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Festivals and Violence in 1 and 2 Maccabees: Hanukkah and Nicanor's Day¹

This article analyzes the nexus between collective violence, temple violation, and military glory in 1 and 2 Maccabees by comparing two festivals established in the context of revolt and guerilla warfare; namely, Hanukkah and Nicanor's Day. It argues that the accounts of the origins of these two festivals in 1 and 2 Maccabees reinforce the close connection between the violation of the temple cult and violence against the community in the memories of the Maccabean rebellion that the authors of these books promote. The article further suggests that the annual celebration of Hanukkah and Nicanor's day was intended to provide sophisticated mnemonic legitimization of the Hasmonean claim to exercise both military and cultic agency as kings and high priests in Judea.

Keywords: festivals; collective violence; Hanukkah; Nicanor's Day; Maccabean revolt; Hasmonean dynasty

1. Introduction: Festivals and Memories of the Maccabean Revolt

1 and 2 Maccabees place a significant emphasis on recounting the origins of new festivals instigated during the Maccabean revolt against Seleucid hegemony in Judea in the mid-second century B.C.E. Both books relate how Judas Maccabeus led the Jews in establishing an eight-day celebration of the temple ἐγκαίνια “dedication” (better known as חנוכה “Hanukkah,” meaning “dedication” in Hebrew), as well as a commemorative anniversary of the-

1 The research presented here was undertaken as part of the Swiss National Science Foundation project “Transforming Memories of Collective Violence in the Hebrew Bible” (project number 181219). It was presented in modified form at the “Violence and Representations of Violence in Antiquity” consultation at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, San Diego, November 23–26, 2019. I wish to thank all the participants at the consultation for their valuable feedback, which helped improve the paper for publication. I further benefited from the opportunity to present a draft of this article at a workshop held at the University of Basel on February 14–15, 2020, where I again received helpful comments and suggestions. Unless otherwise stated, all translations of primary sources are my own.

Jewish military victory over the Seleucid general Nicanor (Nicanor's Day).² Despite the prominence of these two festivals in both 1 and 2 Maccabees, few studies have been devoted to comparing the distinctive form of collective violence that Hanukkah and Nicanor's Day memorialize, both the violence suffered by the community at the hands of the Seleucids, and also the violence that the Maccabees wielded in retaliation.³ The purpose of this article is to address this lacuna, with the view to understanding how the accounts of the origins of Hanukkah and Nicanor's Day reinforce the close connection between the violation of the temple cult and violence against the community in the memories of the Maccabean rebellion promoted by the authors of 1 and 2 Maccabees.⁴

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- 2 It is unclear if the rededication festival or the commemorative anniversary marking the battle against Nicanor had been afforded festal names by the time 1 and 2 Maccabees were composed. The earliest attestation of specific names for these festivals is arguably *Megillat Ta'anit* – an Aramaic document that dates to between 40–70 c.e. (with a mediaeval commentary written in Hebrew) and lists days on which it is forbidden to fast throughout the year. Eight days of “Hanukkah” are mentioned in line 15 (יָמֵי תְּמִינָה), while נִיקְנוֹר “Nicanor” is mentioned in line 32 as being observed on the 13th of Adar. For an edition and commentary on the scroll, see V. Noam, “Megillat Taanit – The Scroll of Fasting,” in *The Literature of the Jewish People in the Period of the Second Temple and the Talmud, Volume 3: The Literature of the Sages* (ed. S. Safrai; CRINT 2/3/2; Leuven: Brill, 2006), 339–362. John 10:22 refers to τὰ ἐγκαίνια “the dedication” as an established festival in Jerusalem, but makes no mention of Nicanor's Day. Both festivals are mentioned by Josephus (for Hanukkah, see *Ant.* 12.35; for Nicanor's Day, see *Ant.* 12.412), although he curiously refers to the rededication as φῶτα “the Festival of Lights.” On the history of this festal name, see M. Hadas-Lebel, “Hanoukka: de la ‘fête de la Dédicace’ à la ‘fête des Lumières,’” in *La mémoire des persécutions: Autour des livres des Maccabées* (ed. M.-F. Baslez and O. Munnich; Collection de la Revue des Études Juives 56; Paris: Peeters, 2014), 231–238, here 233–234.
- 3 For a short but valuable comparison of Hanukkah and Nicanor's Day and the role of the festivals in legitimating the Hasmonean dynasty, see B. Eckhardt, *Ethnos und Herrschaft. Politische Figurationen jüdischer Identität von Antiochos III. bis Herodes I* (SJ 72; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 100–111. Several studies have been devoted to Hanukkah and its representation in 1 and 2 Maccabees; see, e.g., J.C. VanderKam, “Hanukkah: Its Timing and Significance According to 1 and 2 Maccabees,” in *From Revelation to Canon: Studies in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Literature* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 62; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 128–144; Hadas-Lebel, “Hanoukka”; G. Wheaton, “The Festival of Hanukkah in 2 Maccabees: Its Meaning and Function,” *CBQ* 74 (2012): 247–262. Dedicated treatments of Nicanor's Day are comparatively rare. For a more general discussion of the link between festivals and violence in late Second Temple Judaism, see S. Weitzman, “From Feasts into Mourning: The Violence of Early Jewish Festivals,” *The Journal of Religion* 79 (1999): 545–565, although note that Weitzman does not discuss the commemorative aspect of specific festivals but rather the potential for civil unrest during large festal gatherings.
- 4 The focus on Hanukkah and Nicanor's Day in this article reflects the status of these festivals as the only commemorative activities to be mentioned in both 1 and 2 Maccabees.

In adopting this focus, this article builds on the work of historians and social theorists on the socio-political potential of activities that commemorate historic incidents of collective violence. Establishing new commemorative rituals is widely considered to play a key role in fashioning collective memories of violent or traumatic events in a social group's past. This, in turn, is integral to defining the core characteristics or identity of the members of the group that identifies with that traumatic past.⁵ Drawing on these theoretical insights, I argue that Hanukkah and Nicanor's Day commemorated the violence of the Maccabean revolt in a way that reinforced a sense of Jewish socio-cultic order in which the Hasmonean dynasty was considered legitimate, and its use of military violence essential to protecting both the Jewish community and its central institution, the Jerusalem temple. Admittedly, the texts of 1 and 2 Maccabees inform us only about how the authors of these books imagined Hanukkah and Nicanor's Day to shape collective memories of the violence experienced during the Maccabean revolt; they unfortunately contain little evidence of actual celebrations of these festivals in ancient Judea, or of how their performance might have influenced public perceptions of the Hasmoneans. Nevertheless, the ways in which 1 and 2 Maccabees recount the festivals' origins shines valuable light on how these commemorative activities were intended by the books' authors to shape shared memories of the collective injury experienced at the hands of the Seleucids, as well as the military triumphs of the Maccabees, so as to reinforce Hasmonean claims to cultic and political power in Judea.

Other festivals are occasionally mentioned in either 1 or 2 Maccabees; for instance, 1 Macc 13:49–52 refer to a commemorative celebration instigated by Simon on the day of the capture of the *akra* garrison in Jerusalem and the expulsion of its occupants, while 2 Macc 15:36b mentions Mordecai's Day (described in Esther 8–9) when describing the instigation of Nicanor's Day. For a treatment of Simon's Day, see J. Rhyder, "Hellenizing Hanukkah: The Commemoration of Military Victory in the Books of the Maccabees," in *Collective Violence and Memory in the Ancient Mediterranean* (eds. S. Ammann et al.; CHANE; Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

- 5 See further, e.g., the essays in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (ed.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); J.R. Gillis (ed.), *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); T.G. Ashplant et al., *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration* (Routledge Studies in Memory and Narrative; London: Routledge, 2000); K. Tilmans et al. (ed.), *Performing the Past: Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

2. Hanukkah: Violence against Temple and Community Reversed

The first new festival instigated in 1 and 2 Maccabees is the eight-day celebration of Hanukkah. Beginning on the 25th day of the month of Kislev, this festival commemorates the rededication of the Jerusalem temple, recounted in 1 Macc 4:36–61 and 2 Macc 10:1–8, and further mentioned in the two letters prefixed to the book of 2 Maccabees at 2 Macc 1:1–9 and 1:10–2:18.⁶ While few would deny that the temple rededication account is core to the book of 1 Maccabees,⁷ the compositional history of the references to the temple rededication in 2 Maccabees is a matter of debate. Most scholars agree that the two festal letters of 2 Macc 1:1–2:18 should be classed as secondary additions to an extant book that originally began with the epitomator's preface at 2:19.⁸ The status of the temple rededication account in 2 Macc 10:1–8 is more disputed. In his *2 Maccabees* commentary of 2008, Daniel Schwartz argues that the story of the rededication should not be included in the core materials of the book but rather assigned to the same

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- 6 The first letter does not mention Hanukkah explicitly. However, in v. 9 its author implores the Jews living in Egypt to join those living in Jerusalem in keeping τὰς ἡμέρας τῆς σκηνοπηγίας τοῦ Χασελευ μηνός “the festival of Booths in the month of Kislev.” The reference to Kislev is inconsistent with the dating of Booths, which was rather held in the month of Tishri. Eckhardt (*Ethnos*, 103–104) therefore suggests that the letter's author has Hanukkah in mind in 2 Macc 1:9, but refers to it by the name of the nearest festival with a distinct title (namely, σκηνοπηγία “Booths”) because the rededication celebration had not yet received its own name. This interpretation is consistent with the frequent references to Booths elsewhere in 2 Maccabees in descriptions of Hanukkah; note, for instance, 2 Macc 10:6 explicitly states that the celebrations during the eight days of Hanukkah are to modeled after the festival of Booths (καὶ μετ' εὐφροσύνης ἦγον ἡμέρας ὁκτὼ σκηνομαμάτων τρόπον). The second letter (2 Macc 1:10–2:18), for its part, explicitly refers to τὸν καθαρισμὸν τοῦ ἱεροῦ “the purification of the temple” as a celebration held in Jerusalem on the 25th of Kislev (see v. 18). The letter also concludes, in 2 Macc 2:16b, by exhorting the letter's recipients – a certain priest named Aristobulus and the Jews living in Egypt – ποιήσετε ἄγοντες τὰς ἡμέρας “you shall keep the days” of the new festival as a means of commemorating the temple purification.
- 7 For a recent discussion of why 1 Macc 4:36–61 must necessarily form part of the core materials of the book, see F. Borchardt, *The Torah in 1 Maccabees: A Literary Critical Approach to the Text* (DCLS 19; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 203–204.
- 8 As is explained at 2 Macc 2:23, the book of 2 Maccabees is the result of an epitomator's attempt to condense five volumes written by a certain Jason of Cyrene to form a succinct account of the Maccabean rebellion. For the observation that the letters are secondary, see already, e.g., C. C. Torrey, “Die Briefe 2 Makk. 1,1–2,18,” *ZAW* 20 (1900): 225–242; E. Bickermann, “Ein jüdischer Festbrief vom Jahre 124 v. Chr. (II Macc 1:1–9),” *ZNW* 32 (1933): 233–254; F.-M. Abel, “Les lettres préliminaires du second livre des Maccabées,” *RB* 53 (1946): 513–533.

secondary layer as the festal letters.⁹ He emphasizes the disruptive character of the temple rededication account, insofar as it separates the report of Antiochus IV's death in 2 Macc 9:1–29 from the summary of his death at 10:9.¹⁰ In addition, Schwartz contends that the Greek language of the rededication account evinces a distinctive vocabulary and far “simpler style”¹¹ than the surrounding material, which supports the idea that it was penned by a different author.

Yet, while Schwartz presents a sophisticated argument, many of his core claims have been convincingly refuted by Jonathan Trotter, who has recently defended the inclusion of the rededication account of 2 Macc 10:1–8 in the core materials of the book.¹² Trotter makes a strong case that the placement of the temple rededication account should not be seen as interrupting the story of Antiochus' death, but rather as forming part of a deliberate structural device, whereby both the Hanukkah and Nicanor celebrations are instigated in the context of the death of a major enemy of the Jewish people and Jerusalem temple (cf. 2 Macc 10:9; 15:37). Moreover, Trotter demonstrates that many of the allegedly distinctive features of the Greek language of 2 Macc 10:1–8 can be observed in other key passages of the book, and therefore cannot be used as evidence to support isolating the temple rededication account as secondary.¹³ He thus concludes that 2 Macc 10:1–8

9 D.R. Schwartz, *2 Maccabees* (Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 8–10; see also Wheaton, “Festival of Hanukkah,” 248, 260–262; Eckhardt, *Ethnos*, 106.

10 This was also observed in earlier studies. However, it was typically explained by positing that the temple rededication account was originally located elsewhere in the narrative, but was moved to its current position for reasons that remain unclear. See, e.g., J.R. Bartlett, *The First and Second Books of the Maccabees* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 215, 296; J.A. Goldstein, *II Maccabees: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 41A; Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), 24–26; more recently, G. Morrison, “The Composition of II Maccabees: Insights Provided by a Literary Topos,” *Bib* 90 (2009): 564–572, here 564–565.

11 He especially notes the frequency of parataxis in 2 Macc 10:1–8, as well as the supposedly “unadorned” character of its vocabulary, which he claims “typifies the lower register” of the rededication account; see Schwartz, *2 Maccabees*, 8, 375.

12 J.R. Trotter, “2 Maccabees 10:1–8: Who Wrote It and Where Does It Belong?,” *JBL* 136 (2017): 117–130. For similar (albeit less detailed) arguments against removing 2 Macc 10:1–8 as secondary, see R.M. Doran, *Temple Propaganda: The Purpose and Character of 2 Maccabees* (CBQMS 12; Washington DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1981), 197.

13 For instance, Trotter (“2 Maccabees 10:1–8,” 123–126) points out that many of the terms that Schwartz claims are unique to 2 Macc 10:1–8, such as κομίζομαι “recover” or ἀλλόφυλοι “foreigners” are either attested in other core passages of the book or are very similar to terms used elsewhere (e.g., in the case of ἀλλόφυλοι, see the closely-related term ἀλλοφυλισμός “foreign custom,” which occurs in 2 Macc 4:13; 6:24).

are suitably “interconnected with the rest of the narrative with regard to its placement, language, style, and content”¹⁴ and therefore warrant being retained as original to the core account of the revolt in 2 Maccabees.

In light of Trotter’s convincing demonstration, we can proceed with comparing the accounts of the temple rededication in 1 and 2 Maccabees and the role that the Hanukkah festival plays in commemorating the violence suffered by the community and its temple in the core narratives of both books. Crucially, according to both 1 and 2 Maccabees, the Hanukkah festival originated in a context in which *violation of the temple cult and violence against the community were strongly interconnected*. 1 Maccabees 1:20–64 describe how Antiochus IV, having already entered the Jerusalem temple and brazenly removed its sacred furniture and utensils, returned to the city in 168 B.C.E. to instigate a series of punitive measures against the Judean population. He commanded the Jews to construct altars to idols within the temple and sacrifice ὑεῖα καὶ κτήνη κοινὰ “pigs and common animals” (1 Macc 1:47) within its precincts.¹⁵ Any Jew who remained faithful to ancestral customs or who refused to participate in defiling the temple was threatened with the death penalty – a threat that was duly fulfilled in 1 Macc 2:29–41 when 1,000 Jews who hid in the wilderness to avoid following the king’s orders were ambushed and slaughtered on the Sabbath.

2 Maccabees paints a similarly violent picture of Antiochus’ actions against temple and community, but adds two new stories concerning the fate of the scribe Eleazar and also seven anonymous sons and their mother who refused to eat the flesh of sacrificed pig and so died torturous deaths at Antiochus’ command (2 Macc 6:18–7:42).¹⁶ The graphic description of their fates strongly reinforces the connection between the violation of the temple and the violence suffered by the community, because it presents the deaths of ordinary Judeans as the direct consequence of Antiochus’ decision to pollute the sanctuary and to force the Judean population to participate in its defilement.

Beyond these memories of communal repression and temple violation, Hanukkah also recalls how this imperial violence was reversed through the military victories of the founders of the Hasmonean dynasty. According to 1 Macc 3:1–4:35 and 2 Maccabees 8–9, Judas Maccabeus and his associates

¹⁴ Trotter, “2 Maccabees 10:1–8,” 119.

¹⁵ On this command, see further J. Rhyder, “Le porc dans les interactions d’Antiochos IV avec les Juifs: un réexamen des sources,” *Revue de théologie et de philosophie* (forthcoming).

¹⁶ On the compositional history of the martyr stories of 2 Macc 6:18–7:42, see my detailed discussion at Rhyder, “Le porc.”

mounted a series of successful military campaigns in 166–164 B.C.E. to end the Seleucid persecution in Judea and to reclaim the temple. 2 Maccabees 8:2 explicitly frames these campaigns as an attempt to save both the people from collective violence and the temple from profanation, stating that, before Judas and his companions set out to begin their guerrilla warfare, καὶ ἐπεκαλοῦντο τὸν κύριον ἐπιθεῖν τὸν ὑπὸ πάντων καταπατούμενον λαόν, οἰκτίραι δὲ καὶ τὸν ναὸν τὸν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀσεβῶν ἀνθρώπων βεβηλωθέντα “they appealed to the Lord to look upon the people who have been trampled upon by all, and to have pity upon the temple that has been profaned by impious men.”

1 Maccabees, for its part, recounts the events of the temple rededication in a way that interweaves Judas’ military leadership with his role as a cultic reformer. After having defeated Lysias on the battle field, Judas is said, in 1 Macc 4:36, to have turned to his brothers and declared Ἰδοὺ συνετριβήσαν οἱ ἐχθροὶ ἡμῶν, ἀναβῶμεν καθαρῖσαι τὰ ἅγια καὶ ἐγκαινῖσαι “Look! Our enemies have been crushed! Let us go up to cleanse the sanctuary and dedicate [it].” Verses 37–38 then describe how Judas led ἡ παρεμβολὴ πᾶσα “the entire company” up to Mount Zion and, seeing it desolate, set to work in restoring it. To shield the temple from hostile forces during the eight-day restoration, Judas sent members of his armed forces to the *akra*, a garrison in a fortified area in Jerusalem, to fight ἕως καθαρῖση τὰ ἅγια “until he cleansed the sanctuary” (1 Macc 4:41). Then, once the rededication was complete, Judas immediately commanded the army to fortify Mount Zion. As Michael Tilly has observed, the actions of securing the *akra*, in v. 41, and Mount Zion, in vv. 59–61, form a frame around the account of the temple restoration, thereby strongly affirming the necessity of military force in assuring the success of the rededicated temple.¹⁷

Both 1 and 2 Maccabees conclude their accounts of the temple rededication by decreeing that the event must be memorialized with a new festival to be observed every year (cf. 1 Macc 4:59; 2 Macc 10:8). Neither book provides detailed instructions about specific rituals or activities that are to form part of the festal celebrations. 1 Maccabees 4:59 simply states that Judas, his brothers, and ἡ ἐκκλησία Ἰσραηλ “the assembly of Israel” decided that the days of the rededication were to be kept each year μετ’ εὐφροσύνης καὶ χαρᾶς “with joy and gladness.” In 2 Macc 10:7–8, the process is described in somewhat greater detail, with the statement that the Jews celebrated the 25th of Kislev by carrying foliage and offering thanksgiving hymns, before Judas and his followers issued a κοινοῦ προστάγματος καὶ ψηφίσματος “public

17 M. Tilly, *1 Makkabäer* (HThKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2015), 136.

command and a vote” that the festival should be honoured by παντὶ τῷ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἔθνεϊ “all the Jewish nation” every year. We can therefore presume that the annual festival was imagined to consist of similar rites involving foliage and hymns as those that marked the initial celebration. Moreover, 2 Macc 10:5 elaborates on the importance of the date chosen for the festival: it claims that the 25th of Kislev marks not only the date when the temple was purified, but also the anniversary of its initial desecration by the Seleucids three years prior (cf. 1 Macc 4:52–54). In this way, the annual celebration of Hanukkah reminds the community not only of the glorious rededication of the temple by Judas and his army, but also the violent repression at the hands of Antiochus that necessitated its rededication in the first place.

3. The Day of Nicanor: Threats to People and Temple Averted

Much like Hanukkah, the lesser-known Nicanor’s Day, described in 1 Macc 7:43–49 and 2 Macc 15:20–36, commemorates an episode in which violent intervention was necessary to protect both the community and its temple from hostile forces. Nicanor’s Day falls on the 13th of Adar and marks the defeat of the Seleucid general Nicanor on the battle field at the hand of Judas and his army. 1 and 2 Maccabees are again scant on details about which precise rituals or celebratory activities were expected to take place on Nicanor’s Day when it was honored in future years.¹⁸ Nevertheless, both books agree that the festival is to serve as a commemorative anniversary of the violent clash between the Seleucids and the Judean community that took place in 161 B.C.E., when Nicanor was sent to Judea to quash the Maccabean insurgency under the instructions of Demetrius I Soter (the nephew of Antiochus IV, who ascended the throne after his uncle’s death).

Recent studies generally treat the descriptions of Nicanor’s Day in 1 Macc 7:43–49 and 2 Macc 15:20–36 as forming part of the core materials of both books, although they debate whether certain details of the account of the clash between Nicanor and the Jews might be the result of editorial ex-

¹⁸ 1 Maccabees 7:48–49 refer to Nicanor’s day as a εὐφροσύνης μεγάλην “day of great gladness,” in similar language to that which described Hanukkah in 1 Macc 4:59. However, no specific means of rejoicing or celebrating on that day are specified. 2 Maccabees 15:36a focuses only on the public process by which the community decided to honor the 13th of Adar as a commemorative anniversary: ἐδογματίσαν δὲ πάντες μετὰ κοινοῦ ψηφίσματος μηδαμῶς ἔᾶσαι ἀπαρασήμαντον τήνδε τὴν ἡμέραν, ἔχειν δὲ ἐπίσημον τὴν τρισκαίδεκάτην τοῦ δωδεκάτου μηνὸς “they all decreed, with a public decree, not to allow this day to go unobserved, but rather to keep as notable the 13th day of the 12th month.”

pansion.¹⁹ Despite being reported in both 1 and 2 Maccabees, the Nicanor episode clearly plays a much more significant role in the latter's account of the Maccabean rebellion than in 1 Maccabees. In 2 Maccabees the story dominates two chapters (2 Macc 14:1–15:37a), while in 1 Maccabees only thirty-four verses are dedicated to the episode (1 Macc 7:26–50). In addition, the clash with Nicanor plays a much more important structural role in 2 Maccabees, owing to its position as the episode with which the entire book concludes. While this difference in emphasis has been explained in different ways, it can arguably be attributed, at least in part, to the different temporal foci of the two works: 2 Maccabees ends its account of the rebellion during Judas' lifetime, and thus with the glory of this final military victory prior to his death at the Battle of Elasa in 160 B.C.E.; 1 Maccabees, by contrast, has a much larger temporal frame that moves beyond the death of Judas to describe the exploits of Jonathan (1 Macc 9:23–12:53), Simon (1 Macc 13:1–15:41) and his sons (1 Macc 16:1–22), and then finally John Hyrcanus (1 Macc 16:23–24). Hence, while in 1 Maccabees the battle against Nicanor is one among several military campaigns of the founders of the Hasmonean dynasty, in 2 Maccabees it is one of only a few battles to receive dedicated treatment in the account of the liberation of the Jews and their temple from Seleucid hegemony.

Despite these differences, both 1 and 2 Maccabees agree that the clash between Nicanor and the Jews, much like the events that precipitated Hanukkah, presented an existential threat to the community and its temple. 1 Maccabees 7:26 states that Nicanor was charged by the king to travel to Judea with a large army and a mandate to destroy τὸν λαόν “the people.” However, after an initial clash with Judas at Caphar-salama, Nicanor returned to Mount Zion where he ὑπερηφάνως “arrogantly” confronted the Jerusalem priesthood and threatened to burn down the temple (1 Macc 7:33–34). 2 Maccabees 14:33 intensifies the threat by stating that Nicanor promised not only to tear down the temple but to build a new temple to Dionysus in its place.

The subsequent defeat of Nicanor on the battlefield is then construed as his just desserts for the threats he leveled against both the temple and the community. In 1 Macc 7:42 Judas is said to have prayed before com-

¹⁹ Editorial seams have been especially emphasized by Borchardt, *Torah*, 82–95 in his analysis of the Nicanor account in 1 Maccabees. For detailed discussions of the episode in 2 Maccabees, which emphasize the literary unity of the story, see Schwartz, *2 Maccabees*, 9–10; and S. Honigman, *Tales of High Priests and Taxes: The Books of the Maccabees and the Judean Rebellion against Antiochos IV* (HCS 56; Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 149–159.

mencing battle οὕτως σύντριψον τὴν παρεμβολὴν ταύτην ἐνώπιον ἡμῶν σήμερον, καὶ γνώτωσαν οἱ ἐπίλοιποι ὅτι κακῶς ἐλάλησεν ἐπὶ τὰ ἅγια σου “therefore crush this army before us today, and the rest will know that he [Nicanor] spoke wickedly against your sanctuary.” After Nicanor is successfully defeated, 1 Macc 7:46 introduces an extraordinary detail concerning the collective nature of the violent revenge that was wrought by the community against him: the verse states that ordinary Judeans came out from the surrounding villages and, in a poetic reversal, routed the remaining army and dismembered the general who had been sent to annihilate them; they cut off Nicanor’s head and amputated the general’s right arm that he had ὑπερηφάνως “arrogantly” stretched out (using the same term that described his threat against the sanctuary in v. 33). 2 Maccabees 15:32–33 tell of a similar sequence of events, but claim that the dismemberment of Nicanor’s body took place at Judas’ command, and included the instruction for Nicanor’s remains to be taken to Jerusalem and strung up opposite the temple. This act creates a striking juxtaposition between the mutilated body of the humiliated general and the space of the temple that has been successfully defended by Judas and his associates.²⁰

In addition, 2 Maccabees includes a speech of Judas to the troops before they set out to battle in which the theme of temple defense undergoes significant development. Here Judas not only encourages the troops by citing previous victories and examples of triumph from the Torah and prophets (2 Macc 15:8–9), but also by recounting a ὄνειρον “dream” he has had, in which the deceased high priest Onias III appeared to him alongside the prophet Jeremiah (2 Macc 15:11–16). Judas explains that he saw Onias stretching out his hands and praying τῷ παντὶ τῶν Ἰουδαίων συστήματι “for the whole body of the Jews” (2 Macc 15:12), followed by Jeremiah reaching out his right hand to give him a golden sword with the instruction to use it to crush his opponents.²¹ This dream sequence is significant because it explicitly links the military confrontation between Judas and Nicanor with the broader themes of the violence against the Jewish collective (the communal “body” mentioned in v. 12) and the proper management and protection of the temple by the high priesthood. Antiochus IV’s ruthless disposal of the

²⁰ See further Honigman, *Tales*, 157.

²¹ On the significance of this scene and its similarities to the image of the sheep receiving a sword in AnApoc 90:19, see, e.g., P.A. Tiller, *A Commentary on the Animal Apocalypse of I Enoch* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993). I am grateful to Sylvie Honigman for alerting me to this parallel. On the possible echoes of Ptolemaic royal ideology in the imagery of Judas’ dream, see J.W. van Henten, “Royal Ideology: 1 and 2 Maccabees and Egypt,” in *Jewish Perspectives on Hellenistic Rulers* (ed. T. Rajak et al.; HCS 50; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 265–281, here 274–276.

pious Onias III – the last high priest of the Oniad dynasty – is described in 2 Macc 4:30–38 as one of the key events that destabilized the high priesthood and enabled the temple to be pillaged and defiled. The appearance of this figure before Judas and his army thus affirms that the battle against Nicanor is one that is strongly concerned with defending the temple against Seleucid aggressors. Moreover, it effectively positions Judas “as the new protector of the temple”²² who defends this institution through his tactics as a guerilla warrior and his military leadership on the battlefield.

This link between military force and custodianship of the Jerusalem temple is given sophisticated support in the story about the renegade priest Alcimus and his role in causing the clash between Nicanor and the Jewish community. This story is found in both 1 and 2 Maccabees, which agree that Nicanor’s attack would never have come to pass had it not been for the malevolent plans of Alcimus, a Judean who was resentful of the Maccabees’ ascendancy and sought to claim the high priesthood for himself. According to 1 Macc 7:25, Alcimus traveled to King Demetrius and leveled malicious charges against Judas and his followers, thereby provoking the king to take military action and send Nicanor to destroy the Jewish community. 2 Maccabees 14:3–12, 26–27 go even further in their attempts to blame Alcimus for the violence that ensued. These verses claim that when Nicanor arrived in Jerusalem to eliminate the Maccabean insurgency, he was so impressed by Judas that he quickly befriended him and resolved to live peaceably alongside the Maccabees in Judea. It was only when Alcimus returned to Demetrius a second time and reported that Nicanor would not wage war against Judas that the king forced the Seleucid general to take up arms against him.

The inclusion of these details about Alcimus’ role in the Nicanor episode ensures that the commemorative festival on the 13th of Adar is a celebration of Jewish victories on multiple fronts. The festival is first and foremost an occasion that marks Judas’ victory over the Seleucid forces, represented by the violent general Nicanor. In addition, it celebrates the violent revenge wrought by the Jews against their Seleucid oppressors, so vividly represented in the dismembered body of Nicanor. At the same time, the commemorative anniversary also recalls Judas’ triumph over malicious members of the Jewish community who conspired with the Seleucids to orchestrate violence against their fellow community members in a bid to gain control over the

22 Honigman, *Tales*, 154. See further J. Rhyder, “Politics and Theology in Second Maccabees: Epiphanies, Prayers, and Deaths of Martyrs Revisited,” in *Essays on Political Theology* (ed. M. G. Brett and R. Gilmour; AIL; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, forthcoming).

temple. The annual celebration of Nicanor's Day is thus a nuanced reminder of both *the internal and external threats that required the Maccabees to take up arms in defense of the community*, and to prevent unfit agents from assuming the role of high priest at the helm of the Jerusalem temple.

4. Commemoration and Legitimation: Celebrating the Dual Agency of the Hasmoneans

This comparison of Hanukkah and Nicanor's Day suggests that the two festivals are united by their common concern to commemorate the violence of the Maccabean revolt in a way that intertwines the survival of the Jewish community with the fate of its temple. The festivals recall different episodes of the revolt, with somewhat distinct accents on the experience of collective violence in Judea during the rebellion against Seleucid hegemony: Hanukkah memorializes violent resistance to Seleucid aggression in which scores of Jews died and the sanctuary was defiled; Nicanor's Day, by contrast, celebrates an occasion on which violence against the community and its sanctuary was successfully prevented by Judas Maccabeus and his guerilla army. Nevertheless, the two festivals share the function of ensuring the "transgenerational transmission"²³ of a collective memory of the rebellion in which violation of the temple cult and violent repression of the community cannot be disassociated. In turn, the festivals celebrate the role of the Maccabees as the rightful defenders of *both people and sanctuary* against internal and external enemies that threaten them with violence and profanation.

This finding, it must be said, does not mean that the festivals of Hanukkah and Nicanor's Day, as they are described in 1 and 2 Maccabees, necessarily memorialize events of the revolt in the precise way that they transpired. Historians and social theorists agree that what is memorialized, or alternatively forgotten or deselected in commemorative activities is shaped not so much by what "actually" happened in the past as by the values and norms of the particular social context in which the agents of memory are operating.²⁴ Rather than commemorating the revolt with historical accuracy, the festivals most likely served to construct and promote a particular memory of

23 Drawing here on the language of V. D. Volkan (*Psychoanalysis, International Relations, and Diplomacy: A Sourcebook on Large-group Psychology* [London: Karnac Books, 2014], 25) and his work on large-group identity and the commemoration of cultural trauma.

24 On this, see esp. Gillis, introduction to *Commemorations*, 3–26, here 4.

the rebellion that benefited the authors of these books or the groups with which they were associated, in all probability the Hasmonean monarchy and its court.²⁵ Indeed, the emphasis in the festival etiologies on the intertwined violence suffered by the community and the violation of the temple is striking in its congruence with the “specific shape of the Hasmoneans’ power,”²⁶ to borrow the wording of Sylvie Honigman. As is well known, the Hasmoneans claimed not only to serve as kings with military control over Judea, but also to control the temple institution by monopolizing the office of the high priesthood.²⁷ Such a claim to concurrent cultic and political agency, we can presume, would have required sophisticated strategies of legitimation, given the lack of precedent in Judea for merging the office of king and high priest into a single role.²⁸

The festivals of Hanukkah and Nicanor’s Day may have formed one such strategy for gaining popular support for the Hasmonean dynasty. The festivals encourage the community to recall the collective violence experienced during the revolt in such a way that the military defense of the people of Judea – a traditionally royal function – and the task of restoring and maintaining the cultic operations of the Jerusalem temple cannot be dissociated. This, in turn, promotes an image of the founders of the Hasmonean dynasty as not only rightful military agents who took up arms to protect

25 Few would dispute that 1 Maccabees originated in association with the Hasmonean court in Jerusalem. By contrast, considerable debate surrounds the provenance of 2 Maccabees, with scholars such as Honigman (*Tales*, 65–183) arguing that the book was compiled in Jerusalem, Schwartz (*2 Maccabees*, 3–15) defending its origin among Jews in Egypt, and Trotter (*The Jerusalem Temple in Diaspora: Jewish Practice and Thought during the Second Temple Period* [Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 192; Leuven: Brill, 2019], 113–119) contending that there is inadequate evidence to place it in either context. Nevertheless, as I discuss in greater detail elsewhere (see Rhyder, “Politics”), 2 Maccabees is clearly pro-Maccabean in tone, and serves to position the dynasty descended from Judas as the legitimate custodian of the high priesthood. We can therefore safely assume that the epitomator shared close connections with the Hasmonean monarchy and its court, or at the very least showed a favorable disposition towards Hasmonean powerholders, irrespective of where he was precisely located.

26 Honigman, *Tales*, 2.

27 On the history of the Hasmoneans and their particular form of royal and priestly agency, see, e.g., E. Dąbrowa, *The Hasmoneans and Their State: A Study in History, Ideology, and the Institutions* (Krakow: Jagiellonian University Press, 2010); E. Regev, *The Hasmoneans: Ideology, Archaeology, Identity* (Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements 10; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013); K. Atkinson, *A History of the Hasmonean State: Josephus and Beyond, Jewish and Christian Texts in Contexts and Related Studies* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

28 On the innovative dimensions of the high priesthood of the Hasmoneans, see further V. Babota, *The Institution of the Hasmonean High Priesthood* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 165; Leiden: Brill, 2013).

the people during the rebellion, but also cultic leaders who single-handedly restored the temple to proper working order. In this way, then, the annual celebration of Hanukkah and Nicanor's day might have provided sophisticated mnemonic legitimation of the Hasmonean claim to exercise both military and cultic agency as kings and high priests in Judea.

We of course face considerable difficulties when seeking to verify how Hanukkah and Nicanor's Day actually shaped communal perceptions of the Hasmoneans, or to what extent these festivals were celebrated in the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C.E. The letters affixed to 2 Maccabees confirm that attempts were made by the authorities in Jerusalem to encourage Jews in Egypt to keep the days of Hanukkah, and therefore to consider the festivals instigated in the book as normative for how they structured their calendar of annual celebrations. We can therefore justifiably assume that the Jerusalem authorities probably *intended* for the accounts of Hanukkah and Nicanor's Day in 1 and 2 Maccabees, along with their commands to honor the festivals each year, to affect actual festal practice. The prominence of Hanukkah and the Day of Nicanor in the books of 1 and 2 Maccabees therefore sheds valuable light on the importance of festivals that commemorated episodes of collective violence as tools of socio-political legitimation in the late Second Temple period, and especially during the reign the Hasmoneans as kings and high priests in the late Hellenistic period.

