *Alexandria – Hub of the Hellenistic World* (ed. B. Schliesser; WUNT; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021).

24 For the texts, see H. A. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Pagan Martyrs: Acta Alexandrinorum. Edited with commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954); *CPJ* II nos. 154–159. For a comprehensive study, see A. Harker, *Loyalty and Dissidence in Roman Egypt: The Case of the Acta Alexandrinorum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

the Alexandrians, who are repeatedly cited as the Judeans. The noble Alexandrian representatives are unjustly condemned and sent to their death.²⁵

One text in this corpus is the *Acta Isidori et Lamponis*, which features some of the characters mentioned in Philo's *In Flaccum*, where the gymnasiarch Isidoros and two fellow ambassadors (Lampon and Balbillos) confront the Judean king, Agrippa I, before the emperor Claudius. Isidoros proudly vaunts the exclusiveness of Alexandrian citizenship and Greek culture, scornfully claiming that the city's Judeans "live rather after the fashion of the Egyptians," citing the fact that they pay the *laographia* at the rate of Egyptians.²⁶

As this excerpt suggests, even though some of the *Acta* were inspired by real-life trials, the genre indulges in gross distortions, and the traditional Greek theme of the noble death is recycled into a discourse of victimology. That is to say, the *Acta* memorialized real events in a way that suited the target audience by lending voice to their rage, hate, and frustrations.

2.5. Revisiting Egyptian Myths

The Alexandrian philosophers of Egyptian descent Apion and Chairemon authored two of the four known texts that cast the Judeans as "impure evildoers" who were rightly expelled from Egypt, and their leader Moses went on to found the city of Jerusalem.²⁷ This literary tradition harked back to Manetho in the 3rd century B.C.E., and was also exploited by a certain Lysimachos (whose identity remains uncertain).²⁸ Such texts used a mythical paradigm hinging on the theme of disorder and the savior king, a trope that can be traced back to the Late Empire (8th to 7th centuries B.C.E.), and which in Persian times was adapted to stigmatize foreign invaders.²⁹

Although the reasons why Manetho forged this tradition are debated, some commentators aver that he was not motivated by hostility toward the

25 See J. Rowlandson and A. Harker, "Roman Alexandria from the Perspective of the Papyri," in *Alexandria, Real and Imagined* (ed. A. Hirst and M. Silk; CHS, King's College London, Publications 5; Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 79–111, here 94–95; Harker, *Loyalty and Dissidence*, 1–8.

26 CPJ II nos. 156c.ii.25–27; 156d.iii.8–11.

27 See Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 1.288–292 (Chairemon) and 2.10–27 (Apion). On these texts, see J. M. G. Barclay, *Flavius Josephus, Against Apion. Translation and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 341–349.

28 See *ibid.*, 343. Some scholars date him to the late 2nd or early 1st century B.C.E. See K. Berthelot, *Philanthrôpia Judaica: Le débat autour de la "misanthropie" des lois juives dans l'Antiquité* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 106–107.

29 J. Yoyotte, "L'Égypte ancienne et les origines de l'antijudaïsme," *Bulletin de la Société Ernest Renan, RHR* 163 (1963): 133–143.

Judeans.³⁰ Whatever the case, the three subsequent authors were. I suggest that it is no coincidence that two of them were Philo's contemporaries. Chairemon and Apion were prominent grammarians and philosophers. Apion was granted Alexandrian citizenship, and in 39 C.E. he headed the Alexandrian embassy that was sent to Caligula in Rome to speak for the citizens' interests, opposite the Judean delegation in which Philo took part.³¹

The two versions of the "Egyptian Exodus" (or, to quote J. Yoyotte, the "Story of the Impure Ones")³² composed by Chairemon and Apion remain strictly mythical, and neither includes direct references to the events of 38 C.E. However, it is tempting to think that they were produced in the context of, and as a response to the events of 38–41 C.E. According to the Egyptian mythical paradigm, the foreigners' perceived impurity was related to their impiety towards the Egyptian gods; and I wish to suggest that, albeit with a twist, this motif of impiety provides an Egyptian parallel to the Alexandrians' claim that the Judeans were unworthy of privileges in the city because of their rejection of the Alexandrians' gods and of the imperial cult – an accusation which, as noted earlier, the Alexandrians enacted by defiling the Judeans' *proseuchai* with statues of the emperor (Philo, *Flacc.* 41).

2.6. Concluding Remarks

Despite the very different positions of the citizens and the Judeans in the riots of 38 C.E., where the former are primarily assailants and the latter their victims, who also retaliate, it is striking that when we compare the emotions transpiring from the *Acta* and from Philo's *In Flaccum*, the similarities tend to outweigh the differences. The authors of the *Acta* and Philo alike express indignation when commenting on the unworthy way the leaders of their respective sides were treated – King Agrippa and the 38 Judean Elders by the Alexandrians, and the gymnasiarchs by the emperors, and likewise when Philo describes how the *proseuchai* were desecrated – and they equally seek to arouse the readers' pity in multiple ways.

One conspicuous difference, however, lies in the sense of revenge and vindication, and in this respect, it is worth adducing the "Story of the Impure Ones," as well, in the comparison. From trial to trial, the *Acta* offer a storm of rage and frustration, as though the thirst for vindication were un-

30 See, with diverging arguments, Berthelot, *Philanthrôpia Judaica*, 94–101; and I. S. Moyer, *Egypt and the Limits of Hellenism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 84–141.

31 Josephus, *Ant.* 18.257.

32 Yoyotte, "L'Égypte ancienne," 135 and *passim*.

quenchable. While the “Story of the Impure Ones” also starts with pouring hate and insults on the enemy, it notably ends with the gloating twist as the impure ones are duly expelled. In a similar way, throughout his account, Philo focuses not so much on the Alexandrian agitators as on Flaccus, and this angle allows him to round off his narrative with the drastic fall of the Judeans’ arch-enemy, relishing his demise in utmost detail (104–116, 125–191). To further drive the point home, Philo introduces his account of this twist by attributing it to justice, both human and divine (102, 104). Moreover, the Judeans allegedly learned of Flaccus’ summary arrest in the midst of the Tabernacle festival (116–117), by which despondency turned into (allegedly) restrained thanksgiving (117–118, 121–124).

The Egyptian and the Judean readings of the events of 38–41 C.E. therefore share a happy end, which in both cases seems to draw from religious paradigms of divine salvation.³³ However, while the Egyptian texts work out this felicitous conclusion in full – that is, the enemies are expelled from Egypt – Philo’s Judeans are only partly vindicated: while they praise God on the beach, their *proseuchai* still lay in ruins (122), and their other enemies (Lampon and Isidoros) triumph (125–137), a fact that Philo deftly manages to deflect through his adroit narrative focalization.³⁴ Clearly, Philo’s commitment to the mimetic mode of discourse – however biased – constrained his imagination. Although *In Flaccum* puts forward a religiously edifying interpretation of the events, it falls short of delivering the full-fledged cathartic reversal of fortune needed to defuse the trauma. As I will argue next, the text that instead successfully achieved this was 3 Maccabees, which it did by means of a fictional transposition of the traumatic events.

3. From Literary Vindication to Memorializing: 3 Maccabees

The book of 3 Maccabees narrates how King Ptolemy Philopator became enraged against the Judeans when, during his visit to Jerusalem after his victory in Raphia in 217 B.C.E., he was barred from entering the temple. His infamous reaction was to gather all the Judeans of Egypt in the hippodrome of Alexandria and have them trampled by drunken elephants. But as the narrative unfolds, the elephants instead trampled the Judeans’ enemies due to divine revelation, and the king finally recognized the Judeans as his loyal and trusted servants, at which they returned home and celebrated

33 On this paradigm in the Egyptian narratives, see Yoyotte, “L’Égypte ancienne,” 137.

34 Philo mentions Lampon and Isidoros only as the instruments of Flaccus’ fall.

their deliverance. It is generally acknowledged that the narrative form of 3 Maccabees emulates the book of Esther, and Josephus' slightly different account of the same tale in *Ag. Ap.* 2:53–55 attests to the circulation of variants in how the events were memorialized.

3.1. Dating 3 Maccabees

Most scholars date 3 Maccabees to Hellenistic times, mostly because in this work – and in Josephus – the story is set in Hellenistic times.³⁵ However, this deduction overlooks the fact that the two versions disagree about the date: 3 Maccabees situates the story under Ptolemy IV Philopator (222–205 B.C.E.), whereas Josephus speaks of Ptolemy VIII Physkon (146–117 B.C.E.). Rather, like the Books of Esther, Judith, and Daniel 1–6, 3 Maccabees casts its fictional transposition of contemporary events in the days of past dynasties – Esther and Daniel also move them spatially. By this token, the very fact that 3 Maccabees' plot is set in Ptolemaic times is a clue that the work was composed in Roman times.

Within this rule of chronological transposition, selected details create an illusion of truthfulness, like the name of the king (Ptolemy IV Philopator), and the elephants, which were the hallmark of all Hellenistic armies. In truth, however, war elephants disappeared from the Ptolemaic army precisely under this king.³⁶ Obviously, the anachronistic plot of a Ptolemaic king ordering the Judeans to be trampled by drunken elephants is easier to understand if we assume that the author of the story lived in the days of the Roman empire, and not under the Ptolemaic dynasty.

3.2. Comparing 3 Maccabees and Philo's *In Flaccum*

The most decisive reason to date 3 Maccabees to Roman times is a narrative one, however. If we compare Philo's biased account of the events of 38 C.E. in his *In Flaccum* and 3 Maccabees, the parallels are plenty. Altogether, it seems that both the plot as a whole and numerous details in 3 Maccabees were inspired by the events of 38 C.E., as the Judeans subjectively experienced and remembered them. To maximize the emotional impact of their fictionalized

35 See S. Raup Johnson, *Historical Fictions and Hellenistic Jewish Identity: Third Maccabees in Its Cultural Context* (Culture and Society 43; Berkeley: University of California, 2004), 129–141.

36 See C. Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 155. I thank Fischer-Bovet for drawing my attention to this matter.

rendering, the actual events were amplified for dramatic effect. Let us review these textual parallels.

First, in 3 Maccabees the issue of the massacre is central to the plot. Whereas we do not have independent evidence that there was such a massacre under Ptolemy VIII, one certainly did occur in 38 C.E. The fantastic death sentence whereby the Judeans were to be trampled by drunken elephants is a typical dramatic amplification. This narrative device may explain further discrepancies between Philo and 3 Maccabees: what Philo describes as a massacre by the mob, becomes in 3 Maccabees (3:1) a death sentence issued by the king; and, moreover, it concerns all the Judeans of Egypt, and not only those of Alexandria.

For the rest, the parallels are suggestive. According to Philo (*Flacc.* 55–56), the Judeans residing in the city were expelled from their homes and forced to gather in a small area of the fourth quarter, and because of their number they spread to the beaches, garbage dumps, and the tombs (*Flacc.* 56). Likewise, in 3 Maccabees, the Judeans sent from the countryside to Alexandria are gathered in a single place, the hippodrome (3 Macc 4:11). The hippodrome may further allude to the theater, which according to Philo was a prominent site of action in 38 C.E.

A second prominent theme in 3 Maccabees is the legal status of the Judeans who are demoted; the parallel with the events of 38 is particularly tempting. According to Philo (*Flacc.* 53–54), Flaccus published a decree in which he dubbed the Judeans as foreigners and immigrants. In 3 Maccabees (2:28), the decree is issued by the king, and the Judeans become subjected to the census (*laographia*) and are declassified as slaves (cf. also 4:14).

An expected transposition of the events of 38 C.E. in 3 Maccabees is the linking between the legal status of the Judeans and their religious separatism. Although according to Claudius' letter this issue had no legal implication, it was a key point of contention between the Greeks and the Judeans. Philo in *In Flaccum* 41–52 describes the Greeks' desecrating of the *proseuchai* when they erected statues of the imperial cult on them and presents this deed as the first stage of the mob's assault against the Judeans.³⁷ In 3 Maccabees, from the outset, the first royal decree in chapter 2 associates the Judeans' refraining from taking part in Greek religious rites (namely, the Dionysiac mysteries) and their being deprived of Alexandrian citizenship (3 Macc 2:28–30; cf. 3:21–22). More precisely, the king's absurd order in 3 Macc 2:28 that "None of those who do not sacrifice shall enter their sanctuaries" seemingly alludes to the desecration of the *proseuchai*.

37 Philo himself dramatizes this event by dwelling at length on its implications.

3.3. The Commemorative Festival

A seemingly major hindrance to associating 3 Maccabees and the events of 38 C.E. is the etiological function of the tale, which is corroborated by Josephus (*Ag. Ap.* 2.55). Both in Alexandria (3 Macc 6:30–36; cf. 6:38–40) and in Ptolemais of the Fayum (7:17–19), the Judeans celebrate their salvation through banquets, and institute two commemorative festivals to be celebrated each year.

Strictly speaking, Philo does not mention any commemorative festival. That said, he describes how when the Judeans learned about Flaccus being arrested, they started to sing God's praises, and spent the night singing hymns and psalms on the beach (121–122). Therefore, we should not rule out that the festival mentioned in 3 Maccabees in actual fact commemorated Flaccus' downfall.³⁸

3.4. Conclusion

When we consider the pro-Greek *Acta Alexandrinorum* and the Egyptian "Story of the Impure Ones," it seems puzzling that the Judeans, of all the sides involved, would have been the only ones not to memorialize the massacre of 38 C.E. through fiction. The reading of 3 Maccabees proposed above fills in this gap.

The comparison between *In Flaccum* and 3 Maccabees casts light on a striking shift in the fictionalized account. Philo continued his account of the acts of violence suffered by the Judeans in 38 C.E. up to the downfall of Flaccus, thereby recasting the events as a story of existential threat and salvation, thanks to divine and human justice. In contrast, although in 3 Maccabees the Judeans faced the threat of annihilation, ultimately the massacre never took place, and instead they massacred their enemies. As the text itself underscores (6.30–36), this is the narrative that entered the canon and was commemorated by the Judeans in Alexandria and across Egypt. As I will argue next, a similar process of narrative transmogrification occurred in Judea with Antiochos IV's traumatic crackdown on Jerusalem, which was processed into fictional texts that also came to serve as etiological narratives linked to commemorative festivals.

³⁸ For further discussion, see S. Honigman, "Shifting Definition of Greek Identity"; and eadem, "Between History and Fiction: 3 Macc and the events of 38–41 CE in Alexandria," in *Tra politica e religione: I Giudei nel mondo greco-romano. Studi in onore di Lucio Troiani* (ed. L. Capponi; Antiquitas 30; Bologna: Jouvence, 2019), 127–144.

4. Antiochos IV's Storming of Jerusalem, 168 B.C.E.

4.1. The Account of 1 and 2 Maccabees

The violent events that shook Judea in the days of Antiochos IV (175–164 B.C.E.) and thereafter are narrated in 1 and 2 Maccabees; these accounts are biased, since the works aimed at legitimizing the Hasmonean dynasty, which claimed descent from the Maccabean brothers. For the purpose of the discussion below, we can pinpoint a few narrative landmarks.³⁹ Antiochos IV assaulted Jerusalem when he returned from his campaign in Egypt (presumably the second one, in 168 B.C.E.), either, as 2 Maccabees claims, because he “thought that it was in revolt,” or more likely because it actually was. Rather than simply dwelling on the horrendous acts – massacre, rape, plunder and destruction by fire and otherwise, along with land confiscations (in those days routinely perpetrated when armies stormed cities) – the early sources introduce fictional narratives that stress the (real and perceived) religious dimension of the misdeeds committed on this occasion (1 Macc 1:41–64; 2 Macc 6–7).⁴⁰ The king had a citadel built in the city and established a garrison. According to the ancient sources, the regular sacrificial cult was disrupted, and the temple altar desecrated by the foreigners imposing sacrifices deemed impure. Moreover, the surviving population appears to have been disenfranchised.

The sources then focus on the deeds of Judas Maccabee, claiming that he (and his brothers) took the lead in the resistance. Judas allegedly reconquered Jerusalem and he and his men purified the temple, dedicated a new altar, and instituted a commemorative festival on the 25th day of the month of Chislev (1 Macc 4:36–59; 2 Macc 10:1–8). Thereupon Judas fought wars against Seleukid forces and led expeditions against neighboring regions and cities to rescue the Judeans settled in them from the assault of the local populations (1 Macc 7:39–50; 2 Macc 11–12). In 161 B.C.E., Judas won a decisive battle against the Seleukid general Nikanor, who perished in the fight. According to the quite fictionalized account in 1 Macc 7:26–49 and 2 Macc 15:1–36, Judas cut off Nikanor's head and hand, brought them back to Jerusalem, and hung his head from the citadel (1 Macc 7:43, 49; 2 Macc 15:29–34). A festival was decreed to commemorate the victory on the 13th

³⁹ The present summary is based on Honigman, *Tales*, 276–277, 378–404.

⁴⁰ See S. Honigman, “The Religious Persecution as a Narrative Elaboration of a Military Suppression,” in *La Mémoire des persécutions: autour des livres des Maccabées* (ed M.-F. Baslez and O. Munnich; Leuven: Peeters, 2014), 59–76.

day of the month of Adar, “one day prior to the Day of Mordecai” (2 Macc 15:36; 1 Macc 7:49).⁴¹

In its narrative structure, 2 Maccabees neatly juxtaposes two narrative cycles (4:7–13:26; 14:1–15:37) to recount the two episodes – the dedication of a new altar and the victory over Nikanor – which led to the institution of the festivals of Hanukkah and Nikanor’s Day, respectively. This structure suggests a connection of sorts between the two. Moreover, Hanukkah is explicitly associated with the festival of the Tabernacles (2 Macc 10:6), and Nikanor’s Day with Mordecai’s Day (2 Macc 15:36). It is the comparison between the story of the battle against Nikanor in 1 and 2 Maccabees and the Book of Esther and to a lesser extent, with the Book of Judith, which casts light on this connection.⁴²

4.2. Three Fictional Existential Threats: Nikanor, Haman and Holofernes

In his detailed commentary on MT Esther, Jean Daniel Macchi pointed to the numerous thematic similarities between Esther 8–10 and 1 and 2 Maccabees and cogently argued that these final chapters, together with select verses in others, was an addition to a proto-Esther text composed in Judea after 1 and 2 Maccabees.⁴³ These similarities include imperial edicts targeting the customs of the Judeans (Esth 3:8–9; 1 Macc 1:41–64; 2 Macc 6–7), and the Judaization of non-Judeans (Esth 8:17; 2 Macc 9:17), which Macchi sees as an inversion of the Hellenization of Judeans in 1 and 2 Maccabees.⁴⁴

Likewise, Macchi points to the close parallels between the story of the Judeans destroying their enemies in Susa in Esth 9:1–19 and Judas’ battle against Nikanor in 1 Macc 7:39–50 and 2 Maccabees 15.⁴⁵ In particular, the fate of the two arch-enemies Haman and Nikanor are comparable, since their bodies are placed on public display (Esth 7: 9–10, cf. 9:13; 1 Macc 7:47;

41 R. Doran, *2 Maccabees: A Critical Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 289.

42 On the narrative structure of 1 and 2 Maccabees, see Honigman, *Tales*, 409–411.

43 J.-D. Macchi, *Esther* (trans. C. Palmer; International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2018). References below are to the French edition: idem, *Le Livre d’Esther* (Commentaire de l’Ancien Testament XIV; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2016), here 64–70. See also H. Bezold, “Violence and Empire: Has-monean Perspectives on Imperial Power and Collective Violence in the Book of Esther” in this issue.

44 Macchi, *Livre d’Esther*, 65, with further examples. On the conversion theme, see further 434–438. This theme is also found in Judith 14, in which Achior is circumcised.

45 *Ibid.*, 445–447.

2 Macc 15:35). Likewise, Judith cuts off the head of Holofernes and brings it to Jerusalem for display (Jdt 14:11). Moreover, the massacre of the enemies in Susa and the victory over Nicanor occur the same day, Adar 13, and festivals are instituted to commemorate these occasions (Esth 9:23, 27; 1 Macc 7:48–49; 2 Macc 15:36). As Macchi notes, Nicanor’s Day was (logically) set on Adar 13, while Mordecai’s Day was moved to Adar 14 and 15, creating a festival lasting two or three days.⁴⁶ Macchi also makes a forceful case that the date of Purim, which in Esther’s narrative is quite arbitrary, refers to Judas’ victory over Nicanor.⁴⁷

As Macchi notes, Nicanor’s Day belongs in a series of festivals commemorating military victories that were instituted in the days of the Hasmonians.⁴⁸ However, if we bring together the similar narrative structure between Esther and 3 Maccabees; the link between 3 Maccabees and *In Flaccum* discussed above; the similarities between Esther and 1 and 2 Maccabees; and the similarities between the fates of Nicanor, Haman and Judith’s Holofernes, then a more complex interpretation of these festivals emerges.

4.3. Fiction and Festival

As noted above, *In Flaccum* describes a massacre whose historicity is as certain as it can be, but by combining it with the story of Flaccus’ downfall, Philo memorializes it according to the religious paradigm of a misfortune redeemed by divine and human justice. Moreover, in 3 Maccabees the massacre is averted; the Judeans slay their enemies instead, are acknowledged as the king’s trusted servants, and institute a festival to commemorate their salvation.

Esther follows a similar narrative pattern as 3 Maccabees and also offers numerous thematic parallels with 1 and 2 Maccabees. Strikingly, these parallels cut across 2 Maccabees’ two narrative cycles (starting from the hostile imperial decrees), and therefore Esther invites us to read them as one continuous sequence, as in 1 Maccabees. This sequence runs from Antiochos IV’s “persecution decree,” through the “religious persecutions” and the rededication of the temple, to the victory over Nicanor and the institution of the commemorative festival.

Even though we may question that Antiochos ordered a religious persecution in Jerusalem, his troops undoubtedly carried out appalling

⁴⁶ Ibid., 464–466.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 465–466.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 465, with note 135.

deeds of violence as they stormed the city. In other words, I suggest that the relationship between Esther (and Judith) and 1 and 2 Maccabees runs parallel to that linking 3 Maccabees and *In Flaccum*: Esther, Judith, and 3 Maccabees are fictional transpositions of traumatic events that actually happened.⁴⁹ In all three fictional accounts, the threat of the extermination of the Judeans does not materialize, and, thanks to a felicitous reversal of fate, the Judeans triumph over their enemies.

As a consequence, the correlated festivals of Nikanor's Day and Mordecai's Day carry a multilayered meaning. Ostensibly, Nikanor's Day commemorated a victory, and hence had a political import that ensured the cohesion of the Hasmonean kingdom by reinforcing the adherence of the population to the dynasty; under the surface, however, the festival also commemorated the traumatic events of 168 B.C.E., and so did Mordecai's Day. Over time, what prevailed was the festival linked to the etiological narrative that most distanced itself from the anecdotal, historical event of Purim.⁵⁰

At the same time, the memory of the massacre itself was not entirely erased by the stories of salvation that were associated with the festivals. Altogether, 1 Maccabees (1:41–64), 2 Maccabees (6:1–11, 18–31; 7:1–42) and Daniel (11:29–39) comprise no fewer than five fictionalized versions.⁵¹

5. Conclusion

What emerges from the foregoing discussion is that commemorative rites in Athens, Alexandria, and Jerusalem alike combined a prominent political aspect (the victory over the enemy) and themes dealing more overtly with the aspects of suffering and trauma. Notably, however, these themes sideline the intimate, personal dimension of the trauma to frame the events related in terms of the threat it posed to the collective identity of the victims: marriage in Athens, and circumcision in the Judean texts.

49 Judith alludes to the invasions of the Judean territory by the Seleukid armies narrated in 1 and 2 Maccabees.

50 So did Hanukkah, whose etiological narrative is focused on the salvation of the temple, not the people.

51 See Honigman, "Religious Persecution."

