
ON THE JUDEAN POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE IN THE PERIOD OF THE HASMONEANS

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Abstract: The Hasmoneans were an effective power in the Judean region in the second half of the second century BC and the first half of the first century BC. In the sources that provide information about the period and the region, there are some statements indicating that the Hasmoneans had led an independent political structure by separating from the Seleucid State at some point during the period of their presence in the region. In fact, scholars today agree that the Hasmoneans ruled an independent state in history. There even seems to be a consensus among contemporary scholars that this independence took place during the reign of John Hyrcanus I. However, when the massive literature on the Hasmonean State is examined, various opinions are encountered that the independence in question was established by different leaders of the dynasty. Despite this situation, the lack of a study that addresses the issue with a holistic approach has been noticed. For this reason, in this study, different views are presented, pointing to the political independence of the Hasmoneans. Afterwards, these views are discussed within the framework of the phenomenon of political independence in the Hellenistic period, the conceptual framework of which we have tried to present. Finally, among the results of the study, the possible reasons for the existing different views are pointed out and a relatively new argument is presented, indicating that the political independence of the Hasmonean State took place during the reign of Hyrcanus I, by using literary sources, numismatic works and archaeological findings.

Keywords: *Hasmoneans, independence, John Hyrcanus I, autonomy, Judea.*

INTRODUCTION

In the early 2nd century BCE, Judea came under the rule of the Seleucid Empire during the reign of Antiochus III the Great (222–187 BCE). When Antiochus III took control of the region, he granted the Judeans a partial autonomy, allowing them to live under the local administration of the high priest and the Jewish council and governed by their own laws.¹ The existing administrative order underwent a change during the reign of the later Seleucid kings, particularly under Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 BCE). In response to turmoil among the Judeans, he appointed a Seleucid official to Judea. Consequently, the aforementioned partial autonomy came to an end.² The king also issued a decree and compelled different ethnic groups under his dominion to abandon or violate their beliefs through a decree he issued.³ The religious sanctions imposed by Antiochus IV were initially implemented

¹ BICKERMAN 1962, 55–57; HENGEL 1980, 42–43; SCHÄFER 2003, 30.

² 2 MACC. 5.22.

³ 1 MACC. 1:41–44.

in Jerusalem (Hierousalem).⁴ A portion of the population of Jerusalem displayed partial resistance, such as refusing to comply with the orders.⁵ Another portion of the city's population, however, complied with the religious sanctions and even exhibited behaviours that encouraged the innovations.⁶

The religious sanctions of Antiochus IV were subsequently attempted to be extended to the Judean countryside. Within this scope, Seleucid officials encountered serious resistance in the town of Modein, located northwest of Jerusalem. Mattathias, one of the prominent figures in Modein, refused to carry out the pagan-style sacrifice duties entrusted to him and killed a fellow Jew who was willing to accept and perform this practice, along with the Seleucid officials.⁷ After that, Mattathias withdrew to the mountainous terrain with the supporters he gathered from Modein and initiated the movement known in literature as the Maccabean Revolt in 167 BCE.⁸ After leading the uprising for about a year, Mattathias passed away, and in 165 BCE, his son Judas Maccabee (Ioudas Makkabaios / 167–161 BCE) succeeded him as the leader.⁹ The Maccabean revolt continued to strengthen under the leadership of Judas. Following Judas' death in 161/160 BCE, his brother Jonathan Apphus (Jonathan Apphous / 161–143 BCE) assumed the leadership of the movement.¹⁰ Thanks to his diplomatic skills, Jonathan had a successful leadership period filled with achievements. Eventually, following his death in 143 BCE, his elder brother Simon Thassi (142–135 BCE) assumed the leadership of the movement.¹¹ During the transition of leadership from Jonathan to Simon and under Simon's leadership, numerous significant developments occurred. Firstly, the family that initiated the Maccabean Revolt transformed into a dynasty known as the Hasmoneans. Additionally, significant achievements were accomplished in asserting control over Judea, and both with the Judeans and the Seleucid administration, the dynasty began to gain official recognition. Finally, with the death of Simon in 135 BCE, the leadership passed to the next generation through Simon's sons. Following the period of Simon, the Hasmonean Dynasty's rule over Judea continued until the region was conquered by the Romans in 63 BCE.¹²

From the beginning of the Maccabean Revolt in 167 BCE until Judea fell under the Roman hegemony in 63 BCE, the Hasmoneans remained a dominant force in the region. At a certain point during this period, Judeans under the leadership of the Hasmoneans successfully separated from the Seleucid Empire and established an independent political entity. The mentioned existence of this political entity and independence is explicitly emphasized in sources that provide information about the Hasmoneans and the region. For instance, Justin (Iustinus / 2nd century AD) expresses that "the Jews were the first Eastern community

to gain independence with the support of Rome."¹³ Josephus (Iosephos / 37–100 AD) mentions the efforts of Aristobulus I (Aristoboulos / 104–103 BCE), one of the rulers of the dynasty, "to transform the country into a monarchy and become the first crowned leader" of the Hasmoneans.¹⁴ Strabon (64 BCE–24 CE) mentions the later ruler of the dynasty, Alexander Janneus (Aleksandros Iannaïos / 103–76 BCE), as the first member of the dynasty "to declare himself king."¹⁵ Josephus also mentions a gift that Strabon saw while he was in Rome, which bore the inscription "Alexander the king of the Jews."¹⁶ Diodorus (1st century BCE) mentions that during the campaign of Gnaeus Pompeius in Judea, a group of Jews visited Pompeius and expressed "their rejection of the current claimants to the throne." They also conveyed their desire "not to be ruled by kings."¹⁷ Appian (Appianos / 95–165 CE) mentions that after Pompeius' eastern campaign, "the Jewish King Aristobulus" was among the defeated kings during the victory celebrations in Rome.¹⁸ Additionally, on the monument erected in commemoration of this victory, the name of "Aristobulus the King of the Jews" is also included among the defeated kings.¹⁹ Jewish sources also provide parallel information regarding the independent structure governed by the Hasmoneans. In the Book of 1 Maccabees, it is narrated that due to the events that occurred between 142–135 BCE, "the rule of the idolaters came to an end in Israel"²⁰ and Israel's enemies were defeated, and "freedom was achieved."²¹ In the Babylonian Talmud²², the term *Malkhut Hashmonay* (the Hasmonean Kingdom) is used to refer to the dynasty.²³ In another part of the Babylonian Talmud²⁴, Alexander Janneus, referred to as *Yannai/Yannay*, is described as *Melekh* (the King).²⁵ Numismatic findings indeed corroborate this situation. Some of the coins minted by Alexander Janneus bear the inscription *Yehonatan haMelekh* (Yehonatan the King) in Paleo-Hebrew on the obverse side and *Basileos Aleksandrou* (of Alexandros the King) in Greek on the reverse side.²⁶ Furthermore, Antigonos II Mattathias (40–37 BCE), one of the last representatives of the dynasty, features the inscription *Mattityah haKohen Gadol* (Mattityah the High Priest) in Paleo Hebrew on the obverse side and the Greek inscription *Basileos Antigonou* (of Antigonos the King) on the reverse side of the bilingual coins he minted.²⁷

As seen in ancient works, Jewish sources and numismatic

¹³ JUST. EPIT. 36.3. Here, there are significant debates about the misunderstanding of Justinus, suggesting that the issue in question is not independence but rather a treaty. See: COŞKUN 2018, 181–203.

¹⁴ JOSEPH. AJ. 13.11.1; JOSEPH. BJ. 1.3.1.

¹⁵ STRAB. 16.2.40.

¹⁶ JOSEPH. AJ. 14.3.1. Even though the gift bears the name Alexander, the gift was sent by Aristobulus II, and the name Alexander on the gift refers to Alexander Janneus. It is highly likely that this gift was prepared by Janneus but presented by his son Aristobulus II (See: MARCUS 1957, 467 fn. c).

¹⁷ DIOD. 50.2.

¹⁸ APP. MITH. 117.

¹⁹ DIOD. 50.4; APP. SYR. 50.

²⁰ 1 MACC. 13.35–41.

²¹ 1 MACC. 14.26.

²² BABYLONIAN TALMUD.

²³ BT. ROSH HASHANAH 18b.15.

²⁴ BABYLONIAN TALMUD.

²⁵ BT. KIDDUSHIN 66a.9–11.

²⁶ HENDIN 2021, 176, Pl. 15, No. 6183, 178, Pl. 16, No. 6189; MADDEN 1881, 85 (1), (2).

²⁷ HENDIN 2021, 191, Pl. 17, No. 6203.

⁴ JOSEPH. AJ. 12.5.4.

⁵ 2 MACC. 6:18–31; 7:1–41.

⁶ 1 MACC. 1:42–48.

⁷ ZEITLIN 1968, 94–95.

⁸ GRABBE 2010, 67.

⁹ SCHWARTZ 2014, 28.

¹⁰ ATKINSON 2016, 27–28.

¹¹ PERDUE/CARTER 2015, 211–213.

¹² GRAYZEL 1968, 79–80.

evidence, Hasmonean leaders held titles belonging to sovereign and independent rulers. Furthermore, the statements regarding the administrative system's resemblance to a monarchy are noteworthy. As a matter of fact, there is no doubt about the existence of the Hasmonean State today. Current scholarship on the independence of the Hasmoneans is quite numerous. However, in a literature review of this scholarship, despite there being almost a consensus that independence was established during the reign of John Hyrcanus I (Ioannes Hyrcanos/134–104 BCE), it is noteworthy that there are different opinions regarding the date of the political independence of the Judeans under Hasmoneans. Although this is the case, there is no existing research that analyses and evaluates these views collectively. For this reason, in this study, firstly, the existing views on the political independence of the Hasmonean State will be listed along with their justifications. Then, the indicated dates and events will be evaluated within the scope of political freedom, independence, sovereignty, kingship, kingdom, monarchy, and vassalage concepts and regarding the distinction between political independence and religious independence. Finally, by examining the conditions of the period through primary sources, numismatic evidence and archaeological findings, an attempt will be made to present a relatively new argument for the political independence of the Hasmoneans that points to the period of John Hyrcanus I.

A SURVEY ON THE CURRENT SCHOLARSHIP ON THE POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE OF THE HASMONEAN STATE

The events that are believed to indicate the establishment of the political independence of the Hasmonean State are scattered throughout various periods of the dynasty's history. Generally, these dating estimates fall between the late first half and the late second half of the 2nd century BCE. Certainly, this situation is related to the various activities carried out by the leaders of the Maccabean Revolt and the Hasmonean Dynasty.

The first point where the political independence of the Hasmonean State was established was during the period of Judas. In the time span from Judas' assumption of leadership in the Maccabean Revolt to the year 164 BCE, the Maccabees achieved superiority over the Seleucids in three battles (Ma'aleh Levona, Beth Horon, and Emmaus). Following these initial achievements, Judas launched an attack on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, which was under Seleucid control, and successfully liberated the temple from Seleucid occupation. Thus, in 164 BCE, Jewish worship was reinstated.²⁸ However, the Seleucid garrison placed by Antiochus IV in the Akra, located on the same mountain as the temple, had not yet been expelled from the city.

In 164 BCE, the Seleucid King Antiochus IV passed away, and his young son Antiochus V Eupator (164–161 BCE) came to power under the regency of Lysias. At the beginning of their reign, Antiochus V and Lysias found themselves embroiled in a struggle for the throne in the Seleucid capital, Antioch (Antiokheia). Before engaging in the struggle for

the throne, they offered Judas a treaty to avoid leaving unresolved issues behind. The ongoing Battle of Beth Zachariah between the Seleucid Empire and the Maccabees in 162 BCE ended with this proposal, and henceforth, the Jews were granted the privilege to practice their religious worship as they desired. Thus, the decree of Antiochus IV, which violated the various aspects of Jewish religion, was rendered invalid. After the treaty, Antiochus V and Lysias destroyed the walls and fortifications surrounding Jerusalem and marched towards Antioch.²⁹ Additionally, during the Battle of Beth Zachariah, the Jewish high priest Menelaus, who collaborated with the Seleucids, was executed.³⁰ From 162 BCE onwards, the victories achieved by Judas, especially the restoration of freedom to Jewish religious practices, are considered by some scholars as the date when Jewish independence was attained.³¹

Another point indicating the establishment of the political independence of the Hasmonean State corresponds to the period of Jonathan. Of course, these views are based on various events that occurred during Jonathan's reign. The Seleucid throne struggles that began during the reign of King Antiochus V continued to escalate under the leadership of Jonathan. As part of these struggles, Seleucid claimants offered certain privileges to the Judeans to gain their support and promised concessions they would make if they were to come to power. In this scope, Jonathan was appointed by the Seleucid kings as the high priest (archiereus/kohen gadol), commander (strategos), and governor (meridarkhes).³² Thus, the leader of the Maccabees gained control over religious, military, and administrative powers in Judea. Particularly noteworthy is the high priesthood bestowed upon Jonathan by the Seleucids, which subsequently became hereditary among his family members. The developments during the period of Jonathan have led to interpretations that the political independence of the Hasmonean State was achieved during this time.³³

Another period that intensifies interpretations regarding the political independence of the Hasmoneans is the era of Simon. During the period of Simon, the Seleucid throne struggles continued intensively.³⁴ Similarly, during this period, claimants to the throne offered privileges to the Judeans to gain their support. As part of the granted privileges, Demetrius II Nicator (145–138 BCE and 129–126 BCE) issued a decree acknowledging Simon as the high priest and mentioned that he had abolished taxes from the Jewish regions. At this point, the Book of 1 Maccabees uses an expression indicating "the end of the rule of idolaters in Israel."³⁵ In addition, Simon and his family are depicted as those who "defeated Israel's enemies and secured Israel's freedom."³⁶ Josephus, referring to the abolition of taxes,

²⁹ 1 MACC. 6.58–62.

³⁰ JOSEPH. AJ. 12.9.7.

³¹ Conder states that during the time of Jonathan, Jewish independence was established, but it had not yet been recognized by major powers of the time like Egypt and Syria (See: CONDER 1879, 132, 160).

³² 1 MACC. 10.59–65.

³³ For some of these opinions see: BICKERMAN 1962, 138–139; DABROWA 2010, 49; REGEV 2013, 17–18; GRAYZEL 1968, 81; ZEITLIN 1968, 143.

³⁴ For the throne wars see: COŞKUN 2021a, 269–292.

³⁵ 1 MACC. 13.35–41.

³⁶ 1 MACC. 14.26.

²⁸ 1 MACC. 4.41–59; JOSEPH. BJ. 1.1.4; 2 MACC. 10.5–8.

uses the expression, “after assuming the role of high priest, Simon liberated the people from the oppression of the Macedonian (Seleucid) rulers.”³⁷ The interpretation of these expressions in the sources as independence is essentially related to the governance philosophy of the Seleucid State. The Seleucid State, after all, is an empire that expanded through conquests. However, it is more focused on tribute and taxation rather than governing vast territories and populations.³⁸ Therefore, taxation and tribute are significant factors in the issue of independence during this period. The developments experienced during the era of Simon have led some scholars to date the political independence of the Hasmonean State to this point.³⁹ However, it should be noted that there are perspectives that interpret the current development more as economic independence rather than political independence.⁴⁰

There is another event that leads to interpretations dating the political independence of the Hasmonean State to the period of Simon. Accordingly, after the death of Demetrios II, Diodotus Tryphon (142–138 BCE) and Antiochus VII Sidetes (138–129 BCE) engaged in a struggle for the Seleucid throne. As part of the struggle, Antiochus VII offered Simon all the rights and privileges granted to the Judeans by previous Seleucid kings. Moreover, he offered Simon the ability to mint coins in his own name and the recognition of the freedom of Jerusalem and the temple.⁴¹ The offer, combined with Simon’s existing positions as commander, governor and high priest, has led to some interpretations dating the political independence of the Hasmoneans to this event.⁴²

There is one more event that contributes to placing the political independence of the Hasmoneans in the period of Simon. Indeed, Simon permitted the departure of the Seleucid forces and non-Jewish residents from Akra in 142 BCE due to the issues of famine and lack of access to basic resources among those living within the garrison established by Antiochus IV in Jerusalem. Following this development, Akra was cleansed of all pagan symbols.⁴³ As a result of the final development and all other events that occurred during Simon’s reign, Judea and its inhabitants finally attained the stability and peace they had long yearned for. Therefore, Judean authorities honored Simon and his family by declaring him leader (hegemon), commander and high priest in the year 140 BCE.⁴⁴ In the preamble of the decree announcing the decisions it mentions “the third year of high priest Simon’s leadership.” This statement indicates that the Jews had started their own dating system. The aforementioned recent developments have also led to dating the

political independence of the Hasmoneans to the period of Simon.⁴⁵ However, there are also opinions stating that the recent development does not necessarily indicate political independence.⁴⁶

Another period in which the political independence of the Hasmoneans was heavily dated is the era of John Hyrcanus I. After the death of Simon, his son, Hyrcanus I, who took over the administration, had to deal with the Jerusalem siege conducted by the Seleucid king Antiochus VII (138–129 BC) between 134–132 BCE, after establishing his authority.⁴⁷ The siege was brought to an end with the conditions that the Judeans disarm, pay taxes for areas outside Judea, and provide hostages and tribute.⁴⁸ However, despite the treaty, Antiochus VII proceeded to demolish the fortifications surrounding Jerusalem before withdrawing from the region.⁴⁹ Following the conclusion of the siege, Antiochus VII turned his attention to the Parthians in 131 BCE.⁵⁰ Hyrcanus I, on the other hand, increased his military power by employing mercenary forces.⁵¹ Justin indicates that during the war, Antiochus VII had the support of many kings from the East.⁵² Josephus also mentions that during the campaign, a unit under the command of Hyrcanus I joined the ranks of the Seleucids.⁵³ During the mentioned conflict, Antiochus VII passed away around 129 BCE.⁵⁴ After the death of Antiochus VII, Hyrcanus I seized control of Medaba, Samega, and their surroundings in the east of Judea, as well as the areas of Shechem and Mount Gerizim.⁵⁵ Moreover, by moving southward, he conquered numerous strategic positions, including important Idumean cities like Dora and Marissa. He also managed to bring the Idumaeans under his control.⁵⁶ Subsequently, he laid siege to Samaria.⁵⁷ There is also archaeological evidence for the extensive military campaigns led by Hyrcanus I, especially those conducted in the coastal plain.⁵⁸ The mentioned archaeological findings indicate that Hyrcanus I carried out these military activities around 112–111 BCE.⁵⁹

⁴⁵ BARON 1952, 229–230; FREEMAN 2013, 340; GRAETZ 1891, 520; SHATZMAN 1999, 49; ALLEGRO 2015, 100; KLAUSNER 1972a, 200–204; TRAMPEDACH 2012, 62; GRABBE 2010, 68; PERDUE/CARTER 2015, 213; COHEN 2014, 3; TCHERIKOVER 1959, 238.

⁴⁶ ECKHARDT 2016, 58; MEIR 2023, 133–158; OTTLEY 1901, 266; SMALLWOOD 1976, 4.

⁴⁷ DIOD. 34/35.1.

⁴⁸ JOSEPH. AJ. 13.8.3.

⁴⁹ DIOD. 34/35.1.

⁵⁰ DIOD. 34/35.15; APP. SYR. 68.

⁵¹ TCHERIKOVER 1959, 251.

⁵² JUST. EPIT. 38.10.

⁵³ JOSEPH. AJ. 13.8.4.

⁵⁴ DIOD. 34/35. 16–17.

⁵⁵ KLAUSNER 1972, 215; MARGOLIS/MARX 1945, 152.

⁵⁶ JOSEPH. BJ. 1.2.6; JOSEPH. AJ. 13.9.1.

⁵⁷ STERN 1976, 219.

⁵⁸ ESHEL 2008, 81.

⁵⁹ ATKINSON 2016, 68, 70–75; REGEV 2013, 70; TRAMPEDACH 2012, 70–71. There is a particular uncertainty regarding the date of the siege of Samaria. Berthelot, for instance, suggests that military operations took place between 112/111–107 BCE (See: BERTHELOT 2018, 250). Bevan, indicates that it occurred around 108 BCE (See: BEVAN 1902, 256). Finkielstzajn, who evaluates the issue according to archaeological findings, states that the conquests of Hyrcanus took place between 128–110 BCE and that the connection of the settlements of Samaria and the capture of Marissa took place in 111–108 BCE (See: FINKIELSZTEJN 1998, 45, 49). Goldstein, on the other hand, believes that it occurred between 111 and 107 BCE (See: GOLDSTEIN 2007, 329). Horsley states that according to

³⁷ JOSEPH. AJ. 13.6.7.

³⁸ MEIR 2023, 137.

³⁹ MILMAN 1913, 378; RAPPAPORT 2012, 156; TCHERIKOVER, 1959, 236; ZEITLIN 1968, 143–144.

⁴⁰ SCHÜRER 1973, 190.

⁴¹ 1 MACC. 15.2–7.

⁴² Graetz particularly attempted to support the privileges offered by Antiochus VII, especially the right to mint coins, with numismatic evidence. The coins presented by Graetz as evidence feature the *Israel Shekel* on the obverse side and the inscription *Yerushalayim haKodesha* (Holy Jerusalem) on the reverse side. However, there is no mention of Simon’s name or any title referring to him on these coins (See: GRAETZ 1891, 525, 528). And also: DABROWA 2010, 68; BARON 1952, 166; ZEITLIN 1968, 145.

⁴³ 1 MACC. 13.49–52.

⁴⁴ 1 MACC. 14.27–45.

During this period, Hyrcanus I also pursued some financial policies. One of the financial measures implemented was the cessation of payments to the Seleucid State.⁶⁰ Indeed, in the financial domain, Hyrcanus I also initiated the practice of minting coins in his own name. In his bilingual coins made of bronze in Greek and Hebrew, there are no representations of any humans, gods, or animals.⁶¹ The fact that Hyrcanus I had coins minted in his own name is highly significant in the context of the subject matter and carries symbolic meanings. Indeed, at the beginning of Hyrcanus I's reign, especially between 131–129 BCE, he minted coins on behalf of the Seleucid Kings.⁶² However, it is observed that he abandoned this practice in the later years of his rule. All these actions attributed to Hyrcanus I are believed to have been carried out by his own will and in his own name. Indeed, in the sources related to the subject, unlike the periods of Jonathan and Simon, there is no statement indicating that the Seleucid administration granted Hyrcanus I any privilege or permission regarding the minting of coins. The current situation forms the basis for the views that Hyrcanus I began to act independently in administrative, military, and financial matters, thereby establishing the political independence of the Hasmonean State during his reign.⁶³ However, at this point, there are also opinions suggesting that it would not be realistic to claim that the alleged independence of the Hasmonean State was fully recognized by the Seleucid State or other states in the region.⁶⁴

DISCUSSION AND A NEW ARGUMENT POINTING TO THE PERIOD OF JOHN HYRCANUS I

As presented in the previous section, there are various possible dates and diverse views regarding the political independence of the Judeans of that era. Before delving into discussions about current views, it is necessary to present the conceptual framework of the term political independence and examine the basis of these opinions. Indeed, one of the fundamental issues regarding the topic is what independence meant for the Judeans during that period. When we examine the period from the Babylonian exile to the Maccabean Revolt (586 BCE–167 BCE), it is noteworthy that the Judeans did not rebel despite not having political independence. For they had a long tradition of recognizing and adopting foreign rulers. They welcomed Cyrus the Great,

the archaeological evidence, the campaign could have taken place as early as 112 BCE, specifically in 109 BCE (See: HORSLEY 2009, 148). Klausner also points to the period between 111 and 107 BCE (See: KLAUSNER 1972, 219). Schäfer evaluates it as either 108 or 107 BCE (See: SCHÄFER 2003, 68). According to Stern, it occurred in 107 BCE (See: STERN 1976, 219). Ultimately, all the mentioned dates point to the era of Seleucid King Antiochus IX Kyzikenos (113–97 BCE).

⁶⁰ JOSEPH. AJ. 13.10.1; M. NASHIM, SOTAH 9:10 (For MISHNAH text and translation from sefaria.org).

⁶¹ SCHÜRER 1890, 284–285; MAGNESS 2012, 104–105; REGEV 2013, 175; For the coins see: HENDIN 2021, 163, Pl. 14, No. 6171, 162, Pl. 14, No. 6168; MADDEN 1881, 76 (1), 78 (7), 80 (25); MESHORER 2001, 201, Pl. 5, Nos. A1–A10.

⁶² ATKINSON 2016, 102; HENDIN 2007–2008, 83–84; HENDIN 2021, 139, Pl. 14, Nos. 6165–6166; ARIEL 2021, 215–217.

⁶³ BICKERMAN 1962, 149; BERTHELOT 2018, 177; MARGOLIS/MARX 1945, 152; GOODMAN 2007, 50; OTTLEY 1901, 266; KRATZ 2015, 44; SCHÄFER 2003, 68; SCHÜRER 1890, 282–283.

⁶⁴ COHEN 2014, 3.

Alexander the Great, the Ptolemies and the first Seleucids as foreign rulers.⁶⁵ The most probable reason for this situation is that there was no intervention in the Jewish faith in the indicated period. The Judeans refrained from rebellion against foreign authority due to their religious freedom. However, they rose in rebellion only when there was interference with the Jewish faith, notably during the reign of Antiochus IV. At this point, it can be stated that the Judeans of the period, at least the majority, perceived independence more as a religious phenomenon rather than a political one and were content with that. In fact, there are expressions in the Book of 1 Maccabees⁶⁶ that support this idea. At a time when political independence had not yet been fully achieved, the work mentions independence with reference to religious developments. The statements “the rule of the idolaters came to an end in Israel”⁶⁷ and “they fought for the freedom of Israel, and they succeeded in saving Israel”⁶⁸ emphasize this understanding.

In the post-exilic period, when independence was a religious matter for the vast majority of the Judeans, especially under the hegemony of the Ptolemaic and Seleucid rulers and probably under the influence of Hellenistic culture, there was a change in the prevailing understanding. Indeed, as seen in the example of the Maccabean Revolt, Jewish belief cannot accommodate imperial demands. The inability of Jewish faith to align with these demands indirectly results in Judeans being unable to conform to the Hellenistic monarchs. As a result, a strong national identity began to develop among the Jewish population in opposition to Hellenistic monarchs and imperial demands. This national identity aims for a Jewish State founded on the temple, land, and military.⁶⁹ The transformation in the understanding of independence can be observed through the abandonment of the struggle by the Hasideans, who supported the movement since the beginning of the Maccabean Revolt, following the re-establishment of religious independence under the leadership of Judas in 162 BCE.⁷⁰ As seen in this example, Judeans who perceived independence as a religious phenomenon have concluded their struggle once religious goals were achieved. However, despite the re-establishment of religious independence, Judeans driven by the evolving national identity and a desire for political independence continued the struggle under the leadership of the Maccabees. Within this scope, the study focuses on the quest for political independence of the Judeans and the Hasmonean State.

At this point, it is necessary to outline what political independence meant for the Judeans and/or Hasmoneans in the Hellenistic world. In this context, the issue will be addressed through the concepts of *political freedom*, *independence*, *sovereignty*, *kingship*, *kingdom*, *monarchy*, and *vassalage*. The modern definitions presented generally arise from the existence

⁶⁵ COŞKUN 2022, 152.

⁶⁶ The fact that the author of the Book of 1 Maccabees, whose name is unknown and is most likely a historian from the Hasmonean court, wrote the work around 100 BCE (RAPPAPORT 2012, 129) is also important in terms of the possibility of reflecting the understanding of the Jews of the period.

⁶⁷ 1 MACC. 13:35–41.

⁶⁸ 1 MACC. 14:26.

⁶⁹ AITKEN 2011, 37.

⁷⁰ NANA 2008, 362.

of modern states and define them. However, they also have a limited but analytical value for the ancient world.⁷¹ During the period when the Hasmoneans sought political independence, concepts such as *political freedom* and *independence* were expressed through the terms *eleutheria* (ἐλευθερία) and *autonomia* (αὐτονομία).⁷² *Sovereignty*, *kingship* and *kingdom* are defined by the concepts of *monarkhia* (μοναρχία) and *basileia* (βασίλεια).⁷³ The word *monarchy* is indeed represented by *monarkhia*, while *vassal* is seen as *hyparkhos* (ὑπαρχος).⁷⁴

From the presented concepts, *eleutheria* is defined as “freedom, liberty, freed from a thing.” On the other hand, *autonomia* is generally explained as “independence.”⁷⁵ However, this is a different kind of independence. In internal affairs, *autonomia* means “the state of affairs where a community is responsible for its own laws.” In this sense, it means *self-determination*, whereas *freedom* (*eleutheria*) means “absence of external constraint.” But *autonomia* is also regularly used in the context of interstate relations, where it indicates “a limited independence permitted by a stronger power to a weaker”⁷⁶ and different from *eleutheria*, *autonomia* in this scope emphasizes the aspect of “allegiance to another powerful state.” Within the provided definitions, *autonomia* will be interpreted in the study as “limited independence permitted by a stronger power.” Among other related concepts, *monarkhia* is used to denote “absolute rule, sovereignty, monarchy,” while *basileia* is explained as “a kingdom, dominion, hereditary monarchy.”⁷⁷ Indeed *monarkhia* and *basileia* especially became dominant forms of governance in the Hellenistic world, particularly with the reign of Alexander the Great. Hellenistic monarchies typically governed vast territories. They occupied through conquests and often leveraging existing local administrative practices during their rule. Those who governed such political structures often presented themselves as “successors to previous kings,” because hereditary succession has been a significant factor in the transition of power.⁷⁸ And the last term mentioned, *hyparkhos*, is simply defined as “under-ruler.”⁷⁹ According to the current definitions provided, the political independence of the Hasmoneans will be evaluated based on the point that it is seen as a political structure of the type *monarkhia* or *basileia* under the leadership of the dynasty leaders who act like *monarchs* or *kings*, and also not under the administration of a higher authority, and possessing *eleutheria*.

When examining existing views on the political independence of the Hasmonean State within the stated conceptual framework, it appears that the argument suggesting it occurred during the period of Judas is deemed invalid. As mentioned earlier, under the treaty that ended the Battle

of Beth Zachariah in 162 BCE, the privileges granted to the Jews only resulted in the cessation of restrictive practices on Judaism by Antiochus IV. This event marks the point at which the Jews became independent, not politically, but religiously. In fact, after the privileges granted in 162 BCE, no Seleucid king intervened in the Jewish faith. When viewed from a political perspective, the situation is quite the opposite. After the treaty, the walls and fortifications of Jerusalem were demolished.⁸⁰ This indicates the presence of Seleucid control over the city. Moreover, Alkimos was appointed to the position of high priesthood, which serves as the local administrative and religious representative among Judeans, instead of Menelaus⁸¹, and the existing Seleucid garrison located in the Akra maintained control over the city. As a result, this indicates that the Judeans were still subject to a higher authority in both internal and external administrative matters. Moreover, Judas, who only led a regional rebellion, could not govern Judea as a sovereign monarch.

Another period that is crucial in dating the opinions about the attainment of political independence for the Hasmonean State is the time of Jonathan. Since the high priesthood came into the hands of the Maccabees during his rule,⁸² these views seem to have arisen. Certainly, this is an important development that cannot be overlooked. However, it should be noted that the high priesthood that came under the control of the Maccabees was offered by the Seleucid Kings, that is, the higher authority. Furthermore, in the later parts of his life, his brother was appointed as a commander and governor.⁸³ In other words, the Maccabean leaders were turned into Seleucid administrative officials. This situation also indicates that the Jews were still being governed by a higher authority. At this point, Jonathan held a position more akin to a loyal *vassal* to the Seleucid rule, providing faithful service, rather than acting as an *independent monarch*. For these reasons, Jonathan is generously rewarded with various positions by the Seleucid administration.⁸⁴ On the other hand, when the period after Jonathan is examined, it is evident that the Seleucid dominion still persisted over Judea. Therefore, it can be argued that there is no political independence under Jonathan’s rule as well.

Another period that serves as a basis for the political independence of the Hasmonean State is the era of Simon. As mentioned, one of the points of support is that during the Seleucid throne struggles, the candidates promised Simon measures indicating independence, such as abolishing taxes and minting coins to gain the support of the Jews.⁸⁵ The promise regarding taxes is a clear indication of a privilege granted by a stronger power to a weaker one. Furthermore, the authority of Demetrius II over the Seleucid Empire was still contentious when he offered this promise to Simon, as the struggles were ongoing. Therefore, the promise of abolishing taxes remains uncertain. Indeed, in the subsequent period, in 138 BCE, Demetrius II was captured by the Parthians⁸⁶ and Diodotus Tryphon moved to seize the

⁷¹ In fact, Berthelot considers the assumption of many 19th and 20th century scholars that politics and religion are fundamentally at variance with each other to be anachronistic and wrong. According to her, the two concepts were closely related in antiquity and especially in the second temple period (See: BERTHELOT 2018, 59).

⁷² BERRY 2010, 110, 134; WOODHOUSE 1910, 344, 432.

⁷³ BERRY 2010, 142, 222; WOODHOUSE 1910, 470, 797.

⁷⁴ WOODHOUSE 1910, 539, 945.

⁷⁵ BERRY 2010, 117, 215.

⁷⁶ HORNBLLOWER 2012, 214.

⁷⁷ BERRY 2010, 128, 451.

⁷⁸ MURRAY 2012, 785.

⁷⁹ WOODHOUSE 1910, 945.

⁸⁰ 1 MACC. 6.58–62.

⁸¹ VANDERKAM 2004, 226.

⁸² 1 MACC. 10.18–20.

⁸³ 1 MACC. 10.59–65.

⁸⁴ DABROWA 2010, 51; TCHERIKOVER 1959, 236.

⁸⁵ 1 MACC. 13.35–41.

⁸⁶ 1 MACC. 14.1–3; JOSEPH. AJ 13.5.11; APP. SYR. 67.

Seleucid throne.⁸⁷ Thus, Demetrius II could not establish sovereignty over the Seleucid State. Therefore, the privileges he offered to Simon became invalid. Even if we accept that the privileges offered by Demetrius II did not become invalid, the fact remains that the exemption from taxes was granted by the higher authority. Therefore, it is not possible to accept the presented argument regarding the political independence of the Hasmoneans.

The situation regarding the right to mint coins granted to Simon⁸⁸ is similar to the issue of the abolition of taxes. Antiochus VII, who made this promise to Simon, was not yet the undisputed ruler of the entire Seleucid realm when he made these promises. So the privileges mentioned were not yet realized. They were promises that were not certain to be fulfilled and had the possibility of being revoked. Essentially, when we follow the historical process, it can be observed that Antiochus VII emerged victorious from the struggle for the throne with Diodotus Tryphon⁸⁹ and established his sovereignty over the Seleucid Empire.⁹⁰ During the struggle, Simon sent two thousand soldiers and financial aid to Antiochus VII based on their alliance. However, Antiochus VII did not accept this support and had already terminated the agreement between the parties.⁹¹ Moreover, after establishing his sovereignty over the Seleucid State, Antiochus VII sent an envoy to Simon demanding the delivery of revenues from certain regions and payment of compensation.⁹² The current situation clearly indicates that the treaty between the parties had been cancelled and the privileges, including the right to mint coins, granted to Simon were revoked.⁹³ Even if it is assumed that the mentioned promise was not revoked, the fact remains that it was a privilege granted by the higher authority. Furthermore, Antiochus VII laid claim to certain positions under Hasmonean hegemony, indicating that he still regarded the Judeans as his subjects.

There is another aspect of the promise to grant Simon the right to mint coins that is noteworthy. The view that acknowledges the fulfillment of this promise dates the political independence of the Hasmonean State to this point and even grounds its claims by attributing certain coins to the period of Simon. However, this view has become invalid based on recent numismatic studies. Today, it has been revealed that the coins that were previously considered to belong to the period of Simon actually date back to the period of the Jewish-Roman War of 66–73 CE.⁹⁴ Furthermore, Ya'akov Meshorer has presented evidence demonstrating the impossibility of dating these coins to the period of Simon and the absence of any Jewish coin that could be dated to the time of Simon.⁹⁵

The uncertainty regarding the nature of the right to mint coins granted by Antiochus VII is also a subject that needs to be emphasized. As known, the silver coin minted during

the Hellenistic period is considered a symbol of independence. At this point, the possibility that Antiochus VII may have granted the right to mint coins from copper or another material should not be ignored. Indeed, due to the ongoing claim of the Seleucid State over Judea, there are also opinions suggesting that Antiochus VII granted Simon the right to mint bronze coins.⁹⁶ Furthermore, as mentioned, there is not even an example of such a coin available. So, it does not seem likely to date the political independence of the Hasmonean State to the period of Simon through coins.

Another event that caused the dating the political independence of the Hasmonean State to the period of Simon is the evacuation of the Akra garrison from Jerusalem in 142 BCE.⁹⁷ That can also be added to the Jewish authorities' empowerment of Simon and his family with administrative, religious and military responsibilities for their activities, including this incident.⁹⁸ The evacuation of the Akra is a highly significant event in Jewish history. For Akra was located very close to the holy temple in Jerusalem and posed a significant threat to the city due to its strategic position. So, the garrison in Akra was an indicator of Judean subjugation under the Seleucid rule. With the evacuation of the Akra, there remained no foreign factor in terms of administration and military in the heart of Judaism. For this reason, after the evacuation, the Jewish authorities granted religious, administrative and military powers to Simon and his family in 140 BC. As it is known, starting from the era of Antiochus IV, the high priests of Judea were appointed by the Seleucid kings. However, at this point, it is observed that the Jewish authorities offered this position without waiting for approval or permission from the higher authority. This point indicates that under the leadership of Simon, the Jews began to make their own decisions as of 140 BCE. Additionally, the preamble of the decree includes the expression "in the third year of High Priest Simon's tenure." This point also demonstrates that the Jews have initiated their own dating, which was a common custom in the Hellenistic world and often indicated independence.⁹⁹ When the existing evidence is considered in isolation, it gives the impression that under the leadership of Simon, the Judeans transitioned to a form of *monarkhia* with *eleutheria*. However, the aforementioned developments should be evaluated within the historical context, considering what happened before and after. When approached from this perspective, it is observed that just before the evacuation of Akra, Demetrius II told Simon that all his declarations regarding them were valid, the castles they built were granted to them, and their crimes and taxes were forgiven.¹⁰⁰ And right after the Jewish authorities empower Simon, Antiochus VII greets Simon as the high priest, acknowledges the privileges granted by the previous Seleucid kings and offers new privileges.¹⁰¹ These processes clearly highlight the presence of Seleucid authority over the Judeans immediately before and after the developments considered as political independence. It is also noteworthy that among the reasons

⁸⁷ JOSEPH. AJ. 13.6.1.

⁸⁸ 1 MACC. 15.2–7.

⁸⁹ JOSEPH. AJ. 13.7.2; STRAB. 14.5.2.

⁹⁰ 1 MACC. 15.37; APP. SYR. 68; JUST. EPIT. 36.1.

⁹¹ 1 MACC. 15.26–7; JOSEPH. AJ. 13.7.3.

⁹² 1 MACC. 15.28–31.

⁹³ Hoover is of the opinion that Simon never enjoyed the right to mint coins because of his conflict with Antiochus VII over Ioppe and Gazara, and his death in 135 BCE (See: HOOVER 2003, 33).

⁹⁴ HENDIN 2021, 140; HENDIN 2007–2008, 77.

⁹⁵ MESHORER 2001, 134.

⁹⁶ GOLDSTEIN 2007, 320.

⁹⁷ 1 MACC. 13.49–52.

⁹⁸ 1 MACC. 14.27–45.

⁹⁹ LEVINE 1998, 40.

¹⁰⁰ 1 MACC. 13.35–39.

¹⁰¹ 1 MACC. 15.2–7.

for the decision of the Jewish authorities to empower Simon with high authority was his appointment as high priest and friend by Demetrius II.¹⁰² In other words, among the reasons why the Jewish authorities honored Simon were the authorities granted to Simon by the Seleucid authorities. Therefore, there is no attempt against the Seleucid authority in the empowerment of Simon by the Jewish authorities. On the contrary, the powers and high authorities bestowed upon Simon by the Seleucid Kings and the recognition or approval of some of his actions should be considered as political moves reminding that Judea and Simon are still vassals of the Seleucids.¹⁰³ These indicated points clearly demonstrate that the Judeans were still under the Seleucid rule. Therefore, it does not seem possible to attribute the political independence of the Hasmonean State to these events.

Another period for which opinions about the political independence of the Hasmonean State intensified is the era of John Hyrcanus I. After Simon's death, Hyrcanus I assumed leadership, and at the beginning of his reign, Antiochus VII besieged Jerusalem between 134–132 BCE.¹⁰⁴ The siege ended with an agreement between the parties, which involved the payment of tribute and the release of captives by the Jews.¹⁰⁵ Despite the agreement, Antiochus VII ordered the destruction of the walls and fortifications of Jerusalem before leaving the region.¹⁰⁶ According to the developments following the mentioned event, under the leadership of Hyrcanus I, especially between 131–129 BCE, coins were minted on behalf of the Seleucid kings.¹⁰⁷ Additionally, in 131 BCE, Hyrcanus I found himself compelled to support¹⁰⁸ the campaign launched by Antiochus VII against the Parthians.¹⁰⁹ The depicted situation at the beginning of the period of Hyrcanus I indicates that Judeans were still unequivocally in a vassal position under the Seleucid State. This point also makes it impossible to date the political independence to the period of Simon, since the Seleucid dominance continued during the reign of Hyrcanus I.

The death of Antiochus VII in 129 BCE during the Parthian campaign¹¹⁰ marks the beginning of the developments that led to dating the political independence of the Hasmonean State to the period of Hyrcanus I. Hyrcanus I, who was not with Antiochus VII when he died,¹¹¹ is thought to have returned to Judea around 130 BCE. Subsequently, Hyrcanus I embarked on a series of actions that indicated a move towards political independence. The first of these actions was Hyrcanus I's extensive military campaigns.¹¹² The most

significant aspect of Hyrcanus I's military campaigns was that he conducted them according to his own will, without waiting for approval or permission from a higher authority.

Another action indicating that political independence was achieved by Hyrcanus I is the minting of coins in his name.¹¹³ The coins minted under his authority did not feature a king or a similar title. Instead, they bore inscriptions such as *Yehohanan haKohen haGadol veHever haYehudim* (Yehohanan the High Priest and Head of the Jewish Congregation) and *Yehohanan haKohen haGadol Roš Hever haYehudim* (Yehohanan the High Priest (and) Head of the Jewish Congregation).¹¹⁴ Hyrcanus I's last mentioned action, similar to his military campaigns, is significant in that it was carried out without the approval or permission of a higher authority. In addition, considering that he had coins minted on behalf of the Seleucid Kings at the beginning of his rule, the natural conclusion is that he independently ceased minting coins in the name of the Seleucid Kings. This situation concretely indicates a divergence and a claim to sovereignty.

When discussing Hyrcanus I's coins and his claim to political independence, it is necessary to emphasize certain points. Despite the prevalent languages of the time being Aramaic or Greek, these coins were minted in Paleo-Hebrew. This situation is interpreted as a manifestation of Hyrcanus I's claim to be the heir of the ancient and glorious Kingdom of David.¹¹⁵ This aspect resembles the characteristic feature found among the Hellenistic monarchies that emerged prominently with Alexander the Great, which is *presenting themselves as successors to previous kings*. The material of the coins is indeed another point that needs to be considered in the scope of political independence. As mentioned, silver coins minted during the Hellenistic period were often seen as a symbol of independence. However, Hyrcanus I's coins were not made of silver. According to some scholars, the current situation can be explained more by economic reasons than political ones. It is known that during that period, there was no silver mine in Judea.¹¹⁶ Moreover, it should be noted that Hyrcanus I may have followed the examples of other states and cities in the region that minted their own coins. Indeed,

pointed out, Josephus describes the military actions of Hyrcanus I as taking place immediately after the death of the king. Most scholars accept this view and recognise that Hyrcanus I launched military operations as soon as news of the king's death was received, placing Samaria alone between 111–107 BCE. Only some scholars have questioned the possibility of immediate military operations and date the first phase of the conquests to around 125 BCE. However, Shatzman is of the opinion that a reliable answer about the period of military operations can only be given with the help of archaeological data. These archaeological data were not accessible to early scholars. For this reason, he argues that the chronology of Hyrcanus' military campaigns should be reconstructed in line with the archaeological data found in the last 30 years. At this point, a consensus has begun to emerge that the first military campaigns began around 125 BCE (See: SHATZMAN 2012, 31–41). Coşkun also states that Hyrcanus I waited until 125 BCE to begin these actions and that a consensus has begun to emerge in recent years on this dating (See: COŞKUN 2021, 213, fn.59).

¹¹³ The compromise reached after the siege of Jerusalem ended with the death of Antiochus VII in 129 BCE, and the practice of minting coins in the name of the Seleucid kings was terminated by Ioannes Hyrcanus on this date (See: COŞKUN 2021, 213; HOOVER 2003, 34).

¹¹⁴ SCHÜRER 1890, 284–285. For the coins see: HENDIN 2021, 163, Pl. 14, No. 6171, 162, Pl. 14, No. 6168; MADDEN 1881, 76 (1), 78 (7), 80 (25); MESHORER 2001, 201, Pl. 5, Nos. A1–A10.

¹¹⁵ HENDIN 2007–2008, 85–86.

¹¹⁶ RAJAK 2001, 70–71.

¹⁰² 1 MACC. 14.38–39.

¹⁰³ DABROWA 2010, 59. Coşkun emphasises at this point that the power providing legitimacy to Simon was clearly Demetrius II (See: COŞKUN 2022, 157). Berthelot also supports this view and states that there was a relative independence under Simon, but the actual independence was achieved during the reign of Hyrcanus I (See: BERTHELOT 2018, 177).

¹⁰⁴ DIOD. SIC. 34/35.1.

¹⁰⁵ JOSEPH. AJ. 13.8.3.

¹⁰⁶ DIOD. SIC. 34/35.1.

¹⁰⁷ ATKINSON 2016, 102; ARIEL 2021, 215–217; HENDIN 2021, 139, Pl. 14, Nos. 6165–6166; HENDIN 2007–2008, 83–84.

¹⁰⁸ JOSEPH. AJ. 13.8.4.

¹⁰⁹ DIOD. SIC. 34/35.15; APP. SYR. 68.

¹¹⁰ DIOD. SIC. 34/35.16–17.

¹¹¹ GOLDSTEIN 2007, 324.

¹¹² The complex situation regarding the date of John Hyrcanus I's military actions, mentioned in the previous heading, is considered to be based on the fact that there are no contemporary sources from his time. As Shatzman

during this period, among the cities and states that minted coins, only the powerful ones used silver, while others contented themselves with minting bronze coins.¹¹⁷ According to another opinion on the subject, it was possible that there was a sufficient supply of silver coins already in circulation, and bronze coins met the national, economic, and communication needs of the Hasmoneans. Thus, this could be cited as a rationale for Hyrcanus I not having silver coins.¹¹⁸

One of Hyrcanus I's last actions, considered as a political independence move, following the death of King Antiochus VII, was that he stopped paying taxes to the Seleucid State. According to the available information, Hyrcanus I ceased making payments to the Seleucid State sometime after 129 BCE.¹¹⁹ Upon examining the sources related to the period, it is observed that there was no privilege or amnesty offered by the Seleucid authorities regarding Hyrcanus I's action. At this point, considering the governance philosophy of the Seleucid State, which focused on taxation and tribute¹²⁰ rather than managing large regions and populations, along with other developments, it can be said that there was no longer any organic connection between the Seleucid State and Judean administration in terms of the superior-subordinate relationship.

When considering these actions to point to the separation of the Judeans from the Seleucid State in isolation, it can lead to misleading results. To reach a sound judgment on the matter, the historical process should also be examined. As mentioned, Hyrcanus I was able to undertake the above-mentioned actions after the death of Antiochus VII in 129 BCE. First of all, it should be noted that some other separatist movements also managed to secede from the Seleucid State at about this time. As a result of these developments, the institutional and organizational structure of the Seleucid State had effectively collapsed and the Seleucid realm had reduced to only Syria.¹²¹ With this collapse, there was no power left to establish a solid authority in the Near East in the second half of the second century BCE. In the absence of such a power, medium and small-scale political structures in the region were able to claim their independence.¹²² Demetrius II, who succeeded Antiochus VII, failed to hold the Levant as tightly as his predecessors and the kingdom began to rapidly disintegrate. In the Levant, this situation started with the secession of the Judeans.¹²³ Furthermore, from the death of Antiochus VII in 129 BCE to 111 BCE, there were continuous struggles for the throne within the Seleucid State, and the country was governed by inept rulers.¹²⁴ In other words, due to the onset of a period of decline for the Seleucid State, a significant power vacuum emerged in the region. The power vacuum and the weakening of the Seleucid state have reached such dimensions that it is no longer possible for them to cope with the Hasmonean hegemony in the region. In short, the period during which Hyrcanus I

carried out his activities and the subsequent events represent the most favorable conditions for the Hasmoneans to claim their political independence. Indeed, it is possible to state clearly that the historical process demonstrates that no Seleucid king after Antiochus VII managed to establish dominance over Judea.

All the arguments presented regarding the political independence of the Hasmonean State indicate that the political independence established by the Judeans at some point between the mid-second century BCE and the end of the century occurred under the rule of Hyrcanus I. Under his leadership, the Judeans lived under a governing structure of their own resembling a *monarkhia* or *basileia*, possessing *eleutheria*. Namely, they did not pay taxes to another state, acted independently without instructions or approval from another state, minted their own coins and engaged in expansionist activities based on their own will. Here, the choice of the phrase "a structure resembling monarchy or *basileia*" stems from the fact that Hyrcanus I did not officially use the title of a monarch. This title was adopted in the period following Hyrcanus I.

At this point, an argument for the political independence of the Hasmonean State, which is relatively different from existing views, and which has not received much attention before, will be pointed out. The fact that the Hasmonean rulers who succeeded Hyrcanus I adopted titles such as *basileus* and *melekh* essentially indicates that political independence was established during the period of Hyrcanus I. In sources that provide information about the period after Hyrcanus I, events and narratives undergo a sudden change. From this point onward, there is a radical shift towards discussing monarchy, crowned members of the dynasty, and leaders who proclaim themselves as kings and act independently like sovereign monarchs. In one of these sources, Josephus describes Hyrcanus I's son, Aristobulus I, as someone "striving to convert the rule into a monarchy and depicts him as the first crowned member of the dynasty" in the history of their lineage.¹²⁵ The information presented by Josephus cannot be corroborated through numismatic sources, because on the coins minted under the name of Aristobulus I, who followed his father's example by minting coins in his own name, inscriptions in Paleo-Hebrew feature *Yehuda haKohen Galul (Gadol?) Hever haYehudim* (Yehuda the (High?) Priest and the Jewish Congregation).¹²⁶ As seen, Aristobulus I does not use the titles that a crowned monarch would be expected to bear. Upon examining the short reign of Aristobulus I, lasting approximately a year, it is observed that he primarily grappled with internal family struggles and illnesses. He also carried out a military operation in the Iturea, the details of which are not known.¹²⁷ Therefore, it is possible to conclude that during his short and troubled reign, Aristobulus I did not undertake any actions that could be considered as "establishing political independence." If the information presented by Josephus about Aristobulus I being crowned and attempting to convert the system into a monarchy was accepted as accurate, it would imply that he had to be already in charge of a politically independent structure to carry out

¹¹⁷ For this view see: MEYERS/CHANCEY 2012, 44.

¹¹⁸ HENDIN 2021, 147.

¹¹⁹ JOSEPH. AJ 13.10.1; M. NASHIM, SOTAH 9:10.

¹²⁰ MEIR 2023, 137.

¹²¹ STERN 1976, 218.

¹²² SHATZMAN 2012, 29.

¹²³ COŞKUN 2021, 186.

¹²⁴ For the period see: SCHÄFER 2003, 68; STERN 1976, 220; KOSMIN 2014, 22–24.

¹²⁵ JOSEPH. AJ 13.11.1; JOSEPH. BJ 1.3.1.

¹²⁶ HENDIN 2021, 168, Pl. 15, No. 6179; MADDEN 1881, 82 (1).

¹²⁷ JOSEPH. AJ 13.11.1–3; JOSEPH. BJ 1.3.

such actions. Since the mentioned political independence could not be established during the reign of Aristobulus I, it should be dated back to an earlier period. Within the scope of the available evidence, the most suitable period for this dating is the era of Hyrcanus I.

This theory based on the information given by Josephus about Aristobulus I can also be validated through the reign of Alexander Janneus. Unlike Josephus, Strabon identifies Janneus as the first Hasmonean leader to “declare himself king.”¹²⁸ This information can also be corroborated by Jewish sources and numismatic evidence. In the Babylonian Talmud¹²⁹, Janneus, referred to as *Yannai/Yannay*, is described as a *Melekh* (King).¹³⁰ And also, some of the bilingual coins dated to his period feature the inscription in Paleo-Hebrew *Yehonatan haMelekh* (Yehonatan the King) on the obverse side and in Greek *Basileos Aleksandrou* (of Aleksandros the King) on the reverse side.¹³¹ When examining the reign of Janneus, for whom the use of the title *king* can be clearly proven, the first notable aspect is that he acted as a *monarch*. He was busy with issues such as trying to expand his borders, suppressing internal riots, preventing other countries from taking control of Judea and interested in the issue of succession.¹³² That is to say, he endeavored to keep the existing political structure in place and to expand its sphere of influence. It cannot be said that Janneus also fought to establish political independence. Therefore Janneus, who uses the title of king and acts as a monarch, also was the ruler of a structure that has already achieved its political independence. Since the aforementioned independence, which was not achieved during the reign of Janneus, was also not gained by Aristobulus I, this development must have taken place during the reign of Hyrcanus I. This is another point indicating that the independence of the Hasmonean State was achieved during the reign of Hyrcanus I.

CONCLUSION

There are numerous views pointing to different dates regarding the political independence of the Hasmonean State. The divergence of opinions can be attributed to several factors, including the failure to distinguish between religious independence and political independence, making judgments solely based on statements in sources without examining the historical process, the undefined boundaries of political independence during the Hellenistic period and that early scholarship was not aware of new findings, especially archaeological ones.

When the political independence of Judea is searched as the point where it is not under the rule of another state and has a free and sovereign structure and attention is paid to the distinction between religious independence and political independence, the following situation emerges: it seems very unlikely to date the political independence of the Judeans to the periods of Judas and Jonathan. Existing

evidence indicates that during that period, the Seleucid rule over Judea unquestionably persisted, with Jonathan particularly serving on behalf of the Seleucid state. In the period of Simon, although some signs may be interpreted as indicating political independence, the overall picture suggests that he, too, essentially served on behalf of the Seleucids. Indeed, issues such as the minting of coins and taxation mentioned during the period of Simon were privileges granted by the superior Seleucid administration. The Seleucid rulers, through concessions and approvals given to Simon, continuously emphasized and reminded the loyalty of the Judeans to the Seleucid state. Even at the point where Jewish authorities declared Simon as a leader, commander, and high priest, the glorification primarily revolved around the gains Simon obtained from the Seleucids. At this point, the political structure during Simon's period aligns with the definition of *limited independence permitted by a stronger power*. It may therefore be assumed that under Simon Judea was a vassal state with autonomy. The current situation can be evaluated as the restoration of autonomy by Simon after it was lost due to the developments during the reign of Antiochus IV, following the autonomy recognized by Antiochus III at the beginning of Seleucid rule over Judea. This point can also be considered as the point where the understanding of Jewish independence, which we think started to change with the Maccabean Revolt, literally shifted to the political sphere, for now the Judeans recognize and even desire monarch-like leaders, in the case of the powers granted to Simon.

I agree with the view that the political independence of the Judeans was established during the reign of Hyrcanus I. Indeed, Hyrcanus I conducted military, administrative, and financial activities independently, by his own will, without the need for approval from a higher authority. The coins minted by him emphasize this situation. The activities carried out by Hyrcanus I at his own will were previously presented during the periods of Jonathan and Simon as promises of the Seleucid authority. This situation clearly reveals the difference between the structure during the period of Hyrcanus I and the earlier vassal structure. The personal initiatives of Hyrcanus I, along with the subordinate-superior relationship with the Seleucid State and the conditions of the time all indicate the period of Hyrcanus I as the most suitable time for Judean political independence. The internal crises experienced within the Seleucid Empire following the death of Antiochus VII in 129 BCE enabled the realization of the mentioned initiatives, as stated in the sources. Furthermore, when the historical process is examined, no Seleucid king was able to establish supremacy in Judea after the death of Antiochus VII, and the Judeans became dominant in the region. As a relatively new and different argument, the fact that the sons who succeeded Hyrcanus I in administration formally used the title of king and essentially became monarchs also necessitates that political independence had been established earlier, considering that they did not engage in any activities in this regard. Undoubtedly, this period refers to the time of Hyrcanus I. The efforts of Aristobulus I and Alexander Janneus to transform the existing system into a monarchy, and their coronation and kingship, can be considered as the shaping and organization of

¹²⁸ STRAB. 16.2.40.

¹²⁹ BABYLONIAN TALMUD.

¹³⁰ BT KIDDUSHIN 66A.9–11.

¹³¹ HENDIN 2021, 178, Pl. 16, No. 6189, 176, Pl. 15, No. 6183; MADDEN 1881, 85 (1) (2).

¹³² JOSEPH. AJ 13.12–15; JOSEPH. BJ 1.4.

the administrative system of a state that had already gained its political independence.

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