



Reviews of the Enoch Seminar 2019.01.02

Berthelot, Katell. *In Search of the Promised Land? The Hasmonean Dynasty between Biblical Models and Hellenistic Diplomacy.* Translated by Margaret Rigaud. *Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements* 24. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018. ISBN: 978-3-525-55252-0. Pp. 494.

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Katell Berthelot's substantial work addresses a common assumption in treatments of the Hasmonean kingdom, namely that the Hasmoneans were consciously attempting to reconquer a "promised land." Those familiar with Berthelot's research will see similar arguments from her previous publications, which are brought together in this volume to sustain a convincing thesis. The book is divided into three main sections, bracketed by an introduction and conclusion. The thrust of the book's argument is clear throughout.

The introduction stresses the importance of understanding the unique identity of the Hasmonean kingdom as a sovereign Jewish state. The Jewish nature of the Hasmonean polity is helpful to bear in mind as one proceeds through the work. Berthelot's emphasis is often on how the Hasmonean kingdom should be understood as a Hellenistic kingdom, which only had a minor role in the Mediterranean world during the Late Hellenistic period. The introductory chapter details the history of modern scholarship (from 1850) on the Hasmonean kingdom. Berthelot demonstrates how various scholars compared the Hasmonean kingdom and the kingdom of David and Solomon. Generally, scholars began by comparing the size of the two kingdoms, and as scholarship built upon previous work, this comparison developed. Eventually, many scholars argued that the Hasmoneans explicitly attempted to reconquer territory that belonged to the Davidic kingdom. The arguments levied in support of this were typically drawn from parallels between the Hasmoneans and Joshua in First Maccabees, with some further support from Simon's justification for his conquest: that the land taken was theirs by right of inheritance (1 Macc 15:33). Berthelot categorises scholars who argue that the conquest was a "reconquest" into three general perspectives: the first, that the land was seen by the Hasmoneans as the land of the Israelites but was not conceived of as a promised land; the second, that the land was promised and sacred in nature; the third, the Hasmoneans intentionally conquered the territory of the Davidic kingdom and conceived of this land as theirs by right of divine promise. Berthelot notes that there were some scholars who disagreed with the theory that the Hasmoneans sought to reconquer a promised

land, but the most frequently cited voices tended to argue in favour of a theological reconquest. This first section serves to familiarize the reader with the variety of perspectives on the nature of the Hasmonean dynasty. At the end of this introduction, Berthelot describes the aim of the rest of the work, namely that “it is important to distinguish between the historical reality of the Hasmonean wars and their literary representation in the First and Second Books of the Maccabees” (62).

Part one discusses the representation of the Hasmonean rulers principally in First Maccabees. Berthelot’s strategy involves examining each figure individually and allowing the varied nature of the Hasmonean dynasty to come to the fore. First Maccabees, as “royal propaganda” of the Hasmoneans, best shows how the Hasmoneans sought to portray their ascent to power and aims of their rule. Berthelot discusses how the territory claimed or conquered by the Hasmoneans is portrayed in First Maccabees and concludes that this territory was not presented as a “biblical promised land.” An examination of the reworking of Hasmonean history in Second Maccabees and the works of Josephus show further that the concept of “promised land” is noticeably absent, particularly as part of the initial aims of the Maccabean Revolt. These comparisons show that, had the author(s) of First Maccabees wished to draw on the idea of a “promised land” then they surely could have. While First Maccabees employs biblical allusions, notably to Joshua, these allusions are not overwrought and do not serve as typologies of Hasmonean practice. Again, Second Maccabees provides a useful comparison, insofar as that the work exemplifies Joshua more frequently, highlighting the lack of interest First Maccabees has in Joshua’s role as a judge. David is also used as an allusive figure in First Maccabees, but his role as king of a “promised land” is never appealed to. Berthelot notes that one should be mindful of reading “canonical knowledge” of a character into a small mention. We cannot know what the authors were aware of and unless they directly draw parallels between two figures, we cannot suggest that certain characteristics or actions of a biblical exemplar were recalled every time they were mentioned or alluded to. Berthelot then assesses how *herem* warfare was to be carried out and suggests that this model was not being employed by the Hasmoneans. They were not in conflict with idolatry and there is no program of campaigns against foreign cults in First Maccabees. Instead of a promised land, the narrative of First Maccabees frames the question of territorial control in Hellenistic terms. The author(s) bases the Hasmonean’s claim on inheritance rather than divine promise; the Hasmonean wars are not portrayed in terms of a war against the people of Canaan.

Part two discusses Josephus as the principal source for the history of the later Hasmoneans. By examining Josephus’ own position and that of his detectable sources, Berthelot arrives at a balanced view of how the Hasmoneans were perceived by their contemporaries. Berthelot then assesses the reigns and conflicts of John Hyrcanus I, Aristobulus I, Alexander Jannaeus, Salome Alexandra, Aristobulus II and Hyrcanus II. The Hasmonean conquests appear to have taken place at a time when the Roman Republic was preoccupied with wars in North Africa, Germany and Pontus, which seems to have allowed the Hasmoneans to pursue territorial expansion freely. Berthelot’s strength is in the careful analysis of the individual Hasmoneans and their warfare practices. This provides an excellent window into the particular motivations of the Hasmoneans at various periods and concludes that there is no evidence that they ever sought to reconquer a promised land. Their behaviour towards foreign peoples and sanctuaries were mainly attempts to stabilize their power base, exact revenge, integrate newly conquered groups or find land for settlers. These newly conquered groups were incorporated in a manner similar to the *gērim*

(sojourning foreigners), who were required to become circumcised and obey the Law. They further retained a status of “other” while being able to access political power and upper class society. There is no suggestion that the people conquered by the Hasmoneans were ever treated as Canaanites, insofar as they were not exterminated or driven away. Instead, the instances that Josephus reported where certain cities such as Pella or Samaria were destroyed, or groups being massacred, seem to be atypical rather than programmatic policy. The Idumeans also were incorporated into the kingdom and figures like Herod the Great became heavily involved in Judean political life. There is little archaeological evidence to suggest that there were sweeping changes in the culture of any of the regions the Hasmoneans conquered; rather the peoples who now came under the authority of the Hasmoneans had similar practices and beliefs. Furthermore, the Hasmoneans incorporated Hellenistic policies in the governance of their new territories; that is, they established settlements populated by Judeans and involved the local elites in administration.

Part three examines the portrayal of the Hasmoneans in the documents from Qumran and in rabbinic material. The documents found at Qumran critique the Hasmoneans from the reign of either Jonathan or Alexander Jannaeus. There are various criticisms directed at the Hasmoneans, generally condemning their greedy ways, their violent behaviour, or the fact that they occupied the office of the high priest. The rabbinic material has a higher opinion of the Hasmoneans. Berthelot identifies six or seven festivals where the Megillat Ta’anit commemorates events associated with the first generation of the Hasmoneans. Not all the rabbinic texts have a clearly positive view of the Hasmoneans; one notable problem for some of the rabbinic texts (particularly the Babylonian Talmud) is the fact that the Hasmoneans kept the title of high priest, a role to which they were not entitled to hold. The common thread in this section is the lack of comparison between the Hasmoneans and Joshua, David or Solomon.

Berthelot concludes that no source that was supportive of the Hasmoneans viewed them as “Joshuas” or that their conquests were of “promised land.” While biblical models were clearly employed by these various sources, there is no suggestion that the recreation of the kingdom of David or ridding the land of gentiles was ever the aim of the Hasmoneans. Instead the mode of Hasmonean conquest was like that of Hellenistic wars of conquest. This is not to suggest that their politics were “profane” in nature, but rather the Hasmoneans were using “mimicry” to help them cope with political and cultural domination.

Berthelot has a short excursus on Eupolemus’ historical fragments but concludes that there is no suggestion in these documents “that the Hasmoneans sought to reconstitute the territory of the Davidic kingdom, or even that the Hasmonean wars of conquest were perceived favourably.” The fragments contain no useful comparative data for the Hasmonean period of expansion and as such cannot offer any information to address the question of the Hasmonean conquest ideologies.

The book closes with a list of documents which attest to the nature of the relationship between Rome and the Hasmoneans, all sourced from First Maccabees and Josephus’ *Antiquities*. Berthelot also provides a timeline of major events in the Hellenistic/Roman world from the battle of Zama to the Parthian invasion of Syria (202–38 BCE), and events from the history of the Hasmoneans, from the high priesthood of Jason to the reign of Herod the Great (175–37 BCE). There are two maps, the first of Judea under Jonathan and the second of the Hasmonean kingdom under Jannaeus. The work was completed in 2015 and the bibliography has not been updated, although this does

not hinder the thesis. An index of subjects would have assisted readers with the use of the book although the contents are well partitioned into reasonably sized sections. There is also no list of modern authors although key figures are discussed in the introduction at length. Berthelot's work is essential reading for any researching the Hasmoneans and their self-perception. Berthelot's careful textual analysis of First and Second Maccabees and sections of Josephus' works also make this required reading for those interested in these documents.