Eleazar Auaran and the Elephant: Killing Symbols in Hellenistic Judaea

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Both the author of *I Maccabees* and Josephus tell the story of Eleazar Auaran, the brother of Judas Maccabaeus who charged into the Seleucid ranks at the battle of Beth Zechariah (162 BC) and single-handedly killed a war elephant that he mistakenly believed to be carrying the boy king, Antiochus V Eupator.[1] They also recount the tragic conclusion to this act of bravery, in which Eleazar was crushed to death under the weight of the animal. These sources explain the event as the result of mistaken identity or a desire for glory. However, a close reading of the texts in light of the known facts concerning Hellenistic elephant warfare suggests that Eleazar's exploit might be explained better as a symbolic act of resistance rather than as a military blunder or a case of vainglorious heroism.

According to *I Maccabees* 6.43-47:

> καὶ εἶδεν Ελεαζαρος ὁ Αυαραν ἓν τῶν θηρίων τεθωρακισμένον θώραξιν βασιλικοῖς, καὶ ἦν ὑπεράγον πάντα τὰ θηρία, καὶ ᾠήθη ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐστιν ὁ βασιλεύς. καὶ ἔδωκεν ἑαυτὸν τοῦ σῶσαι τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ περιποιῆσαι ἑαυτῷ ὄνομα αἰώνιον· καὶ ἐπέδραμεν αὐτῷ θράσει εἰς μέσον τῆς φάλαγγος, καὶ ἐθανάτου δεξιὰ καὶ εὐώνυμα καὶ ἐσχίζοντο ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα· καὶ εἰσέδυ ὑπὸ τὸν ἐλέφαντα, καὶ ὑπέθηκεν αὐτῷ, καὶ ἀνεῖλεν αὐτὸν, καὶ ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἀπέθανεν ἐκεῖ. καὶ εἶδον τὴν ἰσχὺν τῆς βασιλείας καὶ τὸ ὅρμημα τῶν δυνάμεων καὶ ἐξέκλιναν ἀπ' αὐτῶν.
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> When Eleazar Auaran caught sight of one of the animals equipped with royal armour and taller than all of the other animals, he thought that the king was on it and it seemed good to him to save his people and to make an eternal name for himself. Thus he boldly ran at it, going into the midst of the phalanx, and killing those on the right and the left, he divided them [the enemy] from him on both sides. Having come up under the elephant, he struck and killed it; and it fell to the ground on top of him and there he died. When they [the Hasmonaean forces] saw the strength of the kingdom and the violence of the armies, they turned away from them.

Josephus paraphrases this anecdote at *Antiquitates* 12.373-5, but at *Bellum* 1.42-5 he follows the account of Nicolaus of Damascus for Eleazar's death,[2] reporting that:

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1 The battle is dated to year 150 of the Seleucid Era at *1 Macc.* 6.18, the equivalent to 162/1 BC according to the Babylonian reckoning probably used here, but to year 149 (164/3 BC on the Macedonian reckoning) at *II Macc.* 13.1. For the reasons for preferring the *I Maccabees* date, see B. Bar-Kochva, *Judas Maccabaeus* (Cambridge, 1989), 300 and 543-50. Antiochus V was only nine years old (App., *Syr.* 66) at the time of his accession, making him about ten or eleven at the time of the Beth Zechariah campaign. Porphyry (*FGrH* IIB, 260, F32) says he was twelve at the beginning of his father's eastern campaign, but this is unlikely. See O. Mørkholm, *Antiochus IV of Syria* (Gyldendal, 1966), 48 n. 41; Bar-Kochva (1989), 304 with n. 11.

2 Bar-Kochva (1989), 189-90.

πρὶν δὲ συνάψαι τὰς φάλαγγας Ἐλεάζαρος ὁ ἀδελφὸς αὐτοῦ προϊδὼν τὸν ὑψηλότατον τῶν ἐλεφάντων πύργῳ τε μεγάλῳ καὶ περιχρύσοις προτειχίσμασι κεκοσμημένον, ὑπολαβὼν ἐπ᾽ αὐτοῦ τὸν Ἀντίοχον εἶναι, τῶν τε ἰδίων ἐκτρέχει πολὺ καὶ διακόψας τὸ στῖφος τῶν πολεμίων ἐπὶ τὸν ἐλέφαντα διήνυσεν. ἐφικέσθαι μὲν οὖν τοῦ δοκοῦντος εἶναι βασιλέως οὐχ οἷός τε ἦν διὰ τὸ ὕψος, ὁ δὲ τὸ θηρίον ὑπὸ τὴν γαστέρα πλήξας ἐπικατέσεισεν ἑαυτῷ καὶ συντριβεὶς ἐτελεύτησεν, μηδὲν πλέον δράσας τοῦ μεγάλοις ἐπιβαλέσθαι θέμενος εὐκλείας ἐν δευτέρῳ τὸ ζῆν. ὅ γε μὴν κυβερνῶν τὸν ἐλέφαντα ἰδιώτης ἦν· κἂν εἰ συνέβη δὲ εἶναι τὸν Ἀντίοχον, οὐδὲν πλέον ἤνυσεν ὁ τολμήσας τοῦ δοκεῖν ἐπ᾽ ἐλπίδι μόνῃ λαμπροῦ κατορθώματος ἑλέσθαι τὸν θάνατον. γίνεται δὲ καὶ κληδὼν τἀδελφῷ τῆς ὅλης παρατάξεως· καρτερῶς μὲν γὰρ οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ μέχρι πολλοῦ διηγωνίσαντο, πλήθει δὲ ὑπερέχοντες οἱ βασιλικοὶ καὶ δεξιᾷ χρησάμενοι τύχῃ κρατοῦσι, καὶ πολλῶν ἀναιρεθέντων τοὺς λοιποὺς ἔχων Ἰούδας εἰς τὴν Γοφνιτικὴν τοπαρχίαν φεύγει.

Before the phalanxes joined battle, Eleazar, his [Judas'] brother, saw the tallest of the elephants surmounted with a great tower and gilded battlements, and thinking that Antiochus was on it, he rushed far from his own side and cutting through the column of the enemy, reached the elephant. Unable to reach the man supposed to be the king on account of the height, he struck the animal under the belly, brought it down on himself, and was crushed to death, having done nothing more than to attempt great things, holding life in second place to glory. The elephant driver was, in fact, a common man; but even if he had happened to be Antiochus, his attacker would have gained nothing more than the reputation for grasping at death in the lone hope of brilliant success. To his brother the incident was an omen of the whole battle. For the Jews resisted strongly and for a long time, but the royal forces, being superior in number and favoured by good fortune, were victorious; and, with many killed, Judas, keeping the remainder, fled to the toparchy of Gophna.

The explanations that *I Maccabees*, *Antiquitates* and *Bellum* provide for how Eleazar came to the erroneous conclusion that Antiochus V was riding on the elephant are suspicious in light of the nature of Hellenistic elephant warfare. According to the sources, Eleazar interpreted several features of the elephant and its equipment as signs that it might be carrying Antiochus V: the animal was the tallest (ὑψηλότατον) of the elephants on the field, it wore royal armour (θώραξιν βασιλικοῖς) and, according to *Bellum* 1.42, it carried a large tower with gilded battlements (πύργῳ τε μεγάλῳ καὶ περιχρύσοις προτειχίσμασι κεκοσμημένον).

The tower should probably be identified with the royal armour mentioned by *I Maccabees* and *Antiquitates*.[3] Despite the usual translation of θώραξ into English as 'breastplate' or 'armour', there is little literary or artistic evidence to support the wearing of defensive body armour by Seleucid war elephants. Livy only refers to head protection (*frontalia*) for elephants at the Battle of Magnesia (190 BC),[4] and a terracotta statuette from Myrina, thought to commemorate the elephant victory of Antiochus I over the

3 This appears to be the understanding of Nicolaus of Damascus, but Bar-Kochva (1989), 334, suggests that this may be rationalization, since he was 'far removed from the era of elephant warfare, like the modern reader he found it hard to understand the reason the elephant required armour'.

4 Livy 37.40.4.

Galatians in 272 BC, only depicts segmented leg and neck defences.[5] Neither the Pyrrhic war elephants depicted on a bowl from Capena, nor the Graeco-Bactrian war elephant on the famous Hermitage phalera, wear armour.[6] Likewise, body armour is nowhere to be seen on the war elephants shown on an engraved amulet in the Cabinet de France or a silver 3/8 shekel struck in Campania during Hannibal's Italian campaign.[7] The only known depiction of an elephant possibly wearing body armour comes from a fragmentary bronze statuette in the M. Julien Gréau collection, but the scales of the apparent armour might just as easily be a highly stylized and misunderstood representation of the animal's hide.[8] The skins of wild elephants are often treated as if covered in diamond shaped scales in mosaics of the Roman and early Byzantine periods.[9] If the elephant in the Eleazar story was wearing body armour, it becomes very difficult to imagine how the Hasmonaean brother could have killed it single-handedly, or even to have wounded it so severely that the animal lost its balance and fell on him.[10]

In light of the rather poor evidence for Seleucid elephants in full body armour, it seems better to understand the author of *I Maccabees* to be using the word θώραξ in place of the diminutive, θωρακεῖον, normally employed by Greek sources to describe the

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5 S. Reinach, *La nécropole de Myrina* (Paris, 1887), 318 and pl. 10; Bar-Kochva (1989), pl. XIIIb For the date of the victory, see B. Bar-Kochva, 'On the Sources and Chronology of Antiochus I's Battle against the Galatians', *PCPS* 199 (1973), 3-5.

6 Capena bowl: P. Lévêque, *Pyrrhos* (Paris, 1957), 371-374; H.H. Scullard, *The Elephant in the Greek and Roman World* (London, 1974), 244; Bar-Kochva (1989), 584-5 and pl. XII. Hermitage phalera: N. Kondakoff and I. Tolstoi, *Antiquités de la Russie Méridionale* (St. Petersburg, 1891), 427, fig. 382; M. Rostovtzeff, *A Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World* (Cambridge, 1940), I.433; Scullard (1974), 112-13, 244 and 27; Bar-Kochva (1989), 584-5 and pls. XII and XIIIa.

7 Amulet: Scullard (1974), 245; Bar-Kochva (1989), 588 and pl. XIVb. 3/8 shekel: H.H. Scullard, 'Hannibal's Elephants', *NC* 5 (1949), 158-68; H.H. Scullard and W. Gowers, 'Hannibal's Elephants Again', *NC* 6 (1950), 271-80; E.S.G. Robinson, 'Carthaginian and other South Italian Coinages of the Second Punic War', *NC* 4 (1964), 37-64; *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum: The American Numismatic Society*, pt. 1, (New York, 1969), no. 147 (Capua); Scullard (1974), 170-3; Bar-Kochva (1989), 588 and pl. XIVc.

8 W. Froehner, *Collection J. Gréau. Catalogue des bronzes antiques*, (Paris, 1885), pl. V; Scullard (1974), 239; Bar-Kochva (1989), 588 and pl. XIVd; N. Sekunda *The Seleucid Army* (Stockport, 1994), 77-8 with figs. 52-53.

9 See, for example, A. Ovadiah and S. Mucznik, 'Classical Heritage and Anti-Classical Trends in the Mosaic Pavement of Lydda (Lod)', *Assaph* 3 (1998), 5-6 and fig. 3; M. Yacoub, *Splendeurs des Mosaïques de Tunisie* (Tunis, 1995), figs. 134a-b; I. Nigrelli and N. Vullo, *Piazza Armerina, Town of the Mosaics* (Palermo, 1978), 90-1; Scullard (1974), pls. XIXb, XXb. This tendency is also noticeable on a Pompeian terracotta: Scullard (1974), pl. X; Bar-Kochva (1989), 587 and pl. XIVa.

10 It has been doubted that Eleazar could have killed the elephant, simply because of the toughness of its hide: Bar-Kochva (1989), 46; id., *The Seleucid Army* (Cambridge, 1976), 175. If the supposed scale armour of the Gréau elephant has been correctly reconstructed by N. Sekunda and A. McBride (Sekunda, 1994), pl. 7d, it would have been extremely difficult for Eleazar to reach an unprotected part of the elephant's belly.

elephant tower or its battlements.[11] It is possible that in addition to the gilded battlements, the tower on the elephant attacked by Eleazar might have appeared to be royal (βασιλικός) because of shields marked with Seleucid emblems, hung from it for added protection.[12]

While the description of the elephant is in keeping with what one might expect for a royal mount, the motivation provided for Eleazar in *I Maccabees* and *Antiquitates* is unconvincing when we consider that the Hasmonaean rebel should have been able to see who was riding it. Hellenistic elephant towers were left uncovered to allow the crew full use of their weapons.[13] Surviving depictions of war elephants fitted with towers all indicate that the tower was only about breast high and that the crews' heads and probably shoulders would have been in plain view to attackers.[14] Although the manuscripts of *I Maccabees* describe 30 or 32 soldiers fighting from each tower at the battle of Beth Zechariah,[15] numbers that might easily allow a young king like Antiochus V to be lost in the crowd, such numbers have justly been criticized as textual corruptions. Emendations have included much more plausible crews of two, three, or four men, all of which can be corroborated by other ancient literary or artistic evidence.[16] If the elephant crews at Beth

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11 Scullard, (1974), 239; Bar-Kochva (1989), 334; [Polyb.] Fr. 162b; Diod. 2.17.8; Ael. *NA* 13.9. The use of θώραξ in *I Maccabees* to refer to the tower may be paralleled by the use of *lorica* with respect to Numidian elephant equipment at Caes. *B. Afr.* 41 (*pace* Scullard [1974], 239, who interprets *lorica* as some type of armour composed of iron plates).

12 For the practice of hanging shields on elephant towers, see, Scullard (1974), 244 with pls. VIIa-b, Xa-b; Bar-Kochva (1989), 318. For emblems see, Sekunda (1994), 28. Macedonian shields emblazoned with the Seleucid anchor badge are paired with elephant reverse types on the bronze coins of Antiochus I: A. Houghton and C. Lorber, *Seleucid Coins* I (Lancaster, PA, 2002), nos. 1089-1090. Sekunda's use of a Macedonian shield depicting an elephant head in the tondo, which appears on Roman republican *denarii* of the Caecilii Metelli (M. Crawford, *Roman Republican Coinage* [Cambridge, 1974], nos. 263/1 and 369/1) to reconstruct the shields used by Seleucid elephant troops (Sekunda [1994], 77 and pl. 7), is incorrect. On these coins the elephant head alludes to the capture of Hasdrubal's elephants by L. Caecilius Metellus at the battle of Panormus in 250 BC and the Macedonian shield refers to the title *Macedonicus*, acquired by Q. Caecilius Metellus in 148 BC: Crawford (1974), 287-8.

13 J. Goldstein, *I Maccabees* (New York, 1976), 313 and 321 translates the word σκεπαζόμενοι as 'covered', describing the construction of the πύργοι at *I Macc.* 6.37, although σκεπαζόμενοι is actually used in apposition to πύργοι, indicating that the towers acted as a cover or defence for the elephants. This is the understanding of the *VL* and most English translations of *I Macc.* 6.37. Jos. *AJ* 12.371, entirely omits σκεπαζόμενοι with respect to the towers, describing them only as ὑψηλοί (and ἰσχυροί in the AMW manuscripts).

14 See Scullard (1974), pls. VIIa, Xa and XII; Bar-Kochva (1989), 318 with pls. XII-XIVc. Although most ancient representations only show the heads of crew members above the top of the tower, the shoulders must have been visible to allow for the unconstrained use of weapons.

15 *I Macc.* 6.37. Jos. *AJ* 12.371 omits this detail.

16 The suggestion that the Greek numeral Δ (4) was erroneously transcribed as Λ (30), made by A. Rahlfs, 'Die Kriegselefanten im Isten Makkabäerbuche', *ZAW* 52 (1934), 78-9 and followed by Bar-Kochva (1989), 321-2, seems most compelling, although two or three crewmen have also been given in reconstructions of the original Hebrew text of *I*

Zechariah are reduced to four men at the most, it becomes very difficult to see how Eleazar could have thought that the king was present. Even if Eleazar was unaware that Seleucid kings never rode their elephants into battle, it is unlikely that he was ignorant of the fact that Antiochus V was a minor, ruling under the guardianship of Lysias, the regent (ἐπίτροπος) established by Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 164 BC.[17]

B. Bar-Kochva has attempted to make some sense out of this improbability by attributing the origin of the mistaken identity motive to a low-ranking Jewish soldier unfamiliar with Seleucid military practice and perhaps also ignorant of the youthful age of the king.[18] However, the situation is made even more problematic by the details in *Bellum*. Here we are told that the man whom Eleazar is supposed to have mistaken for Antiochus V was not one of the regular crewmen riding in the elephant's tower, but rather the driver (ὁ κυβερνῶν τὸν ἐλέφαντα)![19] How Eleazar, or even a rank-and-file eyewitness, could have made such a mistake is almost completely beyond comprehension. Unlike the crew, the driver rode on the elephant's neck, fully exposed to the enemy and often lightly equipped, while taking responsibility for directing the beast in battle, and for killing it if it became uncontrollable.[20]

Because of the utter improbability of the mistaken identity theory, it seems better to seek Eleazar's motivation elsewhere. The author of *I Maccabees* suggests that in addition to his erroneous interpretation of the elephant and its harness, Eleazar was also driven by a desire, 'to save his people and to make an eternal name for himself',[21] but this sounds like a later explanation, designed to emphasize the heroism of the early Hasmonaeans. Josephus appears to have thought little of this motive, for he omits it entirely from the paraphrase in *Antiquitates*, while strongly criticizing it as a wasteful flourish of bravery in *Bellum*.[22] However, one modern commentator has plausibly suggested that Eleazar committed his daring act in an attempt to inspire the rest of the Jewish army in the face of the overwhelming Seleucid enemy.[23]

If this interpretation is correct and the true goal of Eleazar was to motivate the troops at Beth Zechariah, we should see the attack as a symbolic action, aimed at impressing the

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Maccabees. See J.D. Michaelis , *Deutsche übersetzung des ersten Buchs der Maccabäer mit Anmerkungen* (Göttingen, 1778), 139-1\40; F.M. Abel, *Les Livres des Maccabées* (Paris, 1949), 119; S. Zeitlin, *The First Book of Maccabees* (New York, 1950), 130-1; Goldstein, (1976), 321. All of these possible emendations are supported by the literary and artistic evidence: Livy 37.40 and Strabo 15.1.25 (crews of 4); Ael. *NA* 13.9 and Plin. *NH* 8.22 (crews of 3); Scullard (1974), fig. 23, pl. VIIa and XII (crews of 2).

17 Bar-Kochva (1989), 335; id. (1976), 268 n. 22.

18 Bar-Kochva (1989), 335.

19 Jos. *BJ* 1.44. For the position of drivers on the necks of their elephants, see Scullard (1974), 237; Bar-Kochva (1989), 17 and 323 with pls. XII-XIVa-c.

20 Bar-Kochva (1989), 17 and 323 with pls. XII-XIVa-c. Although there is no certain evidence that Seleucid drivers were equipped to kill their mounts in case of emergency, it seems likely. Carthaginian drivers are known to have used mallets and stakes to stop maddened elephants: Livy 26.49.1-3. Sasanian drivers are also said to have used knives for the same purpose: Amm. Marc. 25.1.15.

21 *I Macc.* 6.44.

22 Jos. *BJ* 1.45.

23 Bar-Kochva (1989), 336; id. (1976), 183.

minds and emboldening the spirits of the onlookers. According to the account in *Bellum*, Judas Maccabaeus understood the elephant incident in terms of one of the great symbolic expressions of the ancient world: the omen. He saw the attack on the elephant and its aftermath, in which his brother was crushed under the animal's weight, as a portent (κληδών) presaging defeat for the Hasmonaeans on the battlefield.[24] Little imagination is required to understand Judas' probable interpretation of the omen: Eleazar represented the Jews and their Hasmonaean leaders who dared to stand up to the might of the Seleucid empire, but despite their great bravery they would be crushed by the Seleucid forces, symbolized by the elephant. The omen proved to be true, for the Seleucids claimed victory at Beth Zechariah and forced Judas and the remnant of his army to flee north to Gophna or Jerusalem.[25]

Since Judas appears to have understood the attack and its result in symbolic terms, perhaps the actions of Eleazar were calculated to have a symbolic effect. The mad rush of a Hasmonaean brother into the Seleucid phalanx alone should have been remarkable enough to impress his compatriots, but the attempt to kill an elephant is likely to have had a much greater impact. Not only was the elephant the most visible piece of enemy weaponry at Beth Zechariah, and therefore highly suitable for demonstrating an act of bravery, but the animal was already a well-known and widely recognized symbol of the Seleucid kings and their military power.

Although the Ptolemies, who had occupied Coele Syria (including Judaea) for almost a century before their total expulsion by Antiochus III in 198 BC, also maintained a force of war elephants,[26] the popular association of the dynasty with the animals never seems to have caught on as it did with the Seleucids.[27] In 301 BC, the founder of the Seleucid dynasty, Seleucus I Nikator, had already marched into legend when he led 500 elephants acquired in India west against the forces of Antigonus I Monophthalmos at the battle of Ipsus.[28] His son, Antiochus I Soter, similarly gained wide fame for defeating a marauding horde of Galatians with the help of 16 elephants in 272 BC.[29] Out of these victories grew a body of anecdotes illustrating the connection between the Seleucids and their elephants. For example, when Seleucus was laying out the foundations of Antioch-on-the-Orontes he was said to have used his elephants to mark the locations of the

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24 Jos. *BJ* 1.45. For the view that the language of this passage is derived from Nicolaus of Damascus, see Bar-Kochva (1989), 296.

25 Jos. *BJ* 1.45 (Gophna); *AJ* 12.375 (Jerusalem).

26 G. Hölbl, *Geschichte des Ptolemäerreiches* (Darmstadt, 1994), 55-7, 115, 130; Scullard (1974), 123-45.

27 However, see *III Macc.* 5:1-6:41 for the story of elephants supposedly used by Ptolemy IV in an attempt to execute Jews deported to Alexandria. It is perhaps no coincidence that on this occasion the Jewish hero whose prayer halted the onslaught of the elephants was also named Eleazar.

28 Strab. 16.2.10. For the authenticity of such a large number of elephants, see Bar-Kochva (1979), 76-7. The numbers 480 and 400 supplied by Diod. 20.113 and Plut. *Demetr.* 28, respectively, are ultimately derived from the original 500 elephants recorded by Hieronymus.

29 Lucian, *Zeux.* 8-11; *Suda*, *s.v.* Σιμωνίδης; Bar-Kochva (1973), 1-6; Scullard (1974), 120-3. The victory was celebrated in epic verse by Simonides of Magnesia and in a terracotta statuette from Myrina.

towers.[30] We hear of Antiochus III rewarding his elephants for bravery, almost as if they were men, and in turn, the animals were so loyal that one reportedly starved itself to death when it was unable to obey the king's command.[31] It is probably also no accident that when Hannibal of Carthage, the great western exponent of elephant warfare, waged war against the Romans, his bravest animal is said to have been named *Surus* ('the Syrian'),[32] alluding to the long tradition of Seleucid war elephants. Bearing these victories and stories in mind, along with the fact that elephants appeared on Seleucid coinage under many kings from Seleucus I to Antiochus VI,[33] there can be little doubt that over time the elephant had developed into 'an abstract symbol of Seleucid power and majesty.'[34]

The association between Seleucid king and elephant would have been carried into Coele Syria by the armies of Antiochus III during the course of the Fourth and Fifth Syrian Wars (221-217 and 202-198 BC). Not only did the animals play an important role in the key battles of Raphia (217 BC) and Panion (201 BC),[35] but at least two mobile mints following the movements of Seleucid troops in the region disseminated the image of the elephant on the coinages that they produced.[36] In Eleazar's generation, the army of Antiochus IV Epiphanes that plundered Jerusalem on its return march from Egypt (168 BC) probably contained elephants.[37] *II Maccabees* also reports the presence of elephants in the army marshalled by Lysias for his first Judaean expedition in the autumn of 164 BC, but this has been doubted on the grounds that the Seleucid elephant corps was probably away campaigning with Antiochus IV in the Upper Satrapies at this time.[38]

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30 Lib. *Or.* 11.90.

31 Pliny, *NH* 8.11.

32 Pliny, *NH* 8.11.

33 For examples see A. Houghton and A. Spaer, *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum Israel I: The Arnold Spaer Collection of Seleucid Coins* (Jerusalem, 1998), nos. 50-2, 95-107, 129-32, 152-4 (Seleucus I), 183-93, 257-79 (Antiochus I), 460-2, 477-81 (Seleucus II), 593-617, 685-6, 691-5, 761-2, 808-25 (Antiochus III), 914-15, 953-4 (Seleucus IV), 963-72, 1017-40, 1102-7, 1226-8 (Antiochus IV), 1299-1304 (Demetrius I), 1477-9, 1591 (Alexander I), 1771-7 (Antiochus VI).

34 E.T. Newell, *Coinage of the Western Seleucid Mints from Seleucus I to Antiochus III* (New York, 1941), 165.

35 Raphia: Polyb. 5.79-85; Bar-Kochva (1976), 128-41; E. Galili, 'Raphia, 217 BCE, Revisited', *Scripta Classica Israelica* 3 (1978), 52-127. Panion: Polyb. 15.18-19; Bar-Kochva (1976), 147-57.

36 'Uncertain Mint 59' and 'Uncertain Mint 60': Houghton and Lorber (2002), 411-14 and nos. 1084-93; A Houghton and C. Lorber, 'Antiochus III in Coele-Syria and Phoenicia', *INJ* 14 (2000-2002), 44-8, 52-4.

37 *I Macc.* 1.20-8; Jos. *AJ* 12.146-247; Mørkholm (1966), 142-3. Although they are not mentioned on the return trip, Antiochus IV is known to have led elephants against Ptolemaic Egypt in 170/69 BC, and presumably brought them back with him: *I Macc.* 1.17. The animals were showcased in the Daphne procession of 166/5 BC: Polyb. 30.25.11; Mørkholm (1966), 98 and n. 37.

38 *II Macc.* 11.4-12; Bar-Kochva (1989), 284. It is not entirely impossible that a few animals remained in Syria during the eastern campaign, but certainly not 80, as *II Macc.* 11.4 claims. If Lysias had no elephants at this time it is unclear how he acquired the animals for his second expedition in the spring of 162 BC. Bar-Kochva (1989), 343, suggests that some

Thus, when Eleazar charged into the Seleucid ranks at Beth Zechariah and attacked the lead elephant, it seems likely that he was not making a poorly informed attempt to kill the king, as the literary sources suggest, but rather sought to destroy a symbol representing Antiochus V and his power.

The behaviour of destroying or otherwise damaging symbols representing one's enemies, especially when they are too powerful or too distant to be attacked directly, was already a very old one in the ancient Near East and elsewhere by the second century BC. Indeed, the behaviour itself is probably not too much younger than the development mankind's basic ability to interpret signs and symbols. Paleolithic hunters are believed to have painted images of their quarry only to ritually 'kill' the images with the painted addition of spears and arrows, thereby fortifying themselves for the real hunt. In Middle Kingdom Egypt, the so-called Execration Texts, naming enemy cities and peoples, were inscribed on terracotta vessels and figurines, which were then purposely broken to symbolize the destruction of their power.[39] In the Greco-Roman period, one might deface statues and inscriptions as a symbolic attack on the state or private individuals.[40] This type of behaviour, in which the symbol is 'killed' in lieu of the institution or individual that it signifies, has survived into modern times, when a dissident might desecrate a flag symbolizing a certain country or regime, burn the effigy of a politician representing a particular political position, or destroy an important landmark evocative of a specific cultural outlook.[41]

We would count Eleazar's actions at Beth Zechariah in this same class of symbolic behaviour. As in the examples mentioned above, the purpose of attacking the elephant was probably not so much to strike a devastating physical blow against the enemy. The destruction of a single animal would have done little real damage to the Seleucid war machine and certainly would not have 'saved his people', as *I Maccabees* suggests.[42] Instead, the goal may have been to create a visually impressive expression of opposition and resistance to embolden Eleazar's compatriots and, perhaps, shock the enemy. It may

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contingents (presumably he includes the elephants) had returned before the battle of Beth Zechariah, despite *I Macc.* 6.56, which places its return sometime after the battle. However, it seems unlikely that Philippus, the regent appointed by Antiochus IV on his deathbed and Lysias' rival, would have allowed the return of important units, such as the elephant corps, before he made his bid to capture Antioch.

39 *ANET* 328-9; *ANE* I, 153; N. Grimal, *A History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford, 1992), 168-9.

40 The most famous case is probably the mutilation of the Athenian Herms on the eve of the Sicilian expedition of 415 BC: Thuc. 6.27.1-3; Arist. *Lys.* 1094; Diod. 13.12; D. Kagan, *The Peace of Nicias and the Sicilian Expedition* (Ithaca, 1981), 193-5; R. Osborne, 'The Erection and Mutilation of the Hermai', *PCPS* 31 (1985), 66; V. Whohl, 'The Eros of Alcibiades', *CA* 18 (1999), 360-5; D. Rosenbloom, '*Ponêroi* vs. *Chrêstoi*: The Ostracism of Hyperbolos and the Struggle for Hegemony in Athens after the Death of Perikles, Part II', *TAPA* 124.2 (2004), 331.

41 For the destruction of images and symbols as a means of harming the individuals or ideas signified by them, see D. Freedberg, *The Power of Images* (Chicago, 1991), 389-92, 412-15.

42 *I Macc.* 6.30 reports 32, *II Macc.* 13.2 reports 22, and Jos. *BJ* 1.41 gives 80 as the number of elephants in the battle, while Bar-Kochva (1989), 307 recommends emending *BJ* to a more reasonable 8 animals. Even this emendation the loss of one elephant is hardly likely to have turned the tide of the battle in favour of the Hasmonaeans.

be that for Eleazar, the elephant was not seen as the king's vehicle, but rather as his symbolic surrogate.

Had Eleazar survived the encounter with the elephant, the impact of his actions on Hasmonaean and Seleucid morale would probably have been great. The later events of 162 BC show that some loyal subjects had a great affinity for the elephants as a symbol of the Seleucid Empire and could be deeply traumatized when harm came to them. When Cn. Octavius and a Roman embassy enforced the disarmament clause of the Peace of Apamea and ordered the war elephants to be killed, a local man was so disturbed by the sight of their destruction, that he murdered Octavius.[43] He was supported in this act of violence by the scholar Isocrates, who also recommended the same fate for the other ambassadors. Although this is obviously an extreme example, in which the majority of the elephants were destroyed at one time, it is suggestive of the kind of shock that Eleazar might have caused in the Seleucid battle line if he had managed to kill the largest animal single-handedly and remain unpunished.

Conversely, there can be little doubt that a successful conclusion to the elephant attack would have emboldened the Hasmonaean forces. Even as a failure, the incident was spectacular and widely recounted, surviving in two extant independent sources: *I Maccabees* and *Bellum*. A third independent textual witness to the event, *II Maccabees*, offers some indication of the impact that Eleazar's exploit might have had if he had survived. In this work, the epitomator of Jason of Cyrene removes the event from Beth Zechariah and recasts it as an independent victory in which Judas Maccabaeus raids the Seleucid camp, supposedly killing 2,000 of the enemy as well as the lead elephant (τὸν πρωτεύοντα τῶν ἐλεφάντων) with its rider.[44]

Out of its proper context, and with no mention of Eleazar crushed under the animal's weight, the act becomes another brilliant triumph for the Hasmonaeans, symbolizing their pious opposition to the Seleucids and their divine sanction, themes that were

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43 App., Συρ. 46; Polyb. 31.2.11; Pliny, *NH* 34.25; Obsequens 15; Zonaras 9.25. The destruction is explicitly dated to 162 BC by Obsequens, although modern commentators (E. Bevan, *The House of Seleucus* [London, 1902] II, 185-187; F.W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius* [Oxford, 1957-79), III, 465; E. Gruen, 'Rome and the Seleucids in the Aftermath of Pydna', *Chiron* 6 [1976], 81] tend to place it in 163, based on the view that the Polybius passage comes from his discussion of the Olympiad year 154.1 (164/3). Bar-Kochva (1989), 547-8, is probably correct to champion the Obsequens date, but the supporting argument based on Lysias' use of elephants at Beth Zechariah is not compelling, since it is almost certain that not all of the animals were destroyed by Octavius. A Babylonian astronomical diary of 150 BC (A. Sachs and H. Hunger, *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia* III [Vienna, 1996], no. -149A 'Rev'. 6'; R. van der Spek, 'New Evidence from the Babylonian Astronomical Diaries Concerning Seleucid and Arsacid History', *AO* 44/45 [1997/1998], 168-9) indicates that Demetrius I still had elephants based in Syria. Elephants also reappear under the usurper Diodotus Tryphon (*I Macc.* 11.56), but there is some question as to whether they were Seleucid (i.e. Indian) elephants or rather Ptolemaic (i.e. African) animals left behind during the Syrian campaign of Ptolemy VI in support of Demetrius II.

44 *II Macc.* 13.15-16; Bar-Kochva (1989), 293-4, suggests that the account of *II Maccabees* may be conflating a raid on the Seleucid camp during the siege of Beth Zur with the elephant incident from the battle of Beth Zechariah.

important to the epitomator. The fact that he takes such pains to reinvent the story of the elephant, when one might have expected him to have simply glossed over the true disastrous event, is suggestive of its symbolic importance.[45] As a victory, the epitomator may perhaps have intended the killing of the elephant to prefigure the final showdown at Adasa (161/0 BC) between Judas and the hated Seleucid general, Nicanor, which provides the climax of *II Maccabees*.[46] Although the involvement of elephants at Adasa is questionable,[47] Nicanor was closely associated with the animals. The epitomator informs us that before Demetrius I appointed him as *strategos* of Judaea for the war against the Hasmonaeans, Nicanor had held the important military post of *elephantarch*, 'master of elephants'.[48] During the course of the battle, Nicanor was killed and in the jubilation that followed the Jewish authorities established the thirteenth day of the month of Adar as a day of celebration known as Nicanor's Day. Thus, even in the modified account of *II Maccabees*, the elephant appears to be a symbol for the Seleucid enemy.

In the summer of 162/1 BC, Eleazar Auaran attacked a Seleucid war elephant in an expression of resistance to the king and the regime that it symbolized. For this act, he paid the ultimate price. However, in his death, he became just as much a symbol as the elephant he sought to kill. To his brother he became an omen of defeat, to Josephus he became a warning against the reckless pursuit of glory, and to the author of *I Maccabees* he became an icon of selfless heroism in the face of overwhelming odds. Although, as we have seen, it was probably not his true intent, Eleazar managed to make an 'everlasting name' for himself after all.

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45 Bar-Kochva (1989), 294.

46 *I Macc.* 7.39-45.

47 The reference to τὴν τῶν θηρίων ἀγρότητα at *II Macc.* 15.21 seems to indicate the use of Seleucid elephants, but this is widely dismissed in light of the destruction of the elephants at Apamea by Cn. Octavius in 162. However, for the survival of some elephants, see above, n. 43.

48 *II Macc.* 14.12.