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The Relations between Egyptian Judaism and Jerusalem in Light of 3 Maccabees and the Greek Book of Esther

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CHRISTOPHER TUCKETT (Ed.)

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THE RELATIONS BETWEEN EGYPTIAN JUDAISM AND JERUSALEM IN LIGHT OF 3 MACCABEES AND THE GREEK BOOK OF ESTHER

Johannes MAGLIANO-TROMP

Judaism of the Hellenistic and Roman period knew several annual festivals in commemoration of divine deliverances. Two of these exist until the present day: Purim and Hanukkah; others have become obsolete and are practically forgotten: Nicanor's Day, celebrated in Judea, and a nameless festival peculiar to the Jews of Egypt and Alexandria.

The stories connected with these festivals have been preserved in various sources: the story of Purim is related in the book of Esther, those of Hanukkah and Nicanor's Day in 2 Maccabees, and that of the nameless Egyptian festival in 3 Maccabees, as well as in *Against Apion* 2.49-55 by Flavius Josephus.

The basic pattern of these stories is about the same in each case: the Jewish community, be it that of Judea, the Persian empire, or Egypt and Alexandria, is under immediate threat of extinction through its enemies, but is miraculously saved; a feast is organized to celebrate the community's salvation, and it is decided that a commemorative festival will be held annually. This basic pattern also underlies contemporary non-Jewish stories, for instance that of the salvation of Delphi from the Galatians' attack in the first half of the third century BCE,¹ but several more Greek festivals of this kind are attested. The ancient designation for such festivals is *soteria*.²

Among them, the stories differ greatly in detail, probably because they were most commonly handed down orally. In the case of the nameless

¹ The story connected with Delphi's festival is preserved in Pausanias 10.23; in Justin's epitome of Pompeius Trogus, 24.6-8; and in Diodorus Siculus 22.9.

² F. Pfister, 'Soteria', in W. Kroll & K. Mittelhaus (eds), *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, 2. Reihe, III.1 (Stuttgart, 1927), 1221-1231, esp. 1223-1228; J.W. van Henten, "2 Maccabees as a History of Liberation," in: M. Mor et al. (eds), *Jews and Gentiles in the Holy Land in the Days of the Second Temple, the Mishnah and the Talmud* (Jerusalem, 2003), 63-86.

Egyptian Jewish festival, the two extant versions of the story, in 3 Maccabees and in *Against Apion*, share only the bare outlines. Josephus relates that king Ptolemy VIII Physcon (145-116 BCE) wanted to eradicate the Jews of Alexandria, because one of his generals, the Jew Onias, had sided with Cleopatra, the widow of Ptolemy's brother Philometor.³ He ordered the Jews to be trampled by inebriated elephants, but the elephants instead turned against Physcon's friends. Also, he was warned in an apparition not to injure these people, and his wife (Josephus's sources mentioned different names, Ithaca or Irene), had equally begged him not to perpetrate such atrocities.

In contrast, the story of 3 Maccabees places the events under king Ptolemy IV Philopator (222-205 BCE) several decades earlier, and offers a much richer narrative. The extra details include one royal decree, directed against the Jews, and another, in favour of the Jews, issued after various miraculous events that made the king regret the earlier one. This is a well-known pattern, occurring, for instance, in the book of Daniel, chapters 3 and 6, and also in the stories of Joseph and Ahiqar. The most conspicuous agreements, however, are those between 3 Maccabees and the Greek version of the book of Esther. It is to these two writings that the first part of this paper is devoted. They display similarities to such a degree that it has been argued that there must be a literary relationship between them, one writing depending on the other. As we shall see, the assumption of such a literary relationship has great consequences for the interpretation of these writings, as well as for our understanding of the relations between Egyptian Judaism on the one hand, and the authorities in Jerusalem on the other. That subject will be discussed in the second part of this paper.

1. Esther and 3 Maccabees

Let us begin with a brief survey of the three sources involved: Esther, the Greek version of Esther, and 3 Maccabees.

The story of Esther is well-known. It relates how the Jewish girl Esther became the favorite wife of the Persian king Ahasverus, and how her foster father, Mordecai, discovered a conspiracy against the king's life. Afterwards, Haman became a high ranking minister of the king's, who found out that this Mordecai refused to bow for him. Haman convinced

³ Cf. G. Hölbl, *Geschichte des Ptolemäerreiches. Politik, Ideologie und religiöse Kultur von Alexander des Großen bis zur römischen Eroberung* (Darmstadt, 1994), 172.

the king that Mordecai should be killed, together with all his compatriots, the Jews in the empire of Persia. A decree to that effect was issued. Mordecai then pleaded with his foster daughter that she would convince the king to recall this edict. Notwithstanding the personal dangers this involved for Esther, she decided to do so, and by a ruse exposed the evil character of Haman. Haman was executed and the Jews were saved. Again, a decree to this effect was issued throughout the kingdom. The Jews in Persia were allowed to kill their adversaries. An annual festival to commemorate the joyful outcome was instituted.

It is a known fact that God is not mentioned in the entire Hebrew book of Esther, and that this unreligious character of the writing is changed in the Greek version by the addition of six relatively lengthy passages. These Additions contain a vision and its interpretation, prayers, and the texts of the royal decrees, and together make sure that the readers of the writing know that all this was the doing of none other than the Lord God.⁴

The book of 3 Maccabees shows remarkable similarities to the book of Esther, especially in its Greek version. Its contents are about as follows.

The introduction (1.1-7) relates the victory of Ptolemy IV Philopator over Antiochus III the Great near Raphia, in Southern Palestine, in 217 BCE.

The next section (1.8–2.24) is an account of Ptolemy's visit to the shrine in Jerusalem to celebrate his victory. The king insisted to see its inner parts, notwithstanding urgent pleas from the priesthood and the population. In a lengthy prayer, the high priest Simon asked God that he would save his sanctuary from being polluted by the pagan king's entry. It is then told that the king, once inside, was struck down by God and was barely saved by his attendants who dragged him outside. The king's reaction was furious.

The third and main part of the story (2.25–7.23) describes the king's planned revenge, God's interventions and a happy ending. Upon returning to Egypt, Ptolemy issued a decree, ordering that all Jews in his kingdom be registered and brought together in the hippodrome of Alexandria.

⁴ For the present discussion, no separate treatment of the 'Lucianic' recension of the Greek book of Esther is needed, since we shall primarily be discussing the Additions, for which the Lucianic recension, or Alpha-text as it is also designated, offers only few and relatively insignificant variations. On the *L*- or Alpha-text, see R. Hanhart (ed.), *Esther* (Göttingen Septuagint VIII 3; Göttingen, 1966), 87-95, for the fundamental data; and K. De Troyer, *The End of the Alpha Text of Esther. Translation and Narrative Technique in MT 8:1-17, LXX 8:1-17, and AT 7:14-41* (Septuagint and Cognate Studies 48; Atlanta, 2000), for a critical evaluation of Hanhart's and other reconstructions of this text's position in the textual history of Esther.

Only those Jews who were willing to forsake their own God and recognize those of the city were to be exempt from the punishment that the king had thought up for them: to be trampled to death by inebriated elephants. Most Jews chose to be faithful to their God, who in turn decided to act on their behalf. When the drunken elephants were ready to storm into the hippodrome for the first time, God made the king to oversleep the appointed hour. The second time he made him forgetful of the gruesome order he had given. When a third attempt was made, after a lengthy prayer by the Jewish leader Eleazar, the stampeding elephants were suddenly scared off by the appearance of mounted angels, turned around, and trampled the king's army instead of the Jews. This occasioned the king to repent, send the Jews home, allow them to found a commemorative synagogue, celebrate a festival that was to be repeated annually, and kill all Jews who had complied with Ptolemy's original condition for salvation.⁵

It is often assumed that there is a direct tie of literary dependence between 3 Maccabees and the Greek Esther. The classical case for a such a relationship between 3 Maccabees and the Greek book of Esther was made by Bacchisio Motzo in a study published in 1924.⁶ Motzo adduced structural and verbal agreements between both writings to argue for the author of one having known the other.

In the first place, both 3 Maccabees and the Greek Esther begin with the story of a plot against the king, thwarted by a Jew: in the case of 3 Maccabees, Dositheus saves king Philopator (3 Macc 1.1-7), whereas in the new introduction to the Greek Book of Esther, Mordecai does the same for Artaxerxes (Esth LXX 1.1m-r).⁷ In the Hebrew book of Esther, there is also a plot discovered by Mordecai, but not right at the beginning of the story, as in the Greek version and in 3 Maccabees. Motzo

⁵ For the present author's views on the literary and historical questions concerning 3 Maccabees, see his 'Three Maccabees', in K. Doob Sakenfield (ed.), *New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* III (Nashville, 2008), 758-761.

⁶ R.B. Motzo, 'Il rifacimento greco di Ester e il III Maccabei', in: *idem, Saggi di storia e letteratura giudeo-ellenistica* (Contributi alla scienza dell' Antichità 5; Florence, 1924), 272-290; repr. in: *idem, Ricerche sulla letteratura e la storia giudaico-ellenistica* (ed. F. Parente; Rome, 1977), 283-301. Motzo's argument is endorsed by M. Hadas, *The Third and Fourth Books of Maccabees* (New York, 1953), 7-8; S.R. Johnson, *Historical Fictions and Hellenistic Jewish Identity. Third Maccabees in its Cultural Context* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 2004), 137; the latter acknowledges that there is a literary relationship between both writings, but regards the priority of 3 Maccabees as unproven.

⁷ The references to the Additions to Esther are made according to the verse numbering in Rahlfs's Septuagint edition.

suggests that the plot was replaced to the beginning of the narrative in the Greek book of Esther (or rather repeated, because the entire episode is told again in its original place) after the model of 3 Maccabees.⁸

In the second place, both writings contain, at crucial points, royal decrees regarding the Jews. 3 Macc 3.12-29 purports to be a letter from king Philopator, in which he orders the Jews of Egypt to be brought together for wholesale execution; similarly, Esth LXX 3.13a-g is presented as king Artaxerxes' instruction that all Jews in his kingdom be killed. Moreover, Motzo points to several verbal agreements between both decrees. In both cases, the king's motivation for his order is the inimical attitude of the Jews: in 3 Macc 3.7 (admittedly not in the decree itself, but immediately preceding it), the Jews are said to be 'hostile people' (δυσμενεῖς; cf. πεπεισμένοι τούτους κατὰ πάντα δυσνοεῖν ἡμῖν 3.24; also 3.25), and in Esth LXX 3.13d a 'hostile nation' (δυσμενῆ λαόν; cf. δυσνοοῦν τοῖς ἡμετέροις πράγμασιν 3.13e; also 3.13g); in both cases, the king refers to his decision with the term προστετάχαμεν, 'we have decided' (3 Macc 3.25; Esth LXX 3.13f); the Jews are ordered to be killed 'together with their wives and children' (σὺν γυναῖξιν καὶ τέκνοις 3 Macc. 3.25; Esth LXX 3.13f); finally, the king's order is in both writings said to aim at peace and stability in his realm from now on; compare 3 Macc 3.26 τούτων γὰρ ὁμοῦ κολασθέντων διειλήφμεν εἰς τὸν ἐπίλοιπον χρόνον τελεῖως ἡμῖν τὰ πράγματα ἐν εὐσταθείᾳ καὶ τῇ βελτίστῃ διαθέσει κατασταθήσεσθαι with Esth. LXX 3.13g ὅπως οἱ πάλαι καὶ νῦν δυσμενεῖς ἐν ἡμέρᾳ μιᾷ βιαίως εἰς τὸν ἄδην κατελθόντες εἰς τὸν μετέπειτα χρόνον εὐσταθῇ καὶ ἀτάραχα παρέχωσιν ἡμῖν διὰ τέλους τὰ πράγματα.⁹

The second royal decree is in both cases favorable to the Jews. In the letter presented in 3 Macc 7.1-9, Philopator withdraws his earlier decision and orders that no one may disturb the people of the Almighty God. Similarly, the letter in Esth LXX 8.12b-x proclaims royal protection for the Jews throughout the Persian realm. The letter in Greek Esther contains more, such as the defamation of Haman, and the institution of an annual festival. Comparable content matter is absent from the letter in 3 Maccabees, but present in the narrative sections surrounding it.

⁸ Motzo, 'Il rifacimento greco', 274 (285).

⁹ Motzo, 'Il rifacimento greco', 274-276 (285-287). Additionally, Motzo adduces the king's threat against people who hide Jews to protect them in 3 Macc 3.27-29, which has no counterpart in the Greek texts of Esther, but seems to have been preserved in the Old Latin version, where it copies Esth LXX 8.12x.

Verbal agreements include the following. In 3 Macc 6.24 it is related how Philopator comes to his senses and reprimands the courtiers who had persuaded him to assassinate the Jews, saying ἐμὲ αὐτὸν τὸν ὑμῶν εὐεργέτην ἐπιχειρεῖτε τῆς ἀρχῆς ἥδη καὶ τοῦ πνεύματος μεθιστᾶν λάθρᾳ μηχανώμενοι τὰ μὴ συμφέροντα τῇ βασιλείᾳ, that is, ‘you attempt to rob me, your benefactor, of my kingship and my life, while you secretly plot schemes against the wellbeing of the kingdom.’ This has a counterpart in Esth. LXX 8:12c, πολλοὶ τῇ πλείστη τῶν εὐεργετούντων χρηστότητι πυκνότερον τιμώμενοι μεῖζον ἐφρόνησαν καὶ οὐ μόνον τοὺς ὑποτεταγμένους ἡμῖν ζητοῦσι κακοποιεῖν, τόν τε κόρον οὐ δυνάμενοι φέρειν καὶ τοῖς ἑαυτῶν εὐεργέταις ἐπιχειροῦσι μηχανᾶσθαι, that is, ‘many people who are time and again honoured by the great kindness of their benefactors have become conceited, and have attempted, not only to cause harm to our subjects, but even, being unable to forbear their insolence, to plot schemes against their own benefactors.’ In the sequel, this is specified for Haman in 8.12m: οὐκ ἐνέγκας δὲ τὴν ὑπερηφανίαν ἐπετήδευσεν τῆς ἀρχῆς στερεῖσθαι ἡμᾶς καὶ τοῦ πνεύματος, that is, ‘unable to forbear his arrogance, he has tried to rob us from our kingship and our life.’ Next, in 3 Macc. 6.28, the king commands the release of the Jews: ἀπολύσατε τοὺς υἱοὺς τοῦ παντοκράτορος ἐπουρανίου θεοῦ ζῶντος ὃς ἀφ’ ἡμετέρων μέχρι τοῦ νῦν προγόνων ἀπαραπόδιστον μετὰ δόξης εὐστάθειαν παρέχει τοῖς ἡμετέροις πράγμασιν, that is, ‘Release the sons of the heavenly, living God Almighty; for since the days of our ancestors until now, he has always granted our affairs glorious wellbeing.’ To this can be compared Esth. LXX 8.12p-q, where the king states that the Judeans are not criminals, but live according to most righteous laws, ὄντας δὲ υἱοὺς τοῦ ὑψίστου μεγίστου ζῶντος θεοῦ τοῦ κατευθύνοντος ἡμῖν τε καὶ τοῖς προγόνοις ἡμῶν τὴν βασιλείαν ἐν τῇ καλλίστῃ διαθήσει, that is, ‘and that they are sons of the highest and greatest, living God, who has brought our kingdom and that of our ancestors in perfect order.’¹⁰

Motzo inferred from these data that it is the Greek version of Esther that depends on 3 Maccabees, and not the other way around. The reasons for this conclusion are that the decrees in 3 Maccabees are an integral part of the story and conform well with the Hellenistic practice, whereas the decrees in Greek Esther are additions and represent adaptations of

¹⁰ Motzo, ‘Il rifacimento greco’, 276 (287).

the Hellenistic style to the Persian age. To assume that the author took Artaxerxes' letters as his model, one would have to say that the copy has turned out better than the original.¹¹

In the third place, Motzo compares the prayers in 3 Maccabees and Greek Esther, which also bear great resemblance to each other. As indicated above, the prayers in 3 Maccabees come at crucial moments: the prayer by Simon (3 Macc 2.1-20), the high priest, is pronounced when the king is about to enter into the sanctuary; the other, by the pious priest Eleazar, at the moment when the elephants are about to enter into the hippodrome. To these prayers correspond those by Mordecai and Esther in the Greek book of Esther (4.17b-h and 4.17l-z, respectively), although these are said simultaneously and at a much less dramatic moment. All these prayers share the tendency to accumulate divine titles. Moreover, both Simon's and Eleazar's prayers contain a list of three examples of miraculous divine deliverance from Israel's past (3 Macc 2.4-8 and 6.6-8); this device is also used in the book of Esther according to the Old Latin version of Esther's prayer, and the examples are identical to those mentioned by Eleazar: Daniel, the three men in the fiery furnace, and Jonah (Esth C 16-17 in the Old Latin version, corresponding to LXX 4.17; the order is different in the Old Latin Esther). Finally, Esth LXX 4.17o contains a reference to the temple and the altar being under threat, which comes as a surprise in the context of the book of Esther, but is easily understood in that of 3 Maccabees (cf. 3 Macc 5.42-43).¹²

So far Motzo. Let us now consider if these arguments are decisive, beginning with the prayers.

As already noted, the prayers in 3 Maccabees and Greek Esther are placed at very different stages in the narrative. In the story of 3 Maccabees, two deliverances are told: first that of the temple's sanctity, second that of the Egyptian Jewish community. In both cases, the deliverance is immediately preceded by a noteworthy figure's prayer. In the Greek book of Esther, however, both prayers take place simultaneously in the narrative: after Mordecai's plea with Esther to intervene on behalf of the Jews, and before Esther's visit to the king. Next, the accumulation of divine titles is a characteristic of Hellenistic-Jewish prayers, as has recently been shown by Corley. His extensive study of Simon's prayer in 3 Macc 2.1-20 demonstrates that this text, both in structure and formulation, is similar, not just to the prayers in Esther, but to many other

¹¹ Motzo, 'Il rifacimento greco', 277 (288).

¹² Motzo, 'Il rifacimento greco', 277-280 (288-291).

contemporary prayers as well. Also common is the literary device to cite examples from Israel's past.¹³ In this connection, it may be added that the list of examples in Esther's prayer, occurring in the Old Latin version only, should rather be taken as an illustration of the extremely complex text history of the book of Esther than as an indication of its literary dependence on 3 Maccabees.¹⁴ The similarities between the prayers, then, can satisfactorily be explained, if they are understood as representative of a common Jewish tradition in the Hellenistic age.

A similar conclusion is valid with regard to the decrees. Royal decrees against the Jews are familiar from the books of Daniel and 2 Maccabees, which also show various examples of the king's repentance and decrees that are now favourable to the Jews.

The following observations can be made on some of the verbal agreements mentioned.

The detail that all Jews were to be massacred, 'including their women and children', already occurs in the Hebrew text of Esther (3.13; 8.11), and belongs to the standard repertoire in such contexts. The motivation that this be done because of the Jews' hostile attitude towards the king and his empire echoes the recurrent anti-Jewish motif of misanthropy and separateness.¹⁵

The use of the word προστετάχαμεν is not very specific for either writing; προστάσσειν, 'to order', is a typical activity for kings, and both the use of the pluperfect and the majestic plural is common, as is shown, for instance, by OGIS 59; in this letter to Apollonius, king Ptolemy (presumably Ptolemy III Euergetes, who reigned 247-221) writes in lines 6-7: προστετάχομεν Διογένηι τῷ διοκητῇ δοῦναι αὐτοῖς τὰ ἀνειλημμένα κτλ., that is, 'we have given order to our administrator Diogenes to give the deposits to them &c.'¹⁶

¹³ J. Corley, 'Divine Sovereignty and Power in the High-Priestly Prayer of 3 Macc 2.1-20', in R. Egger-Wenzel and J. Corley (eds), *Prayer from Tobit to Qumran* (Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Yearbook 2004; Berlin/New York, 2004), 359-386.

¹⁴ It may here be added that in Haelewyck's recent edition of the Old Latin text of Esther, the number of examples is not three, but seven: Noah, Abraham, Jonah, the three boys, Daniel, Hezekiah, and Anna (Tobias' wife); see J.-C. Haelewyck (ed.), *Hester* (Vetus Latina: die Reste der altlateinischen Bibel VII 3, fasc. 4; Freiburg, 2008), 274-276.

¹⁵ N.C. Croy, *3 Maccabees* (Septuagint Commentary Series; Leiden, 2006), 67.

¹⁶ W. Dittenberger, *Orientalis graeci inscriptiones selectae* I (Leipzig, 1903); for further references, see F. Preisigke, *Wörterbuch der griechischen Papyrusurkunden* II (Berlin, 1927), 413-414.

Also, the argument that both writings use the expression 'to rob someone from both his rule and his life' becomes less compelling once it is acknowledged that this is probably a stock phrase, repeatedly used, for instance, by Polybius.¹⁷

The acknowledgment that God benignly provides for a king's affairs, falls little short of being a cliché; see 2 Chron 17.5; *Arist.* 15.7; 1 Clem 61.2; Julian the Apostate, *To the Community of the Jews*.¹⁸ In all these cases, the verb κατευθύνειν or διευθύνειν is used.

The similarities between the decrees in 3 Maccabees and the Greek book of Esther can be explained by understanding both as representatives of a tradition that involves the story pattern of kings who takes sides against Jews, but revokes in their favour after having been confronted with their God; the verbal agreements reflect a tradition of the language of decrees.

Finally, the Book of Esther makes a clear connection between the thwarted attempt at the king's life and the salvation of the Jewish community as a whole: because Mordecai had earlier saved Artaxerxes' life, the king rescinded the decree to kill all Jews. In 3 Maccabees there is no such explicit connection. This writing does feature a Jew who saves the king's life (Dositheus), but this fact plays no role in the king's change of heart. Moreover, 3 Maccabees stresses that Dositheus was an apostate Jew. In the Greek version of the book of Esther, the story of the king's rescue by Mordecai is even told twice (1.11-r and 2.19-23). Again, this is probably the result of the intricate history of this writing. Comparable narrative elements occur in the story of Joseph in Genesis, in the book of Daniel and the story of Ahiqar.

In summary, the agreements between 3 Maccabees and the Greek book of Esther are manifold and impressive. However, the assumption of literary dependency does not satisfactorily explain the differences that exist between them. Moreover, both writings also display many similarities, both in structure and formulation, with other contemporary writings, so that it is more attractive to regard them as representatives of a same complex of traditions about Jews being miraculously saved by the Almighty God of Israel. The striking agreements in detail, especially in the decrees and prayers, may be due to the formulaic character of such

¹⁷ See Polybius 3.5.3: ὁ δὲ Σελεύκου Δημήτριος ... ἅμα τοῦ βίου καὶ τῆς ἀρχῆς ἐστερήθη; *idem* 8.35.4; cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 6.205.

¹⁸ Cf. M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism II* (Jerusalem, 1980), 559-561, with annotation on 568.

texts in general, combined with both authors' obvious penchant for a bombastic style.¹⁹

Recently, Noah Hacham reached similar conclusions in his study of the relationships between 3 Maccabees and the Greek book of Esther.²⁰ However, he also found reason to believe that there are still other grounds that make it plausible, after all, that the author of the Additions to Esther knew 3 Maccabees.

Instead of pointing to structural and verbal similarities, Hacham adduces linguistic evidence that cannot be explained, according to him, other than as the result of literary dependency. Hacham has identified nine words that occur in the Septuagint only in Greek Esther and 3 Maccabees (παραπέμπειν, διηγεκώς, δυσμενής, δυσνοεῖν, ὑπερχαρής, μηχανᾶσθαι, κόμπος, ὀλεθρία, and κώθων), as well as fourteen examples of expressions and collocations that are equally unique to these two writings within the Septuagint.²¹ A great number of these examples carry somewhat less conviction, as soon as the comparison is extended to other contemporary literature, including non-Jewish writings.²² It is important to look further than the Septuagint alone, because the concept of something like a 'Septuagint'-corpus seems irrelevant insofar as Esther and 3 Maccabees are concerned.

Nonetheless, the relatively high level of agreement is impressive, especially if it is acknowledged that most of these 'unique' agreements are all concentrated in the two royal letters in the Additions (Esther LXX 3.3a-g; 8.12a-x). Moreover, there is one expression that both writings have in common, that does not seem to occur anywhere else in Greek literature, namely in the threat to destroy places 'with spear and fire' (δόρατι καὶ πυρί Esther LXX 8.12x; πυρὶ καὶ δόρατι 3 Macc 5.43). Even if it is granted that the phrase might reflect the Latin stock phrase

¹⁹ Similar conclusions are reached by C.W. Emmet, 'The Third Book of Maccabees', in R.H. Charles (ed.), *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament I* (Oxford, 1913), 155-173, esp. 156-159; H. Anderson, '3 Maccabees', in J.H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha II* (London, 1985), 509-529, esp. 515-516; A. Passoni Dell'Acqua, 'Terzo libro dei Maccabei', in P. Sacchi (ed.), *Apocrifi dell'Antico Testamento IV* (Brescia, 2000), 573-664, esp. 598-601; Croy, *3 Maccabees*, xvi-xvii.

²⁰ N. Hacham, '3 Maccabees and Esther: Parallels, Intertextuality, and Diaspora Identity', *JBL* 126 (2007) 765-785. This article came to my notice after my own study had already been completed in its first draft.

²¹ Hacham, '3 Maccabees and Esther', 772-777.

²² Compare, for instance, the comparison of 3 Maccabees with the Letter of Aristeas and a number of papyri, conducted by C.W. Emmet, 'The Third Book of Maccabees', 157-158.

igni ferroque (or *ferro ignique*, and other variants), it may hardly be a coincidence that both these writings use the word 'spear' instead of 'sword', whereas its particular combination with fire is unknown from other ancient literature.

Hacham concludes that the author of Additions 3.3a-g and 8.12a-x depended on the book of 3 Maccabees. He adds that this 'has no bearing on the question of the relationship between the remainder of Greek Esther and 3 Maccabees.'²³ As a possible reason why the person responsible for these Additions chose to lean on 3 Maccabees for the royal edicts, Hacham suggests that the anti-Greek sentiment prevailing in 3 Maccabees²⁴ was welcomed by this editor, who may have felt that the predominantly friendly attitude towards the royal court in Greek Esther must be corrected.²⁵

The importance of this conclusion lies not only in the fact that it explains the (linguistic) similarities between 3 Maccabees and Greek Esther, but also in that it does justice to the dynamic history of the book of Esther's development through the ages. Furthermore, the acceptance of the Additions' dependence on 3 Maccabees also implies that both writings as a whole are independent of each other, since the strongest arguments for dependence are restricted to those two passages. Finally, it should be noted that, if Hacham's evidence is accepted to prove his conclusion, the author of these two Additions to Esther may have known 3 Maccabees, but did not use it in a systematical way. The words and expressions used in these Additions may derive from 3 Maccabees, but in the latter writing, they are spread out over the entire text and occur in various contexts; rather, the author of the Additions may have been inspired by 3 Maccabees in style only.

2. Jerusalem Festivals and Egyptian Judaism

The question of literary relationships between 3 Maccabees and the Greek Book of Esther is of no small importance, as it appears to have immediate impact on the interpretation of these works and the social and historical contexts in which they are supposed to have played their parts. This becomes apparent if we have a look at the reasons why the author

²³ Hacham, '3 Maccabees and Esther', 778-780.

²⁴ Cf. N. Hacham, '3 Maccabees: An Anti-Dionysian Polemic', in J.-A.A. Brant *et al.* (eds), *Ancient Fiction. The Matrix of Early Christian and Jewish Narrative* (SBL Symposium Series 32; Atlanta, 2005), 167-183.

²⁵ Hacham, '3 Maccabees and Esther', 783.

of the Greek book of Esther supposedly used 3 Maccabees as its model.

Motzo acknowledges that there are great differences between both writings, and stresses that numerous similarities can be explained as traditional motifs. Therefore, there is no need to assume, as is sometimes done,²⁶ that the author of 3 Maccabees was familiar with the Hebrew Book of Esther.²⁷ The similarities, however, were sufficiently clear for the editor of the Greek Book of Esther to recognize. Motzo supposes that the editor of the latter writing wished to promote the celebration of Purim in Egypt, in agreement with the Palestinian Jewish habit of trying to persuade Jews abroad to act as they did in every possible way. However, when trying to introduce Purim in Egypt, he encountered the difficulty that the Egyptian Jews already had a kind of Purim of their own. Therefore, the editor of the Greek Book of Esther made his writing to look more like 3 Maccabees, and presented it to the Egyptian Jews as the *real* story of their festival, much older and concerning, not just the Jews of Egypt, but the Jews of the entire Persian realm. To be successful, the editor had to adopt his writing to the taste of the Egyptian Jews, and therefore, he shaped the Additions to Esther with 3 Maccabees as his model.²⁸

In 2001, P.S. Alexander, unaware of Motzo's study, published an article in which he argued that 3 Maccabees depends on 2 Maccabees, but also on the book of Esther in Greek, but without the Additions. In turn, 3 Maccabees was the inspiration for the Additions to the Greek book of Esther.²⁹ Alexander, then, sees a network of 'subtle inter-textual relations' (p. 339), which also included the Greek translation of Sirach,

²⁶ E.g., J.M.G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE - 117 CE)* (Edinburgh, 1996), 200, who states (but does not argue), that the story of 3 Maccabees 'is probably influenced by the parallel stories in Daniel, Esther and the Maccabean literature'.

²⁷ Motzo, 'Il rifacimento greco', 283-287 (294-298).

²⁸ Motzo, 'Il rifacimento greco', pp. 287-290 (298-301). Motzo also argues that Josephus' version of the Egyptian story in *Against Apion* 2.53-56 is testimony for the fact that already in the first century both stories, even if not yet both festivals, were merging into one.

²⁹ P.S. Alexander, '3 Maccabees, Hanukkah and Purim', in: A. Rapoport-Albert and G. Greenberg (eds), *Biblical Hebrew, Biblical Texts. Essays in Memory of Michael P. Weitzman* (JSOTSup 333; Sheffield, 2001), 321-339. Alexander complains that 3 Maccabees has been neglected too long (321-322); that may be true, but scholarship's negligence for this writing has not been as great as Alexander's negligence of extant scholarly contributions to its interpretation. For extensive bibliographies on 3 Maccabees, see Passoni Dell'Acqua, 'Terzo libro dei Maccabei', 617-628; L. DiTommaso, *A Bibliography of Pseudepigrapha Research 1850-1999* (Sheffield, 2001), 673-684.

and which reveals a pattern of rivalry between the Jewish communities of Judea and Egypt.

According to Alexander, 3 Maccabees' dependence on the book of Esther reflects an Egyptian Jewish reaction to the Palestinian attempt to introduce Purim in Egypt.³⁰ Purim itself had been brought to Palestine from Persia, and it was welcomed there because of the obvious similarity of the story of Esther to that of Hanukkah, both being stories of deliverance from tyranny, commemorated by annual festivals. The Jerusalem authorities, especially the Hasmoneans, would have had great interest in promoting Purim along with Hanukkah in Egypt, to enhance Egyptian Jewish loyalty to Judea.³¹

The publication of Esther in Egypt, however, elicited a reaction from the author of 3 Maccabees. Not only did he find the book of Esther religiously unsatisfactory, he was also aggravated by Jerusalem's imperialism, already proven by the propaganda for Hanukkah in 2 Maccabees, and the production of the Greek translation of the book of Sirach. Instead, he designed 3 Maccabees as a counterpart, a festal roll to be read on the commemoration of the deliverance of the Egyptian Jewish community itself. Indeed, Alexander suggests that 3 Maccabees 'contains an anti-Hasmonean sub-text'. This he understands against the background of a more general Egyptian Jewish opposition to Jerusalem's claims to authority over Jews outside Judea. The flight of Onias to Egypt and the institution of the temple in Leontopolis all fit into this picture.³²

So far Alexander, who himself admits that his reconstruction is speculative.³³ For the present discussion, however, the main point is that his contribution illustrates the significant consequences of assuming a literary relationship between 3 Maccabees and the Greek book of Esther. If the Additions of Esther indeed depend on 3 Maccabees, it seems to follow that the author of the Greek revision of Esther wished to achieve more than just a remedy for the religious inadequacy of the original. If he embellished a festal roll with elements from another community's festal roll, the conclusion seems unavoidable that the festivals themselves are involved, together with the communities celebrating them, and that one author's response to another reflects a certain kind of contention about whose festival is the best.

³⁰ Compare also J.E. Burns, 'The Special Purim and the Reception of the Book of Esther in the Hellenistic and Early Roman Eras', *JSJ* 37 (2006) 1-34, esp. 19-21.

³¹ Alexander, '3 Maccabees', 335-337.

³² Alexander, '3 Maccabees', 337-338.

³³ Alexander, '3 Maccabees', 339.

It should be noted that an atmosphere of contention between Jerusalem and Egypt has also been assumed as the reason for the origin of 3 Maccabees, without reference to the Greek book of Esther. In 1995, D.S. Williams explained the origin of 3 Maccabees in the context of strained relationships between the Jews of Judea and Egypt.³⁴ Williams points to the first festal letter of 2 Maccabees, where, in a particular understanding of it, the Jews of Jerusalem rebuke their compatriots in Egypt for leading a less than perfect Jewish way of life (2 Macc 1.3-6).³⁵ Also, reference is made to an earlier letter in which the Judeans had exhorted the Egyptian Jews to celebrate Hanukkah (2 Macc 1.7); that a new letter was sent, is construed by Williams as an indication that the earlier one had went unheeded. Finally, the prologue of the Greek book of Sirach is cited, which can be understood to mean that the Greek translation of the Law, the Prophets and the other books is untrustworthy. Williams regards this as a disparaging remark about the Septuagint, and thus as an attack on Egyptian Judaism itself. 3 Maccabees would have been written in response to all this criticism from Jerusalem, to make clear to them that the Egyptian Jews, too, knew righteousness and piety, and were as much under the providential care of God as the Jews of Judea.

These scholars, then, all work with a model of imperialism and mutual distrust to reconstruct the relationships between Judaism in Egypt and Jerusalem, respectively. Let us consider if this model rests on sufficient grounds, or whether at least it has some explanatory value.

Motzo regards it as a matter of common knowledge that Palestinian Jews were trying, whenever possible, to impose their manner of life on Jews living elsewhere,³⁶ and accepts this as a sufficient explanation for the reasons why the Additions to Esther were made. Alexander too adheres to this schema, when he suggests that Purim was 'another instrument for asserting the political and spiritual hegemony of Jerusalem'. He continues: 'The Hasmonaeans had much to gain by encouraging loyalty to Judaism among Diaspora Jews, especially if *they* monopolized the definition of Judaism.'³⁷ Williams even imagines a situation in which

³⁴ D.S. Williams, '3 Maccabees: A Defense of Diaspora Judaism?', *JSP* 13 (1995) 17-29.

³⁵ See already E. Bickerman, 'Ein jüdischer Festbrief vom Jahre 124 v. Chr. (II Macc. 1, 1-9)', *ZNW* 32 (1933), 233-254, repr. in *idem, Studies in Jewish and Christian History* II (Leiden, 1980), 136-158, on 153-156.

³⁶ Motzo, 'Il rifacimento greco', 287-288 (298-299): 'È noto come il giudaismo palestinese si adoperasse a dirigere quello della diaspora facendogli adottare, quant'era possibile, usanze, leggi, feste, cerimonie, libri della madre patria.'

³⁷ Alexander, '3 Maccabees', 337.

Egyptian Jews felt the need to defend themselves against the innuendoes coming from Jerusalem, and wrote 3 Maccabees to that end.

Leaving aside the question of whether it is an efficient method of persuasion to write treatises and counter-treatises that leave their purpose implicit, it must first of all be asked whether the Jerusalem authorities really had the ambition to rule over the religious and moral attitude of Jews living abroad. Insofar as I can see, there is precious little evidence for this view.

Williams's references to the prologue of Sirach and the festal letter in 2 Maccabees hold no water. The Greek translator of Sirach excuses the imperfections of his work by stating that translations fall short of the original by definition; he says that this is true even in the case of the law, the prophets and the other writings. To interpret this as a defamation of the Greek translation of the bible, and an attack on Judaism in Egypt, strains the meaning of the words beyond the acceptable.

Also, the view that the passage 2 Macc 1.3-6 censures the Egyptian Jews because of their unsatisfactory way of life, is an exaggeration. This passage reads as follows:

May God make you willing and eager to worship and obey him with all your heart. May he bless you with peace and with an understanding of his Law and its commands. We ask him to answer your prayers and forgive your sins and never turn from you in times of trouble. All of us here are now praying for you.

No doubt, there is exhortation in these verses, but it is of the kind that is very common in contemporary Jewish literature, for instance in Tobit 13, where there is nothing judgmental in it. It is true that such advice is rare in letters, especially in the place of the more usual extended wishes of well-being. The closest parallels are found in the New Testament epistles (Phil 1.3-11; 2.12; Col 1.3-11; 2 Thess 1.11). There, the authors wish that the addressees will develop to perfection in faith and understanding and will be forgiven their sins, but they do not criticize their readers, not even implicitly. It may be objected that, if the first festal letter in 2 Maccabees is authentic (as is commonly accepted), the New Testament parallels date from too remote a period. However, these are the only parallels there are, and they do not support Williams's interpretation of 2 Macc 1.3-6.

More criticism is read into the fact that the author of the first festal letter in 2 Maccabees quotes another one, sent to the Egyptian Jews on an earlier occasion. 'We have written to you before', it says (2 Macc 1.7), and Williams deduces from this, that the Egyptian Jews had not

responded to an earlier call to join in with the celebration, and are therefore chided by the Jerusalem authorities. However, the letter that refers to an earlier communication is dated nineteen years after the original exhortation. Are we to suppose, then, that the Jerusalem authorities sent a letter in the year 143 BCE, and waited for almost twenty years before they sent a reminder? I do not think so. Moreover, the earlier letter does not even contain a call to join in with the Judean festival. It merely states the reason why the Judeans themselves celebrate it.

No mention is made of the Egyptian Jews' behaviour; no reproach, no accusation of celebrating illicit festivals, and no disappointment about their failure to celebrate Hanukkah. What is described, are the reasons why the Jews of Jerusalem celebrate their festival, and why it would be good if the Jews of Egypt would join the Jerusalemites' party. The Jerusalemites state twice that 'we are going to celebrate this festival' (1.18; 2.7), a date is specified (Kislev 1.9; 25th of Kislev 1.18), and mention is made of the solidarity that binds the Egyptian Jews with the Judeans. Furthermore, the hope is expressed that God will bring all Jews together in the Jerusalem temple (2.18). This sentence has been taken as an expression of eschatological hope,³⁸ but it might as well be understood as an expression of the Jerusalemites' hope to be greeting their Egyptian compatriots at the festival, next Kislev.

In this understanding of the passage it is read as an invitation to come to Jerusalem for the celebration of the festival of Booths in commemoration of the re-dedication of the temple.³⁹ In a similar vein, Greek cities used to broadcast invitations to their periodical festivals.⁴⁰ Ambassadors from Delphi, for instance, crossed the Greek world each time the festival was held, to remind their sister-cities and –states of the Delphic Games; no doubt to provide details about the various competitions, the venue

³⁸ E.g., F.-M. Abel, *Les livres des Maccabées* (Paris, 1949), 310; J.T. Nelis, *II Makka-beeën* (Bussum, 1975), 77.

³⁹ J.W. van Henten, *The Maccabean Martyrs as Saviours of the Jewish People. A Study of 2 and 4 Maccabees* (JSJSup 57; Leiden, 1997), 47-50; *idem*, '2 Maccabees', 79-82. Cf. Bickerman, 'Ein jüdischer Festbrief', 145-147, who restricts the Jerusalem ambassadors' function to announcing the exact date on which Jews abroad were to celebrate the festivals in their own homes. This, however, would hardly be in the interest of the Jerusalem temple.

⁴⁰ G. Nachtergaele, *Les Galates en Grèce et les Sôtéria de Delphes. Recherches d'histoire et d'épigraphie hellénistiques* (Académie Royale de Belgique, Mémoires de la Classe des Lettres, 2me série, 63, 1; Brussels, 1977); cf. S. Elwyn, 'The Recognition Decrees for the Delphia Soteria and the Date of Smyrna's Inviolability', *JHS* 110 (1990) 177-180; C. Champion, 'The Soteria at Delphi: Aetolian Propaganda in the Epigraphical Record', *American Journal of Philology* 116 (1995) 213-220.

and the dates; but most of all to present the formal invitation that was needed if they really wanted to welcome their fellow-Greeks.

A number of responses to the Delphic invitations have been preserved. The people of Athens in 245 BCE voted to accept the invitation, in the following terms:

Since the confederation of the Etolians, as a token of their piety towards the gods, has decreed that *soteria*-games will be held in honour of Zeus Soter and the Pythian Apollo, in commemoration of the battle with the barbarians who marched against the Greeks and against the sanctuary of Apollo that is common to all Greeks; barbarians against whom the people also sent the finest soldiers and horsemen to join in the battle on behalf of the common rescue; and because the confederation of the Etolians and Charixenos the strategos have sent ambassadors to the people to discuss with them if they would accept to come to the games [...]⁴¹

The text breaks off here, but there is no doubt that it originally ended with the decision to accept the invitation. Other decrees are preserved that use, *mutatis mutandis*, the same terms, which suggests that they all more or less repeat the text of the invitation. Moreover, there are also indications that all these decrees of acceptance do not date from the same year.⁴² Since it is known that the Delphic games were organized periodically, it is likely that invitations were sent time and again, each time rehearsing the reason for the games, namely the victory over the barbarians that had threatened Delphi and its sanctuary, and thereby all Greeks who felt themselves connected with the Etolians by bonds of Pan-Hellenic solidarity.⁴³

Read against this background, the quotation of an earlier letter in the first festal letter of 2 Maccabees is not a reproach, but simply a reminder. It is unlikely that it was sent because the Egyptian Jews had failed to react to the earlier one for nineteen years. It is much more likely that many more had been sent in the meantime, and that a number of Egyptian Jews had usually reacted by accepting the invitation to celebrate the festival of Booths in Jerusalem.

⁴¹ Nachtergaele nr. 21; cf. nrs. 22-26.

⁴² Elwyn, 'The Recognition Decrees'.

⁴³ Van Henten, *The Maccabean Martyrs*, 42-43. The entire process, from deciding on the exact date, to the invitation through ambassadors carrying letters, the celebration itself, and the return home after the festival is projected into the time of Hezekiah in 2 Chron 30.1-31.1. Interestingly, this author also makes a connection with a re-dedication of the temple (2 Chron 29), as well as with organized vandalism after the festival (2 Chron 31.1).

This brings us back to the question whether Jerusalem wanted to impose this festival upon the Jews in Egypt. This view represents, in my opinion, a misjudgment of the relations between Judea and Egypt in general. The Jerusalem authorities were in no position to impose anything upon anybody under the jurisdiction of the king of Egypt. Both the Judean and the Egyptian Jews must have been aware of that. Even attempts to exert moral pressure on behalf of the High Priest in Jerusalem, if they ever were made, could be shrugged off by Egyptian Jews without consequence. I do not think that such attempts were ever made; at least, there seems to be no evidence for it.

All this is not to say that Jews abroad could not celebrate traditional Jewish festivals at home. From several sources we know that they did. For instance, Tobit is pictured as celebrating, presumably in the company of his family, the feast of Weeks in his home in Nineve with a splendid meal (Tob 2.1-2).

It is not to be denied, either, that contacts between Jerusalem and Jews in Egypt existed. There is ample attestation for literary correspondence. The prologue to Sirach and the letters in 2 Maccabees have already been discussed, and to their examples many can be added, in the first place the colophon to the Greek book of Esther, which explicitly states that a copy of the book of Esther was brought to Egypt by a priest, and that this copy's authenticity was warranted, being a translation made in Jerusalem. There were letters being sent from Elephantine to Jerusalem, as early as in the Persian period.

Apart from correspondence by writing, and probably much more important than that, there were contacts as a result of Jews traveling to Jerusalem on all kinds of missions, but not in the last place because of the holy Jewish festivals. As we have seen, the authorities of Jerusalem warmly invited them, and Philo, *Spec. leg.* 1.69, informs us that large multitudes of pilgrims indeed accepted the invitation several times each year. It may also be surmised that Judeans continued to travel or even emigrate to Egypt throughout the Hellenistic period, possibly giving new impulses to the religious life of local Jewish communities.

The point I want to make, is that Jews living outside Judea did not visit the city because its authorities forced or even only pressured them, but because they wanted to themselves. It is known that, at least from the first century BCE onwards, Jews outside Jerusalem sent contributions to the temple. They were not obliged to do so, but they did it voluntarily, for various reasons: maybe because it excused them for not contributing to the sanctuaries of the cities where they lived, but probably most of all

because they wanted the city of their ancestors to be rich and glorious, to add to their own feeling of self-esteem as Ἰουδαῖοι, Jews.⁴⁴ In other words, the sense of solidarity with Jerusalem, which the festal letter of 2 Maccabees assured to be mutual, was real.⁴⁵

So far our discussion of the evidence for tense relationships between the Jewish communities of Jerusalem and Egypt. Other scraps are sometimes adduced as evidence, such as the flight of Onias and the existence of a Jewish temple in Leontopolis. However, these matters are treated with indifference, if at all, in contemporary Jewish sources. When Josephus states that the temple of Leontopolis was set up to compete with the temple in Jerusalem, he first of all does so to belittle the new temple's importance and to damage its founder's reputation. The question of whether the Egyptian sanctuary was successful does not detain him; this confirms the impression that the Jews of Judea saw no reason to be troubled by Leontopolis.

3. Conclusion

Purim was not a festival celebrated in the temple. It was probably celebrated at home or in community centres such as the synagogue. If the Hasmoneans had an interest in encouraging loyalty to Jerusalem, Purim and the book of Esther, even in its religiously enhanced version, would have been ill-fitted instruments. In any case, the temple authorities had no reason to promote the celebration of the festival abroad. The idea that the temple authorities would even want to replace a local festival commemorating the deliverance of the Egyptian Jewish community, by a similar, but slightly more international festival, is a curious notion in itself, and certainly no explanation for the origin of either the Greek book of Esther, or 3 Maccabees.

Our survey of research into the relationships between the Greek book of Esther and 3 Maccabees has shown that this matter is often discussed

⁴⁴ See J. Tromp, 'The Religious Significance of Jerusalem for Jews in the Greco-Roman Period', in A. Le Boulluec (ed.), *À la recherche des villes saintes. Actes du colloque franco-néerlandais "Les Villes Saintes"* (Bibliothèque de l'École des hautes études. Sciences religieuses 122; Turnhout, 2004), 51-61.

⁴⁵ J.M.G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 198: 'An important feature of Jewish identity projected by this project of Egyptian Judaism is the sense of solidarity with Jews in Judaea. (...) To our Egyptian author, Jerusalem is "the holy city", chosen and sanctified by the God who created all the earth.' Cf. Johnson, *Historical Fictions*, 91-92, n. 90.

against the background of the relations between Egyptian Judaism and Jerusalem. These relations, moreover, are usually described in terms of a model in which the priesthood in Jerusalem behaved itself in an imperialistic manner. The priesthood's attempts to assert its authority in Jewish circles abroad, in turn elicited reactions from Egyptian Jews, who answered to Jerusalem's expansionism in a spirit of defense. In short, this model is based upon a relationship of mutual distrust and competition.

In this contribution, it has been proposed to apply a different model, in which the relations between Egyptian Judaism and Jerusalem are characterized by mutual appreciation and solidarity. The differences between both communities (one being centered around an old and venerable temple cult, the other representing a network of voluntary associations with a history and traditions of their own) are obvious and manifold. However, these differences need not have resulted in constant disagreement and litigation. The model proposed here as an alternative assumes that members of both communities regarded each other with perfect respect and esteem. It has been argued that this model accounts equally well for the texts under discussion, and arguably better.