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Vasile Babota, *The Institution of the Hasmonean High Priesthood. Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 165.* Leiden: Brill, 2014. ISBN: 978900425177. € 123 / \$ 171. Hardback.

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The aim of this book is to define more adequately the Hasmonean high priesthood as an institution in comparison with the biblical / Jewish tradition on the one hand and the Hellenistic / Seleucid world on the other. Were the Hasmonean high priests more like preexilic kings, like priests from the Oniad or Zadokite families, or like Hellenistic king-priests? This is the question that continually surfaces throughout the entire book. The study contains an introduction, ten chapters, final conclusions, a full bibliography, an index of ancient people, and an index of ancient sources.

The introduction offers a brief presentation of the scholarly work on high priestly office which focuses on the relationship among the Hasmonean high priesthood, the Jewish tradition, and the Hellenistic world.

Babota then begins his analysis by describing the sources for his study. He considers 1 Maccabees a unitary pro-Hasmonean work written at the time of John Hyrcanus I, probably soon before his death, whose aim is to strengthen his position as high priest in the line of Simon. This strong political agenda must be taken into account when using this literary work as a historical source: its reliability must be assessed, as the author consistently does, on a case by case basis. Concerning 2 Maccabees, Babota especially emphasizes its pro-Judas stance. It is therefore less favorable towards Jonathan and Simon than 1 Maccabees and to some extent critical of the establishment of the Hasmonean high priesthood. A short presentation of Josephus's works, especially of the sections relevant for the study (*Jewish War 1, Jewish Antiquities 12-13 and 20, Life and Against Apion*) is also offered. Babota considers it plausible that Josephus used Nicolaus of Damascus's *Universal History* as a source for the sections of *War* discussing the Hasmoneans from Judas to Hyrcanus I, which he possibly integrated with other sources. As for *Antiquities*, Josephus paraphrased 1 Maccabees in 12-13, but with differences that Babota analyzes in the main body of his study. In *Life* Josephus claims to have an ancestral link to the Hasmonean priesthood on his mother's side; Babota takes this claim seriously as a manifestation of Josephus's strong pro-Hasmonean stance and his will "to portray the early Hasmoneans in the

best possible way” (34) to his Roman-Hellenistic audience, though it may not reflect historical reality.

Babota then analyzes the high priesthood in the period between the return from the Babylonian exile and the rise of the Hasmoneans. One of the most important differences between the high priests of this time and the Hasmoneans is that the earlier high priests, at least up until the end of the Ptolemaic period, although assuming some prerogatives previously belonging to the Davidic king, definitely did not assume military powers. After the end of the Fifth Syrian War in 198 BCE and the inclusion of Judea into the Seleucid kingdom, the Hellenistic kings in Antioch-on-the-Orontes “exerted political, military, and religious authority in Judea” (64). They could appoint an *archiereus*, as they actually did in 178 BCE, over all the sanctuaries of Coele-Syria and Phoenicia, besides the *strategos* who exercised the political and military powers. The Jewish high priest in Jerusalem, like the one in Samaria, was under direct control of the royal high priest, though only the king had the authority to install a candidate to the office. Initially the Seleucid kings seem to have respected the tradition of transmitting the high priesthood from father to son, but after the disappearance of Onias III in 175 BCE they started to sell the title to the highest bidder, first to Onias’s brother Jason and after him to Menelaus. For the Seleucid period before the beginning of the Maccabean revolt it is less clear than for the time before Antiochus III’s conquest whether or not the Jewish high priest did actually exercise any military power.

Babota argues that to understand the nature of the Hasmonean high priesthood, one must understand what position the Maccabees took toward the king’s appointed high priest Menelaus at the outbreak of the revolt. He underlines that “neither First nor Second Maccabees explicitly states that the five Hasmonean brothers (cf. 1 Macc 2:2-5) fought against the government of the high priest” (68). On the other hand, however, “forces from the Akra also joined Gorgias (1 Macc 4:1-2). It is hardly possible that these forces would have acted against the Hasmoneans and their allies without the explicit order of the royal *epistates* and the consent of Menelaus” (71). In spite of the military support received from the Akra, Gorgias was defeated by the Maccabees. Babota thinks it plausible that Judas and his supporters sought a diplomatic solution with Nicanor, thus acknowledging some reliability in the account in 2 Maccabees: Judas bypassed Alcimus, whom he considered an illegitimate high priest, and tried to find a compromise with the Greeks by talking directly with the king’s representative in Judea, the new *strategos* Nicanor. Taking 2 Macc 14:26 at face value, Babota dives into a philological-linguistic analysis of the second part of the verse. In his opinion the expression τὸν γὰρ ἐπίβουλον τῆς βασιλείας Ἰουδᾶν αὐτοῦ διάδοχον ἀναδειξάιναι represents the content of the protest made by Alcimus to Demetrius regarding the treaty made by Judas and Nicanor; it should not be interpreted as if the Greek military leader appointed the Maccabean high priest instead of Alcimus.¹ Babota notes that in all probability it was not in Nicanor’s power to appoint a new high priest. Furthermore, even if it were, choosing Judas would have probably stirred up the rebellion of the majority of the Judeans, who were on Alcimus’s side. Among these there would have certainly been the hellenized priests, who were in control of the temple, and the Gentiles who lived in the Akra and in the rest

¹ Such a reconstruction is proposed by James VanderKam and Daniel Schwartz, discussed on pp. 98-99 (James C. VanderKam, *From Joshua to Caiaphas: High Priests After the Exile* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004], 242-43; Daniel R. Schwartz, *2 Maccabees* [Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008], 474-75, 551-52).

of Judea. Obviously this would have resulted in a worsening of the disorder in the province and would have appeared to the king as a substantial failure of Nicanor's mission. Moreover, Nicanor was never under the pressure of military defeat by Judas or his party and there is no evidence in the sources that he contacted the king to request his approval for such a radical move. It is true that, according to 2 Macc 14:26, Alcimus accuses Nicanor precisely of acting against the king's policy, probably intending by this that he was, according to Alcimus, ignoring Demetrius's explicit orders. According to 2 Macc 14:13, Nicanor had to "kill Judas and scatter his troops, and to install Alcimus as high priest of the great temple." The simple fact that the new *strategos* was trying to use diplomacy instead of brutal force against the rebels would have been a strong enough argument in support of Alcimus's accusation. Thus there is no need to interpret 14:26b as if the treaty, which according to the same source, Alcimus took with himself to the king, provided for the substitution of the high priest. Nicanor's betrayal consisted in his attempt to stop the rebellion without killing Judas, not in the alleged appointment of the latter as high priest. Babota, therefore, accepts Maria Brutti's interpretation that the expression αὐτοῦ διάδοχον ἀναδεῖξαι refers to Judas's appointment as a sort of vice-high priest, "a deputy high priest that could stand in for him during his absence."² This seems to be consistent with what appears to be Nicanor's strategy of bringing peace by forcing the two parties, the Hellenists led by Alcimus and the Hasideans led by Judas, to find a way to cooperate.

In any case, Nicanor's policy failed. He was forced to face Judas and his army in battle and was defeated and killed by the Jewish leader, who was, in turn, defeated and killed a month later by the Seleucid general Bacchides. According to Babota, Judas never was high priest. His younger brother Jonathan was first allowed to return into the province in 157. He settled at Michmash and was then appointed a military leader by the Seleucid king Demetrius as a result of his weakness against internal and external enemies: Kang Attalus II Pergamum; Alexander Balas, who was even able to gain the support of the Romans in 152; and the Parthians.

Contrary to the arguments of Stegemann and others, Babota argues that there was no high priest in Jerusalem—at least not one appointed or approved by the king—between 159, the year of Alcimus' death, and 152.³ Neither Demetrius and his Jewish allies nor Jonathan considered it convenient to appoint a high priest after Alcimus's death. Since 175, the office of high priest was seen both by the Seleucid kings and by the Jews more as a civil than a religious duty and it is probable that the position remained vacant in many periods. The specifically religious functions traditionally reserved for the high priest, like overseeing the ceremonies of the Yom Kippur, were in those times probably assumed by a deputy, if there was one, or by some other priest specifically appointed by the temple authorities for that task.

Babota also deals with the problem of the beginnings of Jonathan's high priesthood. According to his reconstruction of the events, Jonathan, once he officially obtained a military role, decided to side with Alexander Balas against Demetrius I. The latter had the support of the Akra and of the temple authorities. It was therefore in the interest of Alexander Balas to appoint Jonathan high priest and "friend" (1 Macc 10:15-21), which he actually did in 152. At that point, the

² Maria Brutti, *The Development of the High Priesthood During the Pre-Hasmonean Period: History, Ideology, Theology* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 108; Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006), 74.

³ Hartmut. Stegemann, *Die Essener, Qumran, Johannes der Täufer und Jesus: ein Sachbuch* (Freiburg: Herder, 1994).

Hasmonean became high priest in the Hellenistic sense of the term, a figure with political and military powers, with the specific purpose of bringing Judea to his side in the fight against Demetrius. However, from the perspective of his Jewish supporters Jonathan also had religious tasks. The first time he actually wore the robes of the high priest to officiate in the temple was for the Feast of Tabernacles in October 152. Babota also supports the hypothesis that the “Wicked Priest” mentioned in the Qumran *pesharim* is Jonathan; the time when he “was called by the true name” (1QpHab VIII, 8-9) refers to the period when he was allowed by Demetrius I to reside at Michmash with his supporters.

The author also analyses the sources for the period between the death of Demetrius I in 150 down to 145, the time of the kingdom of Alexander I Balas. In this period, the Maccabean leader consolidated his power; he also made clear the Hellenistic nature of his high priesthood. He was appointed *strategos* and *meridarches*, titles conferred on him with the aim of strengthening his position as a civil and religious leader, especially in the face of internal resistance. If, on the one hand, Jonathan always enjoyed the support of some armed groups, who had probably been loyal to his family since the beginning of the revolt, he also experienced opposition from others.

These latter are difficult to identify with precision and Babota doesn't fully succeed in delineating all the characteristics of these groups. He affirms that “Jonathan may have found temporary support also among those Jews who in various ways opposed the old Hellenizing elite” and that “the strongest opposition that the high priest Jonathan had to wrestle with came from the temple authorities” (194). By the term “temple authorities” Babota seems to intend some priestly families who had supported the Hellenizing pre-Maccabean high priests. This being the case, however, one would ask why those people would have opposed a high priest who, by all standards, was then acting as a Hellenistic high priest, if not just for a personal animosity toward Jonathan himself and his family. But the author affirms that “the Hellenistic type of Jonathan's high priesthood was almost surely the main issue for accusation.” In Babota's opinion, the Jews who went to Ptolemais to accuse Jonathan before Alexander were those Hellenizing Jewish priests who had been in control of the temple until 152. It seems problematic, however, that Hellenizing Jews could protest the Hellenistic character of Jonathan's high priesthood. It is true that only the Hellenizing priests would dare to accuse Jonathan before the king, but the content of the accusation was more likely his unreliability as an ally. In order to prove that Jonathan had some kind of internal opposition and that he used force against it, Babota mentions 1QpHab XI, 4-8, where the Qumranite writer affirms that the Wicked Priest, identified by Babota as Jonathan, tries to kill the Teacher of Righteousness. However, it is quite clear that the opposition represented by the followers of the Teacher did not come from Hellenizing priests. If, as it seems probable, Jonathan had internal opposition from Hellenizers, their position can hardly be reconstructed from the Dead Sea Scrolls since they would probably accuse him of being too “traditionalist/conservative”.

The last part of Jonathan's high priesthood occupied the period between the death of Alexander I Balas in 145 and his own death in 143. Demetrius II's victory in the War of the Three Kings, with the support of Ptolemy VI of Egypt, put Jonathan in a difficult situation, since he had been appointed the high priest by Alexander and had remained on his side after Demetrius's self-proclamation as king. He had even fought against Demetrius's forces in 146. Immediately after Alexander's death, he attacked the Akra, probably with the idea of taking the advantage of a

Seleucid power vacuum to further weaken his internal opposition. As soon as Demetrius came to know what Jonathan was trying to do he summoned the high priest to Ptolemais. Regardless of all that had happened before between the two, Demetrius decided to confirm Jonathan in his office. According to Babota, he did so out of fear of Jonathan's military force, which far exceeded that of his opponents. The Hellenistic character of Jonathan's high priesthood was thus maintained and, as such, he also gained control over the three Samaritan districts of Aphairema, Lydda, and Ramathaim. Nonetheless, Jonathan lost the titles of *strategos* and *meridarches*. This in turn implied a loss of civil powers which were transferred to king's officials in the Akra and the temple, who "interacted with the Seleucid chancelleries and with other Hellenistic institutions often independently of the high priest" (222).

As a result, as soon as he was able Jonathan switched his loyalty to another self-proclaimed king, Antiochus VI Epiphanes Dionysus. Once Antiochus, or better his general Tryphon, succeeded in gaining control of Antioch, Jonathan asked for and obtained confirmation of his high priesthood (1 Macc 11:57). According to Babota, Jonathan did so because he was interested in maintaining the Hellenistic nature of his mandate, which allowed him to keep civil, political, and military power united with the religious one. He was afraid that, had he given up the title of high priest and replaced it with some other title among those given by the king to his officials, some of his internal enemies would have acquired it. He continued to show little regard for the Jewish halakhah. In spite of the appointment of his brother Simon as *strategos* over the coastal plain, Jonathan continued to personally lead his army in many battles against his neighbors and against those officials who had remained loyal to Demetrius II. He pursued a twofold policy of military expansion and political independence, even though the Seleucid king was still, at least formally, the source of his power. This strategy can be seen when Jonathan confirmed the Hasmonean friendship with Rome, originally initiated by Judas, independent of Rome's relationship with the Seleucids (1 Macc 8:17-22). According to Babota, based especially on 1 Macc 12:6, Jonathan's supporters in this policy, besides his army, were "part of the temple priesthood, certain members of the Jewish *gerousia* [and] part of the population that aspired at independence from the foreign rule" (222). These same social subjects favored the transition of the power to Simon after Jonathan was captured and eventually killed by Tryphon in 144-143.

Regarding the high priesthood of Simon in the period between 142-140 BCE, the author is mainly interested in the two-stage process of appointment, first affirmed by the people (1 Macc 14:35) and then confirmed by the Demetrius II (1 Macc 14:38-43). Babota sides with those scholars who think that 1 Macc 14:27b-49 is reliably based on a copy of the actual decree which, according to 1 Macc 14:48, was inscribed on bronze tables. Simon was first acknowledged as a leader in the winter of 143/142 BCE by the military supporters of his brother Jonathan after the latter's death. The fact that Demetrius II confirmed this decision, recognizing Simon's right to be high priest of the *ethnos*, "demonstrates further weakening of the Seleucid dominion in Judea" (266). In spite of this formal reciprocal acknowledgment by Simon and Demetrius in their respective roles as the appointee and the one who as the power to appoint, Simon conquered the Akra and took residence there at the beginning of the summer of 141, signifying the end of the Seleucid rule in Jerusalem.

With regard to this study's main topic of investigation, the institution of the Hasmonean high priesthood, it reaches several relevant and interesting, though for the most part already well-established, conclusions. There are the following:

The Hasmoneans did not put an end to the Zadokite high priesthood, since it ended when the Seleucid king Antiochus IV removed from office both Onias III in 175 and his brother Menelaus in 172.

The first Hasmonean to assume the title and the role of high priest was Jonathan, not Judas. He was appointed high priest by Alexander I Balas in 152, after the latter's arrival at Ptolemais and his recognition as the legitimate Seleucid king by the Roman senate.

After Alcimus's death in 159 and until 152 the Seleucids did not appoint any high priest in Jerusalem. Some priests presided over the ceremonies of the Yom Kippur, without being, from the point of view of the Hellenistic kings, the high priest of the *ethnos*.

The fact that Jonathan and his brother and successor Simon were allowed to maintain both military and religious power was in line with their Hellenistic role as high priests. This was clearly not a characteristic of the Jewish/biblical high priesthood and there is no proof that something like this had ever happened during the Persian and the Ptolemaic periods. On the contrary, it was the norm for the Seleucids, as is proved especially by the case of the governor and high priest Ptolemy.