

The Third or the Fourth? Which of the Two Ptolemaic Kings Visited Jerusalem?

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Abstract: Scholars are divided on the reliability of the report by Josephus, in *Against Apion*, of a visit by King Ptolemy III to Jerusalem. This paper suggests, firstly, that in all likelihood Ptolemy III did not visit Jerusalem during the Third Syrian War, and secondly, that Josephus' report echoes King Ptolemy IV's visit to Jerusalem following the battle of Raphia, as paralleled in III Maccabees. This would make Josephus' *Against Apion* parallel the two acmes of III Maccabees, namely, this visit and the elephant story.

Keywords: Second Temple period; Josephus; *Against Apion*; III Maccabees; Ptolemy III; Ptolemy IV; Third Syrian War; Battle of Raphia; Fourth Syrian war; Jerusalem Temple

A Reliable Report about Ptolemy III and a Legendary One about Ptolemy IV?

In *Against Apion* 2:48, Josephus reports that after Ptolemy III Euergetes I took the whole of Syria by force, he 'did not sacrifice thank-offerings for his victory to the gods in Egypt, but came to Jerusalem and offered many sacrifices to God, after our manner, as well as dedicated votive gifts befitting the victory'.

Josephus does not name a source for this statement. Arguably, if it were a Greek source, naming it would certainly have served Josephus better in challenging Apion's charges.¹

There seems to be a consensus among the scholars who addressed this report that Josephus' opening sentence, to the effect that Ptolemy Euergetes' worship in Jerusalem was a substitute for worship of the Egyptian deities, is hard to accept.²

¹ Note the evident Jewish point of view in the use of the 1st person plural, 'our manner'. It cannot be ruled out that Josephus, as a Jew, changed a reference to the cult of the Jews from the 3rd person into the 1st person. However, the otherwise unnecessary statement that Ptolemy's sacrifices followed Jewish practice accords with another report by Josephus regarding a former Hellenistic monarch, Alexander the Great. In particular, Alexander is said to have sacrificed in the Jerusalem Temple 'according to the instruction of the high priest' (κατὰ τὴν τοῦ ἀρχιερέως ὑφήγησιν — *Ant.* 11:336). Albertz (2013), 118, also adds, in this context, Philo's remark that the dedicatory gifts of Marcus Agrippa to the Temple 'were permitted' (Legat. 297). Albertz perceives behind such remarks the potential of sacrifices by foreigners to offend the local cult, in Jewish eyes.

² In fact, Ptolemy III is known for his great respect for Egyptian cults, as indicated by the Canopus decree of 238/9 B.C.E.: OGIS 56; Bevan (1927), 208; Austin (2006), no. 271. Ptolemy III is also credited with founding several Egyptian temples, the most notable being the great temple dedicated to Horus at Apollonopolis Magna (Edfu): Bevan, *ibid.*, 214, and Nadig (2013). Moreover, as a result of the Third Syrian War Ptolemy III claimed to recover

Some scholars treat Josephus' second sentence about the visit of Ptolemy III in Jerusalem, however, as reliable historical evidence;³ some are content to point out that this visit is otherwise unattested;⁴ others note the similarity of this description to the visit to Jerusalem by the next King Ptolemy, Ptolemy IV, according to III Macc. 1:6-9.⁵ At the same time, the legendary character of III Macc. and the similarity of its Temple scene to that of Heliodoros in the Jerusalem Temple (II Maccabees 3:9-30),⁶ have also been conducive to the opinion that denies any reliability to III Macc.'s report of this visit by Ptolemy IV.⁷

Note, however, that the plausibility of Ptolemy IV's visit to Jerusalem is affirmed by Polybius and the Demotic text of the Raphia decree.⁸ In particular, the former says (5.87.6) that, following his victory in Raphia, Ptolemy IV is reported to have spent three months in his newly reclaimed Syria and Phoenicia,⁹ establishing order in the cities.¹⁰ The latter adds that this tour by Ptolemy IV included sacrifices in temples.¹¹ One might well expect that Jerusalem was included in the tour,¹² which lasted from mid-July to mid-October 217 B.C.E.¹³

thousands of sacred objects that the Persians had carried off during their rule of Egypt: OGIS 54 (The Adoulis Inscription); Austin, *ibid.*, no. 268; Bevan, *ibid.*, 193-4; Grainger (2010), 163, 165.

³ Müller (1969), 247; Hengel (1991), 8, 27, and Kasher (1996), 2:339.

⁴ Thackeray (1926), 311, n. g; Reinach (1930), 67, n. 1, and Donaldson (2007), 346, who concludes, however, that: 'The event itself is certainly within the realm of possibility'.

⁵ Paul (1987), 305; Barclay (2007), 195, n. 164, and Gruen (1998), 222, who adds, nevertheless: 'For all we know, Ptolemy (III) might have traversed Palestine after his victory'. Verbal similarity of the two reports is limited: compare *Against Apion* 2:48 παραγενόμενος εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα with III Macc. 1:9: παραγενόμενος εἰς τὸν τόπον. In FN 1 above, we have mentioned the cautious treatment, in some Jewish texts, of the sacrifices offered in Jerusalem by foreign rulers. Indeed, III Macc. 1:9 also cares to add that Ptolemy IV acted in the early phase of his visit as is appropriate to the holy place. This emphasis, however, has a literary justification, namely, to stress the complete transformation of Ptolemy's attitude towards the Temple, since, in the later phase of his visit, he was about to desecrate it.

⁶ Tromp (1995), 318-321; Hacham (2002), 66-73; Schwartz (2008), 87; Rappaport (2011), 16.

⁷ Krauter (2007), 67. Also, Barclay (2007), 195, n. 64, refers to the visit of Ptolemy IV in Jerusalem according to III Macc. as 'legend'.

⁸ Tcherikover (1961), 6, n. 15; Croy (2006), 41-42; Johnson (2013), 2686. On III Macc.'s reliance on historical source/s relating to Ptolemy IV see Tcherikover, *ibid.*, 3; Johnson (2004), 190-216.

⁹ Syria/Syria and Phoenicia is the Ptolemaic name for what the Seleucids called Coele-Syria/Coele-Syria and Phoenicia — see *Pseudo-Aristeas* 22; Tcherikover (1959), 60-61; Stern (1991), 26.

¹⁰ Hengel (1991), 8, n. 19, refers to two honorific inscriptions, from Joppa and Marisa, bearing witness to this visit.

¹¹ Gauthier & Sottas (1925), 35, lines 15-16.

¹² As suggested by Bevan (1927), 230, and Hengel, *ibid.*, 8.

¹³ According to the reconstruction of the relevant timetable, offered by Galili (1999), 495, who dedicated his life to the study of the battle of Raphia.

The purpose of this short paper is dual: firstly, to lay emphasis on the historical improbability of a visit to Jerusalem by Ptolemy III, set against the background of the Third Syrian War and, secondly, to suggest that Josephus' report actually reflects the visit to Jerusalem by Ptolemy IV in the aftermath of the battle of Raphia that decided the Fourth Syrian War.

The Third Syrian War or the Battle of Raphia?

1. Ptolemy III's own conquests (end of 246–middle of 245 B.C.E.) in the Third Syrian War included — beyond northern Syria — Cilicia and Mesopotamia (Ptolemy's propaganda, i.e., the Adoulis inscription, even bragged that he reached as far as Bactria).¹⁴ The war also brought under Ptolemaic control territories along the southern coast of Asia Minor, the Aegean, Thrace and the Hellespont region.¹⁵ In view of these vast Ptolemaic territorial achievements, Josephus' reference to 'the whole of Syria' alone, seems odd. Compare, however, Josephus' text — κατασχών ὅλην Συρίαν κατὰ κράτος, with *Against Apion* 1:186, concerning Ptolemy I, son of Lagos: 'After the battle at Gaza Ptolemy became master of Syria' (ἐγένετο τῶν περὶ Συρίαν τόπων ἐγκρατής).¹⁶

2. From a geographical point of view, the theater of the Third Syrian War was very distant from Jerusalem.¹⁷ This renders a visit by the king to Jerusalem — thanking God for his victory — much more plausible following the battle of Raphia, i.e., in rough proximity to Jerusalem.

3. Ptolemy III is reported to be in a hurry to return to Egypt from northern Syria in order to quell domestic sedition.¹⁸ If true, a detour to Jerusalem would certainly be improbable.

4. Note the stress (twice) on what appears to be a decisive victory in Josephus' text. This may also fit the battle of Raphia better.

Conclusion

In light of the above, it appears reasonable to assume that Josephus' remark actually refers to Ptolemy IV, although for some reason the latter was 'replaced' by Ptolemy III. In that case, *Against Apion* contains the two zeniths of III Macc. in close proximity to one another, namely, King Ptolemy IV's visit to Jerusalem and the elephant story (sections 53-55 of book 2 of *Against Apion*) — which, in Josephus' version, took place under a different Ptolemy Euergetes, namely, Ptolemy VIII. This offers further substantiation to the thesis that the attempt by Ptolemy IV to enter the Sanctuary — the same scene that is paralleled in II Macc. — forms part of the literary instruments

¹⁴ Hauben (1990), 33, estimates that: 'Ptolémée n'a sûrement pas avancé plus loin que Babylone'.

¹⁵ Grainger (2010), 163-6.

¹⁶ It forms part of the *Pseudo-Hecataeus* source: Bar-Kochva (1996), 46-7.

¹⁷ It should be borne in mind that Ptolemy III reached northern Syria by sea — according to a report ostensibly written by Ptolemy III himself — *FGrH* 160 = Austin (2006), no. 266; Piejko (1990). He also probably returned to Egypt by sea.

¹⁸ Grainger, *ibid.*, 163; Hauben, *ibid.*

employed by the author of III Macc. to conflate a friendly story — that of Ptolemy IV's visit to Jerusalem — with a hostile one, namely, the elephant story.¹⁹

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¹⁹ The latter is shifted, if we follow Josephus' version, by the author of III Macc. from Ptolemy VIII to Ptolemy IV, as suggested by Tcherikover (1961), 8. Despite these literary instruments employed by the author of III Macc. and, as also remarked by Tcherikover, *ibid.*, 2, the two stories that comprise III Macc. are not internally linked.

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