

PREFACE TO ENGLISH TRANSLATION

This translation was undertaken on initiative of Professor Jacob Neusner and with his generous help. Except for omission of two appendices which are no longer needed and correction of some mistakes, the translation, ably done by Professor Moehring, faithfully renders the original text. Some corrections have been made in the text, and a detailed index which we again owe to the generosity of Professor Neusner has been added. The reader may be also interested to know that seven papers written to prepare or to develop some statements in this book have been updated and republished in the second volume of my *Studies in Jewish and Christian History*. The commentary on First Maccabees by Professor Jonathan Goldstein (1976) gives further up-to-date information about the topic of the present book.

In republishing a work written more than forty years ago the author may be permitted to speak about the history of this book. To begin with he was not (and is not) particularly interested in the Maccabees. But collecting the evidence about the Seleucids (see *Institutions des Séleucides*, 1938) he necessarily had to study the Books of Maccabees.

In the meantime, I received an invitation from W. Kroll, then the editor of the *Real-Encyclopadie für die klassische Altertumswissenschaft*, to write the article about the First-Third Maccabees. I don't know why did he choose me for this task. But I was young and, thus, ready to deal with any subject of Greek and Roman History. I was poor and any honorarium was welcome. (I also received an extra reward: a copy of the still indispensable commentary of L. C. W. Grimm on the Books of Maccabees and Fritzsche's edition of Greek Apocrypha.) Last but not least, it was a honor for a beginner to write for "Pauly-Wissowa."

My article was published in 1928. It already presented three essential novelties of my future book: new chronology, the authenticity of documents in I-II Maccabees, and the historiographical difference between First and Second Maccabees. Continuing to work on the Seleucids, and thus, on the Maccabees, I could in 1931 and 1932 deliver lectures which summarized my future book. (In 1935 I published a little popular book *Die Makkabaer* which condensed the present work.)

On the other hand, O. Eissfeldt asked me to write a commentary

on I-II Maccabees for his *Handbuch zum Alten Testament*. The contract was signed by Paul Siebeck, the publisher of Eissfeldt's *Handbuch* on 30th January 1933. When I left his hotel room in Berlin, the newspapers announced the appointment of Hitler as Chancellor of Germany.

The final draft of my book was written three years later and its style naturally reflected the new political situation. (For instance, I wrote that the Maccabees identified their own party with the Jewish people). Nevertheless I was surprised that my academic and even pedantic book (published by Schocken, Jüdischer Buchverlag) could offer some consolation to the persecuted Jews in Germany, as several letters I received from my readers told me. At that time, in 1937, nobody, not even Hitler, visualized the coming gas chambers. As Cicero says, ignorance of future calamities is better than their foreknowledge.

The reviewers, so far as I know, praised the book but often disagreed with my interpretation of the Persecution ordered by Antiochus Epiphanes toward the end of the year 167 B.C. For this reason I take the liberty to return to this topic here. The standpoint of the critics is expressed by the title of the most incisive (and still worth reading) review of my book: "*Wer veranlasste den Glaubenszwang der Makkabäerzeit?*" (I. Heinemann, *Monatsschr. f. Gesch. und Wiss. des Judentums*, 1938). Was Epiphanes the originator of the Persecution or, as I believe, Jewish Reformers? But this dilemma is delusive. There is no either-or. The important royal decisions were more often than not instigated by ministers and courtiers. There was a Haman or a Mordecai behind the king and his edict. But his rôle remained secret. (One of attractions of the Book of Esther for the ancient reader was its laying bare of this hidden mechanism of government). Thus, the monarch alone was praised (or blamed) for his decision. For instance, Ferdinand of Aragon (or sometimes Isabella of Castile) was (and is) presented as responsible for the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, though the royal edict bears the clerical mark and expressly names the Inquisitor General (Torquemada) besides the king and the queen. We may, thus, ask who was Haman in 167 B.C.

Here, the critics ignore the singularity of Epiphanes' acts in Jerusalem. Religious persecutions were not rare in paganism where the State and the State Religion were two facets of the same reality. Therefore, the religious persecution either aimed at reforming the State religion by force (such was the purpose of Pharaoh Akhenaton)

or it punished heretics. Socrates was put to death for introducing new divine beings and for not believing in the gods recognized by his city.

But Epiphanes reformed a foreign religion and persecuted its Old Believers though he was no Jew and no worshipper of the God of Jerusalem. Thus, his Persecution is unintelligible in the pagan context. As Voltaire (*Essai sur les moeurs*, ch. VIII) already noted, the Romans had never forced the Jews to change their religion. The same, of course, is true for Hellenistic kings. The pagans never doubted the existence and power of foreign gods and for this reason were afraid to interfere with the cults in which they were not initiated. When Ptolemy II tried to reform the Egyptian calendar, he did it through a decree of Egyptian clergy.

Accordingly, we must postulate that Antiochus' intervention in the religious affairs of Jerusalem was inspired by Jewish authorities. The account of First Maccabees implies this causal connection, and Second Maccabees states explicitly that the High Priest Menelaos was to blame for all the trouble. Thus interpretation frees us from the uncomfortable idea that Antiochus' action was unparalleled. He rather acted as his father, Antiochus III, who, after conquering Jerusalem in 200 B.C., obviously on the urging of Jewish authorities, proclaimed that the Jews should live in accordance with their "ancestral laws" (that is the Torah) and punished by heavy fine any violation of the ritual purity of the holy city.

Both Antiochi continued the policy of Persian kings. In 458 King Artaxerxes commanded that the Jews live according to the law of their God as it was codified by Ezra, and threatened the dissenters with penalties which ranged from death to flogging. Menelaos was an anti-Ezra and Epiphanes his Artaxerxes. There can be no doubt that Menelaos' Reformation would have succeeded in Jerusalem and became a new orthodoxy, and the remaining Old Believers would be only a small heretic minority among the paganized Jews—if the Maccabees had lost. "Except the Lord keeps city, the watchman waketh but in vain." (Ps. 127:1).

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