

The Queenship of Alexandra Salome--  
Her Role in the Hasmonean Dynasty,  
Her Achievements  
and Her Place in History

by Bonnie Margulis

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion  
March 3, 1992  
Referee: Dr. Adam Kamesar

## DIGEST

The life and queenship of Salome Alexandra is interesting for the unique position she holds in Jewish history as the only queen to rule the Jews in her own right, as well as for the light her reign sheds on questions about the role of the Pharisees in this time in history, and about the extent to which the Hasmoneans were influenced by Hellenism. Salome Alexandra seems to have been a queen very much in the mold of Hellenistic queens. The role of royal women in the Hellenistic world in general had been greatly enhanced in the century or so before Salome Alexandra, and this led to the acceptability of the idea of a woman ruler in Judea. In her actions and her rulership, Salome Alexandra showed herself to be a ruler of the Hellenistic type, ruling internally with the help of "Friends" at court, and concentrating herself on the foreign sphere.

In foreign policy, Salome Alexandra was energetic and effective. She kept her potentially hostile neighbors at bay, and she initiated diplomatic overtures to a foreign ruler to prevent the possibility of invasion of Judea. She seems to have had ambitions of conquest, but these efforts did not bear fruit. However, she kept the vast territories acquired by John Hyrcanus and Alexander Jannaeus intact.

Domestically, Salome Alexandra seems to have been concerned with the strict observance of Jewish law and tradition, and this led her to entrust the Pharisees with the internal administration of her kingdom. This turned out

to be a mistake, as the Pharisees took advantage of their position to exact revenge on old enemies. But Salome Alexandra minimized the potential troubles caused by this, and by the end of her reign, seems again to be in charge of her government.

The most troublesome area of Salome Alexandra's reign was in her relations with her son, Aristobulus II. He had ambitions to rule and disagreed with his mother's domestic policies. Salome Alexandra tried to keep him from causing too much disruption in her rule, but in the end he rebelled against her. She began to take measures to put a stop to his revolt, but died before accomplishing anything. Thus, after nine years of peace during her reign, Judea was again plunged into civil war after her death.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Adam Kamesar of Hebrew Union College, and to Dr. Getzel Cohen of the Classics Department of the University of Cincinnati, for all their help and advice in the preparation of this thesis. I also would like to thank my fellow students, David Nixon Joel Mlay, and Curtis Giese, for their help in translating certain French and German works consulted. I especially wish to thank my husband and fellow rabbinic student, Jonathan Biatch, for all his patience, encouragement and support, and for his invaluable assistance in delving into the mysteries of my computer.

### NOTE

All abbreviations used in the footnotes and bibliography are according to the Theologische Realenzyklopadie, edited by Siegfried Schwertner, (1976).

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. HELLENISTIC QUEENSHIP AND SALOME ALEXANDRA	18
III. FOREIGN AND MILITARY AFFAIRS	53
IV. THE PHARISEES AND SALOME ALEXANDRA	70
V. CONCLUSION	99
BIBLIOGRAPHY	107

## I. INTRODUCTION

In 166 BCE, rebellion broke out in Judea against the repressive regime of the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The leaders of that rebellion, known as the Maccabees, became the rulers of the Second Jewish Commonwealth, and the founders of the Hasmonean dynasty. The dynasty began as a religious and nationalistic movement, struggling to maintain their Jewish identity in an increasingly Hellenized world. It ended up as a Hellenized rulership, but still preserved its unique Jewish character.

The independence of Judea was acknowledged by the Seleucids in 142 BCE, and Simon Maccabee became the High Priest and ruler of his people. Although his title was High Priest, he was invested by the people with broad powers of rulership in perpetuity, thereby establishing the hereditary dynasty.<sup>1</sup> Simon initiated what was to become the ongoing policy of conquest of the Hasmoneans. His first act upon assuming the High Priesthood was to capture the city of Jaffa and expel the inhabitants.<sup>2</sup> This was the first of many conquests undertaken by him and his successors.

Simon's son and heir, John Hyrcanus, improved on his father's policies, implementing a planned and systematic

---

<sup>1</sup> I Maccabees 14:41

<sup>2</sup> I Maccabees 13:11

conquest of the country.<sup>3</sup> He captured two cities in Transjordan and destroyed the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim, as well as capturing and forcibly converting the population of Idumea. He also brought the Hasmoneans closer to the Hellenism they had initially opposed. He adopted the Hellenistic ruler's policy of importing foreign mercenary soldiers to create his army, even though his own population was sufficient to form an army. This was a common Hellenistic practice, having the effect of making the army beholden to the king personally, rather than being bound to the nation as a whole. This signalled the change from the early Hasmonean rulers who were national leaders and a part of the people, to being a dynasty ruling over the people as an independent power.<sup>4</sup>

John Hyrcanus was succeeded by his son Judah Aristobulus I. Josephus says that Aristobulus was the first Hasmonean to take an epithet (Philhellen), in the style of Hellenistic rulers, and was the first Hasmonean to assume the title of King.<sup>5</sup> Strabo, however, attributed this important innovation to Aristobulus' brother, Alexander Jannaeus.<sup>6</sup> In either case, Aristobulus did not live long

---

<sup>3</sup> Victor Tcherikover, Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews, (1959), p. 245

<sup>4</sup> Tcherikover, p. 251

<sup>5</sup> Ant. XIII. 301

<sup>6</sup> Strabo XV, 762

enough to make any changes in Hasmonean policies. He died after one year of rule, and was succeeded by Alexander Jannaeus.

Jannaeus took on the title of king, minted coins, gathered a mercenary army, and expanded upon the conquests of John Hyrcanus. He captured territory in Transjordan and Greek cities along the Phoenician coast. But he also stirred up opposition from his own population and spent six years engaged in civil wars. The internal strife was eventually put to rest, and Jannaeus returned to his conquests. He died while engaged in besieging Ragaba, east of the Jordan, and he was succeeded by his wife, Salome Alexandra.

Scholars of Hellenistic history have assessed the life and reign of Salome Alexandra with varying degrees of thoroughness and have come to different conclusions. Some have seen her as a queen in the mold of other Hellenistic queens; others have said she brought the Hasmonean dynasty away from the Hellenism they had increasingly taken on. Some scholars have seen her reign as an oasis of peace and prosperity, sandwiched between two eras of civil war; while others have said that her policies sowed the seeds for future strife.

Grace Macurdy's and Joseph Sievers' assessments of Salome Alexandra are formed in the context of the history and civilizations that surrounded the Hasmonean dynasty.

Macurdy writes of Salome Alexandra as one among many queens of the Hellenistic world. Macurdy's research into the lives of the queens of Macedonia, Seleucid Syria and Ptolemaic Egypt, and of vassal-queens under Roman rule, reveals women who were strong and powerful rulers, who were willing and able to do whatever needed to be done in order to keep and consolidate their hold on their thrones. They were involved in military affairs and in diplomacy and foreign affairs, just as were their male counterparts.<sup>7</sup>

Macurdy reads Josephus' eulogy of Salome Alexandra as a description of a typical Hellenistic queen, of a woman who showed none of the weaknesses of her sex, who was a wise administrator and who had a practical understanding of politics.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, Macurdy's discussion of Salome Alexandra's life and reign is limited to a recital of the facts according to Josephus, with little attempt to evaluate Josephus' evidence or to compare in detail her role as queen with that of her contemporaries.

Joseph Sievers' evaluation of Salome Alexandra is somewhat more critical and in -depth. Sievers points out that there is no precedent in Jewish history for a woman ruling in her own right, with the exception of her mother-

---

<sup>7</sup> Grace Harriet MacCurdy, Hellenistic Queens: A Study of Woman-Power in Macedonia, Seleucid Syria, and Ptolemaic Egypt, (1932), pp. 1-233

<sup>8</sup> Grace Harriet MacCurdy, Vassal Queens and Some Contemporary Women in the Roman Empire, (1937), pp. 64-66

in-law, the widow of John Hyrcanus. This queen, however, was murdered before she could take the throne. Yet there is ample precedent for a woman ruling in the Hellenistic dynasties of Syria and Egypt. There is no direct evidence that the Hasmonean dynasty was influenced by the examples of its Hellenistic neighbors, but Sievers identifies three factors that make this a likely assumption, especially from the Egyptian side: 1. the close proximity in time and space 2. the relative rarity of the phenomenon elsewhere 3. the good relations the Ptolemaic queens had with Judea.

Yet there are differences between Salome Alexandra's queenship and that of the Ptolemaic queens. The queens of Egypt generally ruled, at least in name, in partnership with a male ruler - either a husband/brother, or a son. But Salome Alexandra was a widow who was bequeathed the throne with no designated co-ruler, not even either of her two grown sons. However, it is true that Hyrcanus II was designated as High Priest and so had some share in the power, at least in name.<sup>9</sup> Sievers sums up her reign as occupying the middle ground between being totally Hellenistic, as Grace Macurdy said, and being totally Jewish, as others have said. Sievers says it was both- she was Hellenistic in her actions and in the very fact of her rule, while at the same time being God-fearing and devoted

---

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Sievers, "The Role of Women in the Hasmonean Dynasty", Josephus, the Bible and History, (1989), edd. Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata, p. 134

to the Pharisees, as Josephus said.<sup>10</sup>

But not all scholars have seen Salome Alexandra in this light. Far from seeing her as part of a history of Hellenistic queens, Victor Tcherikover says of Salome Alexandra that her rule put an end to the Hellenistic aspirations of the Hasmoneans.<sup>11</sup> In the second, revised edition of Emil Schürer's The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ, Salome Alexandra is compared to her husband, Alexander Yannai, as follows: "whereas he (Yannai) was a despot after the oriental pattern, she was a God-fearing ruler after their (the Pharisees) own heart."<sup>12</sup> In other words, Yannai was despised by the Pharisees for his Hellenism, but Salome Alexandra found favor in their eyes because she turned away from Hellenism and was God-fearing.

Just as scholars have disagreed about the degree to which Salome Alexandra's reign can be seen as an outgrowth of Hellenism, so too do they disagree in their assessments of how much power she actually wielded, as opposed to the Pharisees, and of how important was her reign. Josephus' own account is contradictory as to who was truly in power and as to his overall assessment of her character and her

---

<sup>10</sup> Sievers, p. 140

<sup>11</sup> Tcherikover, p. 253

<sup>12</sup> Emil Schürer, Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 BC-AD 135), Vol.I, (1973), p. 230

reign. Some scholars attribute these differences to Josephus' use of different sources.<sup>13</sup>

The picture of Salome Alexandra given by Schürer, Vermes, Millar, is as a weak woman who gave over all power to the Pharisees, but who, when her son Aristobulus II and his followers came to complain to her about the Pharisees' vengeful behaviour, was easily forced to capitulate.<sup>14</sup> However, this does not exactly fit in with Josephus' account. Josephus says she did not agree to put an end to the Pharisees' activities, but merely agreed to allow Aristobulus' friends to use some fortresses as refuges.<sup>15</sup> The final assessment of her reign is that nothing of great importance occurred during it, and that the basic instability of her reign was demonstrated by Aristobulus II's rebellion during her last illness.

The most positive assessment of Salome Alexandra's reign comes from Heinrich Graetz. Graetz's picture of her reign is completely rosy and problem-free, to the point of overlooking some of the evidence presented by Josephus. Graetz says of Salome Alexandra that she was a woman of "gentle nature and sincere piety", under whose reign the country rose above petty partisanship to advance the common

---

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Klausner, "Queen Salome Alexandra", The World History of the Jewish People, (1972), ed. Abraham Schalit, pp. 242-243; and Joseph Sievers, p. 139

<sup>14</sup> Schürer, Vermes, Millar, p. 231

<sup>15</sup> Ant. XIII. 417

welfare of the country. Even though she favored the Pharisees, Graetz says she did not persecute the opposing party.<sup>16</sup>

However, this completely ignores Josephus' testimony that the Pharisees took this opportunity to take vengeance against their enemies, unchecked by Salome Alexandra. Only when her son Aristobulus II came to her with his friends and pleaded with her to stop the Pharisees did she acquiesce. Even then, she only granted them asylum, and did not actually stop the Pharisees' persecutions.<sup>17</sup>

Ultimately, Graetz's assessment of Salome Alexandra is as a good queen, who kept her country at peace both internally and externally, and under whose reign the country prospered. The laws of the Pharisees became fixed and Simeon ben Shetaḥ, reputed to be her brother, so rose in prominence that the era became known as "the days of Simeon ben Shetaḥ and Queen Salome".<sup>18</sup> However, this overwhelmingly positive assessment fails to take into account Josephus' statements about the persecution of the Pharisees' enemies, and the great discontent and subsequent rebellion of Aristobulus II.

In the political sphere, Graetz says that there was no

---

<sup>16</sup> Heinrich Graetz, History of the Jews, Vol. II, (1893), pp. 47-48

<sup>17</sup> Ant. XIII. 410-417

<sup>18</sup> Graetz, pp. 48-55

important event in her reign,<sup>19</sup> a conclusion also made by Schürer, Vermes, Millar.<sup>20</sup> Graetz says she kept Tigranes of Armenia from invading Judea by virtue of her gifts and gentle words, but he concedes that his failure to invade Judea was due to Rome's invasion of Armenia, and not Salome Alexandra's diplomatic overtures. This is one of the few instances where Graetz's assessment is objective and uncolored by his desire to present Salome Alexandra in the best possible light.

Joseph Klausner's account of Salome Alexandra and her reign is somewhat more balanced, but he devotes much of his attention to the role Simeon ben Shetah might have played in her reign, and to discussing the legends, lore and laws associated with him. Apparently, Klausner sees the Pharisees in general, and Simeon ben Shetah in particular, as the major players in her reign. Of Salome Alexandra herself, he says she showed the love of power Josephus attributed to her by her activities in the external sphere. In domestic affairs, she left everything to the Pharisees, leaving her free to concentrate on more important matters. She wielded the power in foreign affairs - in the areas of diplomacy, the military, and in fortifying the country to keep it safe from foreign invasion.<sup>21</sup> This follows what

---

<sup>19</sup> Graetz, p. 55

<sup>20</sup> Schürer, Vermes, Millar, p. 231

<sup>21</sup> Klausner, "Queen Salome...", pp. 242-245

Josephus said about Salome Alexandra, and also seems to accord with Grace MacCurdy's descriptions of the activities of Hellenistic queens. So, even though Klausner does not explicitly say so, he seems to be describing Salome Alexandra's reign in the tradition of Hellenistic queens.

At the same time, however, he indicates that Salome Alexandra tried to distance herself from her husband's Hellenizing tendencies. He says the Pharisees opposed the mercenary army that Yannai built and Salome enlarged, because "these foreigners had proved a bastion for the king whenever he had acted in a manner alien to Judaism."<sup>22</sup> In other words, the mercenaries were a force for Hellenism. Salome Alexandra continued the policy of having a mercenary army - a normal policy for Hellenistic rulers - and she even doubled the size of the force. Yet Klausner claims that the Pharisees accepted the mercenary army under Salome, because she put the command of the troops in the hands of Jewish generals, so the mercenaries' Hellenizing influence was minimized.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, Klausner does not indicate how he knows this, nor is there any hint in Josephus that this is the case.

There is one instance which could be seen to back up Klausner's claim that she left the command of the army to Jewish generals. This incident was the advance against

---

<sup>22</sup> Klausner, "Queen Salome...", p. 245

<sup>23</sup> Klausner, "Queen Salome", p. 245

Ptolemy son of Mennaeus in Damascus, which she put in Aristobulus' hands. Yet it is most natural for her to send her own son on such an important mission, and Klausner himself said she probably sent him to Damascus to keep him from making trouble at home. Moreover, Aristobulus would hardly be seen as an anti-Hellenizing influence who would be satisfactory to the Pharisees, since his allies were the enemies of the Pharisees.

Klausner makes no overall assessment of Salome Alexandra's character or her reign, dwelling instead on the achievements of Simeon ben Shetah, who he said guided Salome Alexandra in all things.<sup>24</sup> But from what he does say of her, he paints a picture, albeit unwittingly, of a Hellenistic queen who leaves domestic matters in the hands of her male councilors (the Pharisees) and concentrates herself on foreign and military affairs.

A few years before Graetz wrote his History of the Jews, Joseph Derenbourg wrote a history of Palestine. Like Graetz, he is very positive in his estimation of the character of Salome Alexandra, but like Klausner nearly a century later, he attributes the true rule of the country to Simeon ben Shetah and the Pharisees. Of the queen, Derenbourg says she was a devoted wife and a moderate and respected ruler. It had to have been under her influence, he says, that Simeon ben Shetah instituted his laws

---

<sup>24</sup> Klausner, "Queen Salome", p. 248

improving the status of women. But as far as her power went, she gave it all up to the Pharisees and Simeon ben Shetah became all-powerful. They took advantage of her to abrogate the laws of the Sadducees and make their own laws permanent.<sup>25</sup>

The most critical assessment of Salome Alexandra has been made by Solomon Zeitlin. He is one of the few historians who tries to determine what motivated her in her actions. According to Zeitlin's reading of the situation, Salome Alexandra was deeply affected by the fate of her mother-in-law, the widow of John Hyrcanus. When Hyrcanus died, he left the throne to his widow, but his son, Salome Alexandra's first husband, Aristobulus I, imprisoned her and three of his brothers, and starved her to death. Salome Alexandra learned from this event to do all she could to safeguard herself. When it seemed that her sickly husband would soon die, and his favorite brother succeed him, Salome Alexandra feared suffering the same fate as her mother-in-law, and so she conspired to have the brother assassinated. Then, when Aristobulus died, she seized the opportunity to make the youngest brother, Alexander Yannai, king, and to marry him.

Zeitlin speculates that she chose Yannai over his older brothers because she thought she could control him and rule

---

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Derenbourg, Essai sur L'Histoire et la Geographie de la Palestine, (1887), pp. 102-112

through him, although there is little evidence that she succeeded in this, if this was indeed her goal. She was further motivated, according to Zeitlin, by a desire to reconcile the Hasmonean dynasty with the Pharisees, especially with her brother, Simeon ben Shetah, but if this is so, then she failed in this goal as well.<sup>26</sup>

Zeitlin contradicts himself on this last point. He claims Salome Alexandra hoped to reconcile Yannai to the Pharisees by making him king, since she was linked to the Pharisees through her brother, and Yannai would be beholden to her. And yet, Zeitlin later says that, by making Yannai king rather than restoring the Commonwealth, Salome Alexandra created the circumstances that led to civil war between the Pharisees and Yannai.<sup>27</sup>

This seems to attribute much more power and influence to Salome Alexandra than there is evidence for. According to Josephus, she did choose Yannai as successor to Aristobulus, and made him king. But, also according to Josephus, Aristobulus I was the first Hasmonean to declare himself king.<sup>28</sup> Thus, by calling himself "king", Yannai would simply have been following the precedent already established by Aristobulus. Moreover, as Sievers points

---

<sup>26</sup> Solomon Zeitlin, The Rise and Fall of the Judean State, Vol. I, (1962), pp. 317-321

<sup>27</sup> Zeitlin, pp. 334-335

<sup>28</sup> Ant. XIII. 301

out,<sup>29</sup> when the Pharisees split with Yannai's father, John Hyrcanus, they told him he should be content to govern, and give up being High Priest.<sup>30</sup> So it was the Hasmonean High Priesthood, and not their rulership, whether they called themselves "king" or not, to which the Pharisees objected. In the rebellion against Yannai, the trouble began over his functioning as High Priest at Sukkot,<sup>31</sup> not over his activities as king. The rebellion was exacerbated by Yannai's actions in his treatment of his enemies, and there is no hint in Josephus of Salome Alexandra having any influence over him in any of these things.

In his evaluation of Salome Alexandra's performance as queen, Zeitlin, like Schürer, seems to see her as a weak and ineffectual ruler. He says she did not grasp the importance of the changes that were taking place on the international scene, particularly in Asia Minor, with regard to Rome, and so she did not take advantage of the situation for her own country's sake. He does acknowledge that she safeguarded her country's peace by building up her army and taking hostages from neighbouring states to secure their loyalty. However, in the final events of her reign, Zeitlin says she failed to grasp the reality of the situation. On her deathbed, in the face of her son's rebellion, she tried to

---

<sup>29</sup> Sievers, p. 135

<sup>30</sup> Ant. XIII. 288-292

<sup>31</sup> Ant. XIII. 371-374

bolster the spirits of her councilors by saying the country was strong and the army loyal and the treasuries full. But Zeitlin points out the nation was divided in its loyalties between Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II, and the army was similarly divided, and Aristobulus' troops had already seized many fortresses, with all the wealth that they held.<sup>32</sup>

Zeitlin's conclusion, that Salome Alexandra's policies were effective for the short-term goal of keeping the peace, but in the long-term led to civil war after her death, is not too far from the truth. However, his assessment of her character as vicious and ruthless, doing whatever she had to in order to safeguard herself and her rule, is dubious. If she were truly so ruthless, she would not have hesitated to kill her son, Aristobulus II, who was the chief destabilizing factor in her reign. Instead, she entrusted him with her army in her expedition to Damascus, acceded to his demands for safe asylum for his compatriots, and when he rebelled, Josephus reports the first reaction of a fond mother, that she could not believe he had fled for the purpose of starting a revolution.<sup>33</sup>

Unlike Zeitlin, Salo Baron does not present an overall assessment of the reign of Salome Alexandra, but he does speculate as to the motivation behind Alexander Jannaeus'

---

<sup>32</sup> Zeitlin, pp. 337-341

<sup>33</sup> Ant. XIII. 425

decision to leave the throne to her. He believes that the queenship of Salome Alexandra was a compromise to appease the Pharisees, who objected to the kingship and High Priesthood being held by the same person. By making Salome Alexandra queen, the rulership would perforce be separated from the High Priesthood.<sup>34</sup> But this does not explain why John Hyrcanus would have left the throne to his wife, for, as Sievers points out, the Pharisees were not a big factor in events at that time.

More to the point, as we have already mentioned, in the dispute the Pharisees had had with John Hyrcanus, they had wanted him to give up the High Priesthood and be content with being king. Salome Alexandra taking the queenship, and leaving her son, Hyrcanus II, to be High Priest, did not resolve the Pharisees' problem with a Hasmonean High Priest.<sup>35</sup> It seems more logical to see her as part of the world of Hellenistic queens than as part of Jewish tradition or as a compromise candidate to appease the Pharisees.

Of all the scholarly accounts of Salome Alexandra's reign, Joseph Sievers' seems to be the most balanced and objective view. Graetz's view was unabashedly apologetic and Zeitlin's unaccountably hostile. Schürer, Tcherikover, and Klausner basically dismissed her rule as unimportant -

---

<sup>34</sup> Salo Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, Vol. I, (1952), p. 223

<sup>35</sup> Sievers, p. 135

Klausner's account of it did not even spend much time on Salome herself, preferring to dwell on the accomplishments of Simeon ben Shetah. A fuller exploration of the evidence of Josephus, taken in the context of the world events of the time, will hopefully yield a more complete and balanced picture of Salome Alexandra's life and reign.

## II. HELLENISTIC QUEENSHIP AND SALOME ALEXANDRA

The first question one asks when discussing the reign of Salome Alexandra is why did she reign at all? She had two grown sons who, according to expectation, would have taken precedence over their mother. Further, there seems to be little precedence for a woman ruling on her own in Jewish history. Perhaps there is some evidence of royal women holding positions of power in Biblical Israel, and there may be some precedence found for Salome Alexandra's rule in the end of the reign of John Hyrcanus, a generation earlier. However, the most profitable place to look for precedence for her rule seems to be in the growth of the phenomenon of Hellenistic queenship.

N.E.A. Andreason argues that queen-mothers, or grandmothers, in ancient Judea held an official and powerful position in the court of their sons or grandsons. They held the title of מלכה<sup>1</sup>, which Brown, Driver and Briggs, in A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, says means "lady, queen or queen-mother"<sup>2</sup> and Andreason claims this position was second only to the king himself. For example, in I Kings 2:13-25, Batsheva seems to have unrestricted access to her son King Solomon, and Solomon pays her great

---

<sup>1</sup> Niels-Erik Andreason, "The Role of the Queen-Mother in Israelite Society", CBQ, Vol. 45, (1983), p. 179

<sup>2</sup> Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, (1906), p. 150

deference, bowing down before her and having a chair brought for her to sit on his right side, thereby signalling her position of precedence at court. Further, I Kings 15:13 and the parallel text in II Chronicles 15:16 refer to the king removing his grandmother Maacah from the position of **נִיבִּי** because of her cultic activities.<sup>3</sup>

However, it is unclear where this role of queen-mother came from, nor is it clear just what the role of queen-mother was. There is little evidence for her wielding any real political power. The deference shown Batsheva by Solomon could be due simply to the force of her personality, as well as to the natural deference a son owes a mother. Even if the queen-mother did hold some measure of political power, she was clearly subordinate to her son, or grandson, the king, as demonstrated by Asa's ability to depose Maacah. Certainly in no way did the queen-mother have any power to rule in her own right.

The one time a queen-mother does try to assume political power, she was put down. Athaliah, mother of Ahaziah, in II Kings 11:13-16, upon learning of her son's death, kills off all the royal heirs and rules herself for six years, not knowing that her daughter has hidden away Ahaziah's infant son. After six years, the royal guard swears to protect the king's son, and proclaims him king, thereby overthrowing Athaliah, who is put to death.

---

<sup>3</sup> Andreason, pp. 179-181

Clearly, her rule was considered an illegal usurpation, and would not have been seen as setting a precedent for the later bequest of the throne to a queen-mother, rather than to her grown sons.

Closer to the reign of Salome Alexandra is the end of the reign of John Hyrcanus, which could be seen as setting a precedent for her rule. Josephus reports in Bellum Judaicum I. 71 and in Jewish Antiquities XIII. 302 that John Hyrcanus left the throne to his wife when he died, but that his son Aristobulus disputed the bequest and had his mother imprisoned and starved to death. It is possible that this story is due to a mere confusion of the stories of Alexander Jannaeus with those of his brother Aristobulus.<sup>4</sup> However, Josephus is so specific and consistent in his accounts in both BJ and Antiquities as to the circumstances and manner of this queen's death, that it seems quite plausible that he is relating an actual incident. Moreover, it seems odd to see the story of the murder of a queen, who was never allowed to take the throne, as a confusion with the story of a queen who not only took the throne, but ruled for nine years. But, even if this unnamed queen really existed, the question would still remain - where did the idea of a woman ruler come from?

The most logical place to look is not within Jewish

---

<sup>4</sup> Ralph Marcus, ed. and transl., Josephus: Jewish Antiquities XIII. 302, (1933), p. 379, note c, (LCL)

history, for we have seen that the evidence for women having any kind of official position in the rulership is minimal at best. However, if we broaden our investigation outside of Jewish history, and look at the greater environment in which the Hasmonean state developed, we might find the origin of the institution of queenship in the Hasmonean dynasty.

The Hasmonean dynasty developed in the context of the Hellenistic era of Middle Eastern history. There is no question that there was a great deal of cross-fertilization of ideas and of culture between Judea and the Hellenistic states which surrounded her. We know the most about the influences which the Jews in Egypt had on the Ptolemies, and the mutual influences between Egypt and Judea. In the time of Ptolemy Euergetes II (145-116 BCE), some Jews held positions of power in Egypt. Cleopatra II was helped by Jewish generals in her army in her struggles with Euergetes II for the throne. Cleopatra III (116-101 BCE) also was backed by Jewish generals and they influenced her foreign policy toward Judea.<sup>5</sup>

Just as Jews were influential in the Ptolemaic court, so too must they have been instrumental in the transplantation of Hellenistic ideas and institutions from Egypt to Judea. The Jews who lived in the Diaspora must

---

<sup>5</sup> Menahem Stern, "The Relations Between the Hasmonean Kingdom and Ptolemaic Egypt Against the Background of the International Framework of the First and Second Centuries BCE", Zion, Vol. 50, (1985), pp. 83-94, (Hebrew)

have written to friends and relatives back in Judea, and merchants and travellers must have come through Judea, trading ideas as well as merchandise. No culture exists in a vacuum, and certainly Judea, which was the site of so much activity between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids, was no exception. The Zenon Papyri give us a glimpse into how active the Ptolemies were in Judea in the third century BCE, and there is no reason to think the Seleucids were not equally involved during their rule. So there would be ample opportunity for there to be a sharing of ideas between the Hellenistic kingdoms, and Judea and the Hasmoneans.

As we noted in chapter one, Joseph Sievers identifies three factors which would tend to support the assumption that the Hasmonean queenship was influenced by the phenomenon of Hellenistic, particularly Egyptian, queenship. Therefore, if one is looking for the source of the institution of queenship in the Hasmonean dynasty, one must first look at the development of this institution in the Hellenistic world at large, and then compare this to the queenship of Salome Alexandra.

One of the changes wrought in the Western world by the Hellenistic age was the development of the status of Hellenistic queens. While the primary role of royal women was to be used as marriage pawns to seal alliances, the evidence of geographical names, cultic worship and coinage, as well as literary and papyrological evidence, attest to

their growing power and influence. In the early years of Alexander and the Diadochoi, whatever power a woman had, came to her by virtue of her own character and strength of will. But as time went on, royal women's place at the forefront of political activity and influence became institutionalized. This happened to the greatest degree in Egypt, to a lesser degree in the Seleucid Empire, and least of all in Macedonia.

#### DYNASTIC MARRIAGES

The primary usefulness of women as marriage pawns is evident from the earliest days of Alexander's conquests. Arrian of Nicomedia describes how Alexander arranged the marriages of his chief councilors to Persian women, a purely political move designed to consolidate Persian loyalty. After his death, however, most of these political marriages were repudiated.<sup>6</sup> The councilors took this lesson in political expediency to heart, and when the chief among them took power after Alexander's death, they made use of their daughters to seal alliances with each other. This was evident in the aftermath of the battle of Ipsus, as shifting alliances were followed by shifts in marriage connections among the Diadochoi.<sup>7</sup> As Sarah Pomeroy pointed out,

---

<sup>6</sup> M.M. Austin, ed. The Hellenistic World From Alexander to the Roman Conquest, (1981), pp. 27-29

<sup>7</sup> Edwyn Bevan, The House of Ptolemy, (1927), p. 36

political marriages tended to end when alliances failed or more attractive ones appeared.<sup>8</sup>

In the early days of the Hellenistic era, women tended to be passive players in their fathers' hands. Antipater the Regent married his daughter Eurydice to Ptolemy I, who in turn married his own daughters off, including marrying Arsinoe to Lysimachus of Thrace. The foreign policy of the Ptolemies can be seen in their marriage alliances, for example, Cleopatra Thea was married to Alexander Balas, pretender to the Seleucid throne, by her father Philometer. When this alliance broke down, Philometer retrieved his daughter and married her off to Demetrius II instead.<sup>9</sup>

However, the daughters soon learned to take their lives into their own hands. Arsinoe II was married off to Lysimachus, but after his death, she married herself to her half-brother Ptolemy Ceraunus and after his death, she fled back to Egypt and married her full brother, Ptolemy II.<sup>10</sup> Four generations later, after Cleopatra Thea's second husband, Demetrius II, was taken captive by the Parthians, she sent for his younger brother Antiochus VII Sidetes to marry her and take the Seleucid throne.<sup>11</sup> These were

---

<sup>8</sup> Sarah Pomeroy, Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity, (1975), p. 123

<sup>9</sup> Grace Harriet Macurdy, Hellenistic Queens, (1932), pp. 93, 102, 113-115

<sup>10</sup> Macurdy, Hellenistic Queens, pp. 113-115

<sup>11</sup> Macurdy, Hellenistic Queens, p. 93

still marriages made for political reasons, but the women were no longer completely passive players in the events of their lives.

The fact that daughters were used as pawns, and not sons, would seem to suggest that men held all the power, and women simply did as they were told. Yet in later times it was the women, as well as men, who controlled marriage alliances. Cleopatra III forced her son Ptolemy Lathyrus to divorce the wife-sister he loved and marry his other sister.<sup>12</sup> The daughters were still being used as marriage pawns, but this time it was within the family, and it was the mother, and not the father, who was controlling things, and the son, as well as the daughters, who was forced to comply.

For men who may not have had direct claims to power, or even for those, like the Ptolemies, who were part of the ruling dynasty, marriage to the daughter of a king was a way of obtaining or keeping the throne. For women, at first marriage was a path to power, if not to direct access to the throne. Grace Macurdy claimed that only marriage, not birth, could bring a woman to power.<sup>13</sup> But at least in Egypt in later years women did attain the throne by virtue of birth, and only used marriage as a means of consolidating power. In Macedonia after the death of Alexander, his

---

<sup>12</sup> Bevan, p. 327

<sup>13</sup> Macurdy, Hellenistic Queens, p. 1

mother Olympias tried to use her daughter Cleopatra as a lure to Perdiccas to ally himself with her, but Antipater the Regent married his daughter to Perdiccas instead. He kept Cleopatra prisoner to prevent anyone from marrying her and gaining the throne.<sup>14</sup> It seems that being Alexander's sister would not be sufficient to give her the throne, but marrying her would give someone the connection to Alexander's house they needed to get the throne. Similarly, in the Seleucid empire, Cleopatra Thea could not herself take the throne after Demetrius' capture, but marriage to her was Antiochus Sidetes' path to the throne.

In neither of these cases did the women themselves actually attain power, but marriage to them could give power to their husbands. In Egypt, marriage to a Ptolemaic princess could give or consolidate power for the male heir, but it also seems to have given some measure of power to the princess herself. In later years, it seems the power preceded the marriage. Arsinoe II's marriage to Ptolemy II helped him consolidate the loyalty of the Egyptians, and there is evidence that it also gave Arsinoe II unprecedented power and influence. It soon became the norm that the Ptolemies would marry their sisters, unless they made an alliance with a Seleucid princess for the sake of foreign policy. Marrying their sisters seems to have been a prerequisite for kingship, and four of the first eight

---

<sup>14</sup> Macurdy, Hellenistic Queens, pp. 33-38

Ptolemies did so.<sup>15</sup> Ptolemy VI Philometer married his sister Cleopatra II upon ascending to the throne. When he was defeated in battle with Antiochus IV, his younger brother was put on the throne and married to Cleopatra II. The throne changed hands between the two brothers several times, once they even shared it, but all the time, the one constant was Cleopatra II.<sup>16</sup> It seems no matter who was on the throne, they needed her to legitimize their rule. Further, she herself seems to have had power unto herself, for she ruled as regent for her son, and when he died, she ruled as Sister-Queen along with her former husband and his new wife, Cleopatra III. Even during the period Cleopatra II ruled with Philometer, we see for the first time documents dated by both the king and the queen,<sup>17</sup> indicating that she was looked upon as co-ruler with the king, and not simply as queen-consort.

Under her daughter, Cleopatra III, the power of the queen progresses still further. The throne was left to her, with the choice of which of her sons she would have as her co-ruler. Berenice III and Berenice IV each ruled alone, by their own right of birth, not because of being married to a Ptolemy. Indeed, in both cases the people of Alexandria searched for a suitable husband for them. But this seems to

---

<sup>15</sup> Pomeroy, Goddesses, p. 123

<sup>16</sup> Macurdy, Hellenistic Queens, pp. 147-153

<sup>17</sup> Bevan, p. 291

have been more the result of their own discomfort at a queen ruling alone than because of any thought that their rule was not legitimate. Even the most powerful Ptolemaic queen, Cleopatra VII, needed to have some male relative as her co-ruler, whether it was one of her brothers or her son. But her name preceded his on official documents, and it was clear, especially as he was yet a child, that she was the ruler.

So we see a progression in the status of royal women from mere passive pawns in the marriage game, to necessary prerequisites for power. And from there, they acquire a legitimacy all their own in the rulership. Perhaps this was due to a scarcity of legitimate male rulers in the later years of the dynasty. However, Cleopatra II and Cleopatra III each had legitimate brothers or sons, yet they seem to have held equal, if not greater, power with them. In any case, Macurdy's assertion that women had power and prestige only from marriage, and not from birth, fails to take into account historical developments.

#### DOCUMENTARY AND LITERARY EVIDENCE

Further evidence of the growing legitimacy of the rule of queens can be found in papyrological evidence, where the names of queens gradually came to be included with the kings' names in the dating formulae. Cleopatra I is the first queen to have her name actually precede that of her

son in the dating of documents. The papyrus P. Freib. 12-33 has the formula: "Cleopatra, the Mother, Goddess Manifest, and Ptolemy, son of Ptolemy God Manifest, reigning in the third year".<sup>18</sup> In the joint reign of Cleopatra II and Ptolemy VIII, from 163 BCE onward, the official dating of documents was given as: "in the reign of king Ptolemy and queen Cleopatra".<sup>19</sup>

By the time of the joint rule of Cleopatra III with her son Ptolemy Alexander I, it seems to have been protocol to use double-dating on official documents, that is, to cite both Cleopatra III's regnal years and Ptolemy Alexander's. Sometimes we see both regnal years being cited in the dating formula of a document, and then just Ptolemy Alexander's dating in the body of the document. However, some documents are dated solely to Cleopatra III's regnal years, and some are dated solely to Ptolemy Alexander's.

The use of double-dating was probably the norm, and variations were due to the scribe's being unused to the new system, or to scribal error. Perhaps there was a desire to simplify the formula, especially for more mundane documents. In this case, perhaps the scribe would choose to use Ptolemy Alexander's dating because the king traditionally took precedence. Or perhaps he chose to use Cleopatra III's

---

<sup>18</sup> Macurdy, Hellenistic Queens, p. 144

<sup>19</sup> Macurdy, Hellenistic Queens, pp. 148-150

dating, because she ruled first, and was the dominant ruler.<sup>20</sup> This dominant role can be seen in the dating formulae where both she and Ptolemy Alexander appear, because her name appears first, as for example, in a lease of land from 103 BCE.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to the evidence in the dating of official documents, there are hints in historical works that queens were beginning to be viewed as equal rulers with their husbands. In the aftermath of the quarreling between Ptolemy VI and Ptolemy VIII, when they reunited and ruled jointly with Cleopatra II, Livy tells us they sent an embassy to Rome asking for help against Antiochus IV. Livy says the embassy came from the king and queen - "Legati ab Ptolemaeo et Cleopatra regibus". The legates that thanked Rome did so in the name of the king and queen. The reply was sent to "the rulers in Egypt, Ptolemy and Cleopatra". So it would seem that, at least on the level of formulae in official documents, Cleopatra II was treated as an equal ruler with her husband.

Perhaps we can date from the reign of Cleopatra II the idea that it was acceptable for a woman to inherit the throne, provided she take some male relative into the

---

<sup>20</sup> E. Van Dack, W. Clarysse, G. Cohen, J. Quaegebeur, J.K. Winnicki, The Judean-Syrian-Egyptian Conflict of 103-101 BC, (1989), pp. 112-114

<sup>21</sup> Bernard P. Grenfell, Arthur S. Hunt, J. Gilbert Smyly, edd.; The Tebtunis Papyri, Vol. I, (1902), # 105, pp. 454-463

government with her. The evidence of the dating formulae and the literary evidence date from her reign. And certainly, Cleopatra II ruled on her own during the exile of Euergetes and Cleopatra III, and later on, Cleopatra III, was the primary ruler, with her sons as co-rulers. Toward the end of the Ptolemaic dynasty, the rule of Berenice IV, first with her mother Tryphanea, and then on her own, was taken as a matter of course.<sup>22</sup> By the end of the dynasty, Cleopatra VII ruled almost without interference from her brothers, once she had the backing of Rome, and later her name precedes that of her son in official documents. There can be no question but that she was the ruler in Egypt.

#### CITY NAMES

One sphere in which it might be possible to speculate about the influence of royal women is in the area of city and other geographical names. The custom of naming a city or street after a royal woman may be linked in some way to the growth of power and influence of the women. At the very least, it seems to show women taking on a greater role in public life than they did before the time of Philip II, when they were restricted to the private sphere.<sup>23</sup>

Elizabeth Carney speculates that, in the wake of the

---

<sup>22</sup> Macurdy, Hellenistic Queens, pp. 181-2

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Carney, "Eponymous Women: Royal Women and City Names", AHB 2.6, (1988), p.141

battle of Ipsus, the Diadochoi looked for means by which to strengthen and legitimize their kingship. These means included the taking of divine honors, the wearing of the diadem, and the founding and naming of cities for themselves and for family members. Thus, the founding of a city was a political act, and naming it not just for yourself, but for a family member, legitimizes not just your rule, but your family's dynastic rule.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Strabo and Appian both tell us of the many cities Seleucus I founded and named for himself, his father, his wife, his mother and his daughter.<sup>25</sup>

It is difficult to say how much having a city named for a royal woman meant the woman had any real power. Certainly, Amastris, daughter of Darius III and wife, in turn, of Craterus, Dionysus of Heraclea Pontica, and Lysimachus, had some measure of power, for she herself founded a city and named it for herself.<sup>26</sup> Yet Thessalonica, daughter of Philip II and wife of Cassander, had a city named for her, but she did not seem to have any power. More likely, her husband Cassander founded the city and named it for her because it was through her that he was linked to Alexander's family and thus through her that his rule was legitimized. The most we can say about the naming

---

<sup>24</sup> Carney, p. 140

<sup>25</sup> Austin, p. 285; p. 88

<sup>26</sup> Carney, p. 135

of cities for women is that it seems to have some significance in that it is the counterpart to naming a city for a man, and seems in some way to indicate the shifts in power and status of royal women in early Hellenistic times.

### RULER-CULT

The deification of rulers was a feature of the Greek world even before the time of Alexander. Rationalism explained away the stories of gods as really being legends of great heroes of old, and so it became natural to begin to see contemporary heroes in the same light. From here it was an easy step to begin to accord such heroes divine honors.<sup>27</sup> Being deified was a political, not a religious move. The people did not think of their ruler-gods as being immortal, but the rulers were people who could feed the populace in times of famine, and protect them in times of war, and so, in a very real sense, they had god-like powers over the people and were worshipped in this spirit.<sup>28</sup>

Macedonia, the Seleucid empire and Ptolemaic Egypt all had their ruler-cults, with similarities and differences among the three. The phenomenon was least developed in Macedonia. The kings of Macedonia were national kings selected by the army, and were not worshipped in state-

---

<sup>27</sup> Bevan, p. 48

<sup>28</sup> W.W. Tarn, and G.T. Griffith, Hellenistic Civilization, (1952), p. 52

sponsored cults, although they might be worshipped by individual Greek cities.<sup>29</sup> Macedonian queens, who were generally less prominent than their Seleucid or Ptolemaic counterparts, had no eponymous priestesses or state-worship dedicated to them.<sup>30</sup>

The cults of queens in the Seleucid empire seems to be parallel to that of the Ptolemaic queens in some regards, but different in others. Like the Ptolemaic cult, the Seleucid cults to kings and queens seems to be hierarchical, established by the rulership, as a decree from Antiochus III seems to demonstrate.<sup>31</sup> In this decree, Antiochus instructs a city to establish a cult and priesthood to his sister-queen, which he says he is establishing throughout his empire, as he has already done with his own cult. A decree in Smyrna<sup>32</sup> also shows the similarities of the Seleucid to the Ptolemaic cults, including indicating the assimilation of a Seleucid queen to a classical goddess (Aphrodite Stratonicia).

Ruler-cults reached their height of complexity in Egypt. Bevan identified four different types of cultic worship in Egypt: 1. worship offered them in the Egyptian manner, in Egyptian temples, without Greek involvement. 2.

---

<sup>29</sup> Tarn, p. 51

<sup>30</sup> Macurdy, Hellenistic Queens, p. 7

<sup>31</sup> Hellenica 7, (1949), 5-22, in Austin, pp. 262-263

<sup>32</sup> OGIS 229, in Austin, p. 297

Private worship in the Greek manner - erecting shrines to the king or queen, or private associations taking them on as their patron deity. 3. City-cults established nominally by free Greek city-states, in or out of Egypt. 4. The state-instituted cult of Alexander, instituted by the Ptolemaic court.<sup>33</sup>

Ptolemy II developed the state-cult in Egypt. He deified his parents and put up temples to their worship. Then he established a new precedent by deifying himself and his sister-queen, while she was still living, combining their worship with that of Alexander, although he kept his parents' worship separate. All had cult-epithets - Ptolemy I and his wife Berenice I were the Savior Gods; Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II were the Brother-Loving Gods. The deification of Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II may have helped reconcile the Greek population to their incestuous marriage, as it was an accepted practice among the classical gods. The worship of Arsinoe II was among the most highly developed cults, attesting at least to her great popularity, if not to her actual power.

Arsinoe was worshipped along with her brother as the Theoi Adelphoi, but she also had her own separate cult, with her own special priestess and temples. Her priestess was used in the dating of documents along with the priest of Alexander and the priest of the Theoi Adelphoi. She was

---

<sup>33</sup> Bevan, p. 48

associated with the classical deity Aphrodite, although the honor is somewhat diminished when you realize that Ptolemy II's mistress was similarly honored. Subsequent Ptolemies also deified themselves, their wives and their mothers, adding epithets to their names and priests and priestesses to the dating of documents. Ptolemy IV established a cult to his mother, Berenice of Cyrene, and caused her priest to precede that of Arsinoe II in the dating formulae of documents.<sup>34</sup>

Fraser provides a lengthy discussion on the development of the royal-cult in Egypt. In this discussion, he identifies three stages in the deification of queens. In the first stage, specifically with regard to Arsinoe II, geographical names show that queen-goddesses identified themselves with classical goddesses by adopting the epithets of the classical deities. These epithets describe attributes of the goddesses, and in taking on a goddess' epithet, the queen-goddess also was taking on the attribute. A papyrus dated ca. 252/1 mentions several streets in Alexandria named for Arsinoe II with cultic epithets attached to her name. Another papyrus, dated ca. 190, also mentions such names. For example, a street is named Arsinoe Basileia, showing she had taken on the attributes of Hera Basileia; the name Arsinoe Karpophorus showed she was identified with Demeter. The names Arsinoe Sozousa and

---

<sup>34</sup> P.M. Fraser, Ptolemaic Alexandria, (1972), p. 219

Arsinoe Eleemon are also attested, showing her association with Isis and with Aphrodite.<sup>35</sup>

In the second stage in the development of the cult, the queen-goddesses began taking on, not merely the cultic epithets of other goddesses, but actually the goddesses' names themselves. This was seen in the Seleucid empire with Aphrodite Stratonicia. It is widely attested in Egypt with Arsinoe II, who is most closely associated with Aphrodite, as well as with Isis. This association of queen with goddess reached its height in the third stage, in the first century BCE with Cleopatra III. She was so closely associated with Isis that her own name was suppressed, and she was known simply as "Isis, the Great Mother of the Gods".<sup>36</sup>

As with the information we have on royal marriages and on city-names, it is difficult to say how much the progression in the queen-cult reflects a development in the power and influence of the queens. Yet, taken in aggregate, there does seem to be some indication that the queens did wield a certain amount of power. Further evidence can perhaps be found in the study of the coins of the Ptolemies and the Seleucids, and then a general discussion on queenly power can be held.

---

<sup>35</sup> Fraser, pp. 230-238

<sup>36</sup> Fraser, pp. 239-244

COINS

As in the realms of marriage and cult, the evidence of the coins from Macedonia seem to indicate that the queen in Macedonia held no power. There do not seem to be any coins issued by Macedonian queens, nor do they have their names or faces on the coins issued by their husbands.<sup>37</sup> The Seleucid queens were more prominent than their Macedonian sisters. Cleopatra Thea seems to have been the most powerful of the Seleucid queens, reigning as regent for her son and being the first Hellenistic queen to strike coins in her name alone.<sup>38</sup> Copper coins exist with portraits of Demetrius I and his wife Laodice, but only his name is inscribed on it.<sup>39</sup> But Cleopatra Thea has her portrait on coins along with her son Antiochus Grypus, with her head in front of his,<sup>40</sup> and she has silver coins with only her head on it, with the inscription "of Queen Kleopatra, Benefactor Goddess".<sup>41</sup> This would seem to indicate that Cleopatra Thea at least, among all the Seleucid queens, had some measure of power.

As in the other areas under investigation, the evidence

---

<sup>37</sup> Macurdy, Hellenistic Queens, p. 7

<sup>38</sup> Macurdy, Hellenistic Queens p. 98

<sup>39</sup> Percy Gardner, A Catalogue of Greek Coins: The Seleucid Kings of Syria, (1878), Plate XV

<sup>40</sup> Macurdy, Hellenistic Queens, p. 98

<sup>41</sup> Gardner, p. 85

of the coins of the Ptolemies is rich, and seems to indicate at least a greater prominence of the Ptolemaic queens than of the Seleucid or Macedonian queens. Macurdy asserts that the evidence of the coins shows the Ptolemaic queens were always subordinate to their husbands because the living queens had only their heads, with no titles, put on copper coins, while deified queens had their heads and names on gold and silver coins, like living kings. She further stated that only Cleopatra VII issued coins in her own right.<sup>42</sup>

However, Poole, in his A Catalogue of Greek Coins states that neither the coins of the kings nor those of the queens were necessarily struck in the lifetime of the person depicted on them. Indeed, Poole stresses that it is difficult to know the exact dating and provenance of any coin, so it is difficult to say if a coin was struck in a person's lifetime or not. Poole further denies Macurdy's statement about Cleopatra VII, stating that Cleopatra I struck her own coins during her regency after the death of her husband Ptolemy Epiphanes.<sup>43</sup>

In an article on Arsinoe II, Stanley Burstein calls into question assumptions scholars have made as to the extent of Arsinoe's power. In this article, Burstein

---

<sup>42</sup> Macurdy, Hellenistic Queens, pp. 7-8

<sup>43</sup> Reginald Stuart Poole, A Catalogue of Greek Coins: The Ptolemies, Kings of Egypt, (1883), pp. xiii. xlv

asserts that Arsinoe II's head appears alone on just copper coins; while on gold and silver coins she appears with her husband, Ptolemy II.<sup>44</sup> Burstein here seems to be referring to coins issued within Arsinoe II's lifetime. Poole cites gold octadrachms and silver decadrachms with the bust of Arsinoe II alone, the earliest dated ones coming from the end of Ptolemy II's reign, and the beginning of the reign of Ptolemy III.<sup>45</sup> Poole's evidence does not demonstrate that Arsinoe held any power, it only indicates her enduring popularity, for her image appeared on coins for a century and a half.

According to Poole, Berenice II is the first Egyptian queen to have the title Basilissa on her coins. After this, Cleopatra I, Cleopatra II, Cleopatra III and Cleopatra VII all do so. Poole said each had a hereditary right to the title - Berenice because of being queen in Cyrene, Cleopatra I because of her dowry of Coele-Syria, Cleopatra II because she was seen as equal co-ruler with her brothers, Cleopatra III because she was the heiress of Philometer, and Cleopatra VII because she was co-heiress with Auletes.<sup>46</sup> So the evidence of the coins would seem to indicate that these

---

<sup>44</sup> Stanley Burstein, "Arsinoe II Philadelphos: A Revisionist View", Philip II, Alexander the Great and the Macedonian Heritage, W.L. Adams and E.N. Borza, edd., (1982), p. 201

<sup>45</sup> Poole, p. xxxviii

<sup>46</sup> Poole, pp. xlv-xlvi

queens were seen as rulers in their own right, without reference to their husbands.

Possible further evidence from the coins of the power of queens can be seen in the coins of Cleopatra I. She issued coins during her regency, with her head on them. Later, her brother, Antiochus IV, invaded Egypt and issued coins. Rather than issuing coins with his own name and face on them, he chose to use the name and face of an Egyptian ruler. Presumably, he hoped thereby to link himself with a legitimate Egyptian ruler, thereby strengthening his position in Egypt. The ruler he chose was Cleopatra I, copying her coins in his issue.<sup>47</sup> Of course, it would be natural for him to use the image of his sister, yet using her image would not have helped his cause unless she was considered to be a legitimate ruler.

So a case seems to be building, given the evidence of the coins, coupled with that of the royal cults and city-names and marriages, for a growth in the power of royal women. It remains to examine the issue of power in general, that of kings as compared with that of queens.

#### POWER AND QUEENSHIP

As Sarah Pomeroy points out, before one can say anything about the role of the queen, one must first define the role of the king. The most important role for the king

---

<sup>47</sup> Poole, p. lx

was in the military sphere. Beyond that, kings were important as benefactors of cities and temples, and as patrons of the arts. They were the supreme political power, appointing successors, making laws and dispensing justice. They regulated the market and taxes and minted money.<sup>48</sup> The royal women to a large extent became the counterparts of the royal men in Hellenistic times. Like the men, they received envoys, built temples, founded cities, engaged mercenaries and led armies, and acted as regents and co-rulers.<sup>49</sup>

As we have said previously, Macurdy states that women attained power only through marriage, yet a closer examination of the facts shows that, at least for the Ptolemies, this was not so. Arsinoe II, Cleopatra II and Cleopatra III each attained power through their marriages, yet Cleopatra II retained power even after she was no longer Ptolemy VIII's wife, and Cleopatra III ruled after her husband's death. She co-ruled with one or the other of her sons, but the fact that she kept changing co-rulers shows that she held the power in her own right, and her association with her sons was secondary.

Similarly, Berenice IV ruled in her own right, and only after she took the throne did the people of Alexandria look

---

<sup>48</sup> Sarah Pomeroy, Women in Hellenistic Egypt: From Alexander to Cleopatra, (1984), pp. 11-12

<sup>49</sup> Tarn and Griffith, p. 98

for a suitable husband for her. Yet they were not questioning her legitimacy as a ruler, they were only expressing their own societal discomfort at having a woman reign alone. I would make the analogy that this situation was similar to the situation in Elizabethan England. Elizabeth Tudor's councilors never questioned the legitimacy of her rule, yet they continually urged her to marry, even long after the possibility of childbearing was no longer at issue. Clearly, the issue was simply their own discomfort at having an unmarried female ruler. It seems reasonable to suppose something similar was the case in the situation with Berenice IV.

As Pomeroy says, one of the major roles of the king was to fight for his country. Macurdy cites numerous examples of royal women who similarly acted in this capacity. In Macedonia, rival queens Eurydice and Olympias met on the battlefield. A daughter of Philip II, Cynane, fought alongside her father against the Ilyrians, and later led troops into battle in Asia.<sup>50</sup>

In Syria, Cleopatra IV, angered at her forced divorce from Ptolemy Lathyrus, went to Cyprus and gathered an army and went to Syria and loaned her troops to Antiochus Cyzicenus, whom she married. Her mother, Cleopatra III, led her own troops into Palestine in her fight against

---

<sup>50</sup> Macurdy, Hellenistic Queens, pp. 41-49

Lathyrus.<sup>51</sup> The most famous queen of all, Cleopatra VII, was noted for her military adventures. She led troops against her brother in their dynastic struggles and campaigned beside Antony in his wars. Her sister, Arsinoe, resenting being bypassed in the succession, took control of the troops at Pergamum and had them proclaim her queen. Not only does this show that royal women had a place at the head of an army, it also shows that Arsinoe gave no thought to the possibility that her gender might preclude her ruling. Clearly, by this time, gender was no longer an obstacle to rule.<sup>52</sup>

As for their role as benefactors to cities and temples, there are numerous examples from inscriptions expressing a city's fear of the hostility of a queen, or their gratitude at the benefactions of a queen. A decree from Telmessus from 279 BCE expresses such a fear, while Miletus issues a decree praising Apama, wife of Seleucus I, for her help, and Laodice, wife of Antiochus III, is honored for her benefactions to Teos.<sup>53</sup> So queens fulfilled, at least in some measure, the same role as benefactor as did the kings, although they may not always have had the resources to give on the same scale.

---

<sup>51</sup> Macurdy, Hellenistic Queens, pp. 164-167

<sup>52</sup> Macurdy, Hellenistic Queens, pp. 186-188

<sup>53</sup> Burstein, "Arsinoe", p. 203

### Conclusion

Any of the different topics discussed above, taken alone, would not be sufficient to come to any conclusions about the power and influence of Hellenistic queens. Yet, taken as a whole, it seems clear that women progressed in power, from being mostly passive, only taking power in unusual circumstances and only by dint of their own force of will, to being seen as legitimate candidates for rulership. In the area of marriage, we saw a progression from being passive pawns in their fathers' hands, to taking their lives into their own hands. In both the areas of marriage and of city-names, we have seen the importance and usefulness of women as links to power for their husbands. The growth of the queen-cult, especially in Egypt, points at the very least to the prominence and popularity of the queens among the populace, but also seems to indicate their power in the court.

With the numismatic evidence, again we see at least the popularity of the queens, again especially in Egypt. But here even taking into account the caveat of the uncertainty of the dating, the evidence seems less ambiguous. The fact that women were sometimes shown in front of their male co-ruler, and especially the fact that some women minted their own coins, is a strong indication of the powerful position these women held. This, coupled with evidence from papyri and inscriptions showing women being named alongside, and

even preceding their co-rulers, shows that, at least in Egypt, by the end of the Ptolemaic dynasty, women were accepted as rulers on a par with the men.

### Salome Alexandra

As we have suggested, the idea of a woman ruling on a par with the king seems to be datable from the joint-rule of Cleopatra II with Ptolemy VI and Ptolemy VIII (170-164). This coincides with the very beginning of the Hasmonean dynasty. In other words, the Hasmonean dynasty would have developed in an atmosphere where women as rulers was accepted as a norm.

Salome Alexandra's husband, Alexander Jannaeus, not only knew of the power of Cleopatra III in Egypt, he had first hand knowledge of it, as he was allied with her in her struggles with her son Ptolemy Soter II.<sup>54</sup> So it is reasonable to suggest that it is the influence of the phenomenon of Hellenistic, and particularly Ptolemaic, queenship that Alexander Jannaeus left the throne to his wife, rather than to either of their sons. It is interesting to note that Cleopatra III had been left the throne by her husband, with the choice of either of her sons to be her co-ruler.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Ant., XIII. 285-87, 324-355

<sup>55</sup> John Selby Watson, Justin, Cornelius Nepos, and Eutropius, XXXIX.3, (1890), p. 267, (LCL)

Salome Alexandra's actions throughout her life fit very well into the mold of other Hellenistic royal women. As the wife of Aristobulus, she was involved in a plot against her husband's brother, Antigonus.<sup>56</sup> This involvement of the queen-consort in the intrigues of court is very much in keeping with the activities of the queens of the Ptolemy, Seleucid and Macedonian empires, ranging as far back as Olympias, wife of Philip II.<sup>57</sup>

When Salome Alexandra came to the throne, she appointed her son Hyrcanus II as High Priest. In Bellum Judaicum, Josephus states that Salome Alexandra had entrusted the kingdom to him even while she was alive.<sup>58</sup> It seems that, at least in name, Hyrcanus held a position roughly analogous to that of a co-ruler, just as the Ptolemies ruled as co-rulers with husbands and wives, mothers and sons. Of course, it was the norm for the Hasmonean prince to become High Priest, aside from any influence from the Hellenistic world. Yet, perhaps the fact that Salome Alexandra had sons whom she could choose to make co-rulers, in the tradition of Cleopatra III, made it seem to Alexander Jannaeus the logical thing to do. Perhaps he felt that, because of her strong character and her ties to the Pharisees, Salome Alexandra would be able to bring peace to the country,

---

<sup>56</sup> Ant., XIII. 308, and Bell. I. 76

<sup>57</sup> Macurdy, Hellenistic Queens, pp. 22-45

<sup>58</sup> Bell. I. 120

whereas Hyrcanus II was too weak, and Aristobulus II was too headstrong and too connected with the enemies of the Pharisees.

Certainly in her role as queen, Salome Alexandra seems to have filled the same role as any other ruler in the Hellenistic mold. Like the Hellenistic rulers, her primary role was in the military sphere, in safeguarding the peace of the country. Her first act upon the death of her husband was to complete his military operation upon the fortress at Ragaba.<sup>59</sup>

After this, the major accomplishments which Josephus attributes to her are all in the military realm. She greatly increased the mercenary army and levied troops to build up the regular army.<sup>60</sup> Josephus claims the Pharisees held all the power, yet he credits Salome Alexandra with sending the envoys to deal with Tigranes of Armenia when he threatened to invade Judea, and it was she who dispatched Aristobulus and the army on an expedition to Damascus.<sup>61</sup> Taking charge of military and diplomatic matters were roles for the king or queen in Hellenistic kingdoms.

As we have seen, another area which was within the purview of the Hellenistic ruler was in the founding or re-

---

<sup>59</sup> Ant. XIII. 400, 405

<sup>60</sup> Bell. I. 112, and Ant. XIII. 409

<sup>61</sup> Bell. I. 115-116, and Ant. XIII. 418-421

founding of Hellenistic cities. The Hasmoneans seem not to have engaged in the founding of cities, but they did build fortresses which were named for powerful figures they wished to honor. For instance, Josephus notes that the fortress of the Antonia got its name from Mark Antony, when he was in power in Rome.<sup>62</sup> Alexander Jannaeus is credited with the building of a number of fortresses, but perhaps one which was attributed to him was really built by Salome Alexandra. This was the fortress of Alexandrion on Mount Sartaba. The Greek name is Alexandrion, and the Hebrew name is Shlomey, a diminutive for Salome Alexandra's Hebrew name, Shlomzion.<sup>63</sup> It is possible that Alexander Jannaeus built the fortress and named it for her, but this also would be in the tradition of Hellenistic kings and queens, and perhaps would attest to her power and influence in Jannaeus' reign.

Hellenistic rulers also minted their own coinage. Here, the evidence for Salome Alexandra is sketchy, at best. According to Schürer, Vermes, Millar, there are no coins certainly attributable to Salome Alexandra's reign. However, there are coins from Hyrcanus II with the Greek letter A on the obverse, which may refer to Salome Alexandra, and may have been minted in her lifetime.<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> Bell. I. 118

<sup>63</sup> Klausner, "Judah Aristobulus and Jannaeus Alexander", WHJP, Vol. VII, p. 238

<sup>64</sup> Schürer, p. 229

But, Ya'akov Meshorer negates this theory when he points out that Greek monograms on Hellenistic coins often refer to the initials of mint officials, in this case perhaps to Antipater the Idumean.<sup>65</sup>

Klausner claims there are coins of Salome Alexandra's which are inscribed Basilis. Alexandra, and also there is a coin which seems to have inscribed on it the Hebrew letter  $\Pi$ , perhaps the remnant of the Hebrew word  $\Pi\text{לכח}$ .<sup>66</sup> However, these readings are dubious at best.<sup>67</sup> If any of these coins can be traced to Salome Alexandra's reign, it would be further evidence of the parallels of her rulership with that of other Hellenistic queens.

However, if it is true that Salome Alexandra did not mint any coins, this is problematic for our assessment of her as a Hellenistic queen. There seems to be a definite link between the assumption of kingship and the minting of coins. Alexander Jannaeus was reported by Strabo to be the first Hasmonean to use the title of "king"<sup>68</sup> (Josephus attributes this innovation to Aristobulus I,<sup>69</sup> but this may be a confusion with Alexander Jannaeus, and even if

---

<sup>65</sup> Ya'akov Meshorer, Ancient Jewish Coinage, Vol. I, (1982), p. 38

<sup>66</sup> Klausner, "Queen Salome Alexandra", WHJP, p. 242

<sup>67</sup> Schürer, p. 229

<sup>68</sup> Marcus, Josephus: Antiquities XIII. 301, p. 379, note

c

<sup>69</sup> Ant., XIII. 301

true, Aristobulus' reign was too brief and tumultuous for him to do much with his new prerogatives as king), and Ya'akov Meshorer makes a convincing case for Jannaeus also being the first Hasmonean to mint coins.<sup>70</sup>

Meshorer theorizes as to the reason why Salome Alexandra did not mint any coins. He speculates that perhaps the power of the Pharisees prevented her from doing so, although it is unclear why they would do this. He further speculates that perhaps she entrusted the minting of coins to her son, Hyrcanus II. There are two or three groups of coins attributed to the reign of Hyrcanus II, which are not linked with Antipater. These may have been coined between 76-67 BCE, and therefore would belong to the reign of Salome Alexandra.<sup>71</sup>

As for Salome Alexandra's relationship with the Pharisees, it seems to some extent to be a reflection of the Hellenistic ruler's relationship to his court of "Friends". These were people chosen by the ruler for their loyalty and their skills. They included artists, writers, scholars, and philosophers, all adding up to a group of expert advisors to help rule the country.<sup>72</sup> Eventually, this group developed into a complex bureaucracy which controlled domestic affairs

---

<sup>70</sup> Ya'akov Meshorer, Jewish Coins of the Second Temple Period, (1967), translated from the Hebrew by I.H. Levine, pp. 56-58

<sup>71</sup> Meshorer, Ancient, p. 81

<sup>72</sup> F.W. Walbank, The Hellenistic World, (1981), pp. 74-78

for the ruler. The Pharisees seem to have fulfilled this role in the reign of Salome Alexandra. They dealt with internal affairs, and left matters of diplomacy and defense to Salome Alexandra. More will be said about the role of the Pharisees in the reign of Salome Alexandra in the following chapter.

Over all, while it is difficult to draw a direct correlation between Salome Alexandra's reign and that of Hellenistic queens, the link seems to be there. The evidence of any tradition of women in power in Israelite history is scanty at best, while the evidence of a developing tradition of powerful royal women in Hellenistic dynasties is growing. There clearly were many points of contact between these cultures and the Hasmonean dynasty, and there is no reason to suppose the Jews were not influenced by these contacts in the development of their ideas of rulership, as well as in other spheres.

### III. FOREIGN AND MILITARY AFFAIRS

Salome Alexandra came to the throne in a time of rapid changes on the international political scene. Rome did not yet exercise a direct influence on Near Eastern events, but its actions did have an indirect effect. Alexander Jannaeus had been caught in the middle of the dynastic struggles of both the Ptolemies and the Seleucids, yet neither dynasty was a major factor by the time Salome Alexandra came to the throne. On the other hand, Alexander Jannaeus' policies of conquest had created clashes with neighboring states, the effects of which were still felt in Salome Alexandra's time. In addition, the power vacuum in Syria, caused by the weakened state of the Seleucids, created opportunities for surrounding dynasts, including Salome Alexandra, to move in and take control in various regions.

Roman intervention in Near Eastern affairs was usually done on an ad hoc basis, and more at the instigation of the disputing factions in a region than from Roman initiative. Rome was interested in protecting its trade and shipping routes, and in upholding its international reputation. By the first century BCE, the idea began to take shape of an organized, unified empire under Roman control. More and more Greek states sent delegates to the Roman Senate to seek Roman patronage, which then obligated Rome to protect its

clients.<sup>1</sup> Rome became further involved in the affairs of the Near East by unexpected bequests of territories made to it, for instance the bequest of the island of Cyrene made to Rome by Ptolemy Apion in 96 BCE.<sup>2</sup>

Rome's involvement in a war with Mithridates VI of Pontus has been viewed by scholars as having an indirect beneficial effect on the security of Judea in Salome Alexandra's reign. Mithridates VI had been engaged in expanding his territory since he came to the throne in 121 BCE. His increasing power was disturbing to Rome, which tried to contain his expansion into Cappadocia and Pamphlagonia. He also came into conflict with Rome when he "liberated" Greek cities of Asia and the Aegean. These conquests led to continual battles with Rome. At the same time, Mithridates was giving aid to his ally and son-in-law, Tigranes of Armenia, when the latter was annexing parts of Syria and Cappadocia.<sup>3</sup>

By 75/4 BCE, the king of Bithynia died and bequeathed his throne to Rome. Mithridates took this opportunity to invade Bithynia, and Rome responded with three years of warfare against Mithridates. Eventually the Roman army

---

<sup>1</sup> Erich S. Gruen, The Hellenistic World and the Coming of Rome, Vol. II, (1984), pp. 721-729

<sup>2</sup> Alfred R. Bellinger, "The End of the Seleucids", Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, Vol. 38, (June, 1949), p. 73

<sup>3</sup> H.H. Scullard, From the Gracchi to Nero, (1959), pp. 74-102

invaded Pontus itself, and Mithridates was forced to flee. In 72 BCE, he sought refuge in the territory of his ally, Tigranes.<sup>4</sup>

Tigranes in the meantime had been very busy with conquests of his own. He had come to the throne of Armenia in 95 BCE. Backed by Mithridates, he had occupied Cappadocia and deported 300,000 people to settle his new capital city of Tigranocerta. He united all of Armenia and annexed the northern territories of Parthia. By 83 BCE, he had annexed the remnant of the Seleucid empire in Syria and Cilicia. He was now the most powerful ruler in the East, and proclaimed himself "king of kings".<sup>5</sup>

Josephus reports on Tigranes' invasion of Syria and subsequent attack on Acco-Ptolemais in Palestine as if this all occurred in one event. He says "At that time it was reported that Tigranes (king of Armenia) had invaded Syria with an army of 300,000 men and he was coming up to Judea. As was reasonable, this terrified the queen [Salome Alexandra] and the people. Accordingly, they sent many valuable gifts to him, and an embassy, while he was besieging Ptolemais."<sup>6</sup>

However, these events actually took place over a number

---

<sup>4</sup> Glanville Downey, A History of Antioch in Syria, (1961), p. 139

<sup>5</sup> H.A. Omerod and M. Cary, "Rome and the East", CAH, Vol. IX, (1932), pp. 356-357

<sup>6</sup> Ant. XIII. 419

of years. As already mentioned, his annexation of Syria took place in 83 BCE. He seems to have left the south country of Syria alone until 72 BCE, when he is found to be striking coins in Damascus.<sup>7</sup> At this point in time Mithridates fled Pontus and took refuge in Armenia. The Roman general Lucullus sent his brother-in-law, Appius Clodius Pulcher, to Tigranes' Syrian headquarters in Antioch to demand the return of Mithridates. However, Plutarch relates that Pulcher was told that Tigranes was away subduing some cities in Phoenicia.<sup>8</sup>

The Phoenician city of Ptolemais was ruled at that time by Cleopatra Selene, the daughter of Cleopatra III of Egypt, and the wife, successively, of Antiochus VIII Grypus, Antiochus IX Cyzicenus, and Antiochus X Eusebes, claimants to the Seleucid throne. In 75 BCE,<sup>9</sup> Cleopatra Selene sent her two sons to Rome to claim the thrones of Egypt and Syria. According to Cicero, their claim to the Syrian throne was generally acknowledged, but the Senate did not have time to address the question of Egypt.<sup>10</sup>

Rome was currently pre-occupied with its war with Mithridates, so after two years, Cleopatra Selene's sons returned to Syria. But if Rome ever had a respite from the

---

<sup>7</sup> Bellinger, p. 81

<sup>8</sup> Plutarch, Lucullus 21,1-5

<sup>9</sup> Bellinger, p. 81

<sup>10</sup> Cicero, In Verrum IV, 27-30

war with Mithridates, it could come to the aid of Cleopatra Selene and her sons. This made her a powerful rival to Tigranes' hold on Syria, so he besieged her in Ptolemais. Taking Plutarch's testimony into account, it appears that Tigranes began his incursion into Phoenicia in 72 BCE, and in 69 BCE he succeeded in taking Ptolmais and capturing Cleopatra Selene.<sup>11</sup>

Salome Alexandra feared that Tigranes would next turn his attention to invading Judea. This fear was well-founded, for Tigranes seems to have been engaged in conquering more than just Ptolemais. Strabo tells us that Tigranes took by force both Syria and Phoenicia,<sup>12</sup> and Appian says that he conquered all the Syrian peoples as far as Egypt.<sup>13</sup> And as we have mentioned, Plutarch says he was subduing some cities in Phoenicia, not specifically Ptolemais. So it is quite understandable for Salome Alexandra to fear that Judea would be next. To forestall the possibility of his invading Judea, Salome Alexandra sent him envoys and gifts, while he was at Ptolemais, to buy his goodwill. Josephus tells us that Tigranes was favorably disposed toward this embassy, but that before any formal treaty could be made, he learned that Lucullus had invaded

---

<sup>11</sup> Strabo, Geography XVI,2,3

<sup>12</sup> Strabo, Geography II.14, 14-15

<sup>13</sup> Appian, The Syrian Wars 48

Armenia, forcing him to abandon Phoenicia and Syria.<sup>14</sup>

Scholars have concluded from Josephus' testimony that Salome Alexandra's diplomatic overtures were ineffectual, and that it was Rome's timely invasion of Armenia which saved Judea from invasion.<sup>15</sup> However, it is possible that Salome Alexandra's action was more vital than either Josephus or modern scholars give her credit for. Josephus says that Tigranes was forced to leave Ptolemais suddenly because Lucullus had already invaded Armenia. However, Plutarch relates that Lucullus had not yet invaded when Tigranes left Phoenicia. Rather, his business in Phoenicia having been successfully concluded, Tigranes returned to Antioch. In Antioch, he finally met with Clodius Pulcher. In the course of their interview, Tigranes refused to hand over Mithridates to the Romans. It was not until this point that Lucullus invaded Armenia and Tigranes left Syria to defend his throne.<sup>16</sup>

Plutarch's account makes it clear that Tigranes was in no hurry to meet with Pulcher, but left him waiting, and stirring up trouble, in Antioch, while Tigranes pursued his own interests in Phoenicia. It is not difficult to suppose that had invading Judea seemed to be advantageous to

---

<sup>14</sup> Ant. XIII. 421

<sup>15</sup> see for example Schürer, Vermes, Millar, p. 231; and Zeitlin, p. 339

<sup>16</sup> Plutarch, Lucullus 21, 1-5

Tigranes, Pulcher's presence in Antioch would not have prevented him from doing so. One thing that would have prevented him from invading would have been Salome Alexandra's successful diplomatic efforts. So there is good reason to believe that Salome Alexandra played a vital role in keeping Tigranes from invading her realm.

Salome Alexandra's relations with her neighboring fellow-rulers was also vital to Judea's security, and her policies were as successful with them as they were with Tigranes in safeguarding the peace of her realm. Judea was surrounded by many other nations and city-states, each of which had its own alliances and ambitions in the changing political climate of the first century BCE. The city-states of the Phoenician coast took advantage of the breakdown of the Seleucid empire to assert their independence. At the same time, small independent states with their own kings, like the kingdom of the Itureans, took advantage of the chaos to grab territory in Syria.<sup>17</sup> The city of Gaza was allied with the Nabateans, who were the enemies of Judea, while the city of Ascalon had been allied with Judea in the time of Alexander Jannaeus, because of their mutual ally, Egypt.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Menahem Stern, "Judea and Her Neighbors in the Days of Alexander Jannaeus", The Jerusalem Cathedral, Vol. I, Lee I. Levine, ed., (1981), pp. 23-24

<sup>18</sup> Stern, "Judea...", pp. 25-27

The Nabateans were the most powerful enemies of Judea.<sup>19</sup> These two nations had been allied in the early days of the Maccabees, but the expansionist policies of each nation's later rulers led to clashes between the two. John Hyrcanus had begun a policy of conquests in Nabatean territory, leading to conflicts of interest and hostilities between the two nations. His policies paved the way for Alexander Jannaeus' conquests of land in Transjordan, in areas under Nabatean influence, creating an even greater rift between the Hasmoneans and the Nabateans. Both groups were trying to establish trade routes from the Arabian Peninsula and so inevitably came into conflict. Alexander Jannaeus at first took cities from the Nabateans, but was forced to return some territory later on, in order to keep the Nabateans from taking advantage of Judea's internal unrest.<sup>20</sup>

In 85 BCE, Aretas III of Nabatea marched into Judea and defeated Alexander Jannaeus at Adida, but instead of annexing Judea, Aretas contented himself with wresting concessions from Jannaeus, and then he left.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps Aretas was unable to press the advantage in Judea because of struggles with the Iturean king, Ptolemy, son of Mennaesus,

---

<sup>19</sup> Schürer, Vermes, Millar, p. 226

<sup>20</sup> Aryeh Kasher, Jews, Idumeans and Ancient Arabs, (1988), pp. 44-45, 77, 89-96

<sup>21</sup> E.R. Bevan, "The Jews", CAH, Vol. IX, p. 400

over control of Damascus, or perhaps he was distracted by Tigranes' invasion of Syria in 85 BCE.<sup>22</sup> In either case, he left Judea intact, but remained its enemy.

Toward the end of his reign, Alexander Jannaeus resolved his internal troubles and returned to his policies of conquest and expansion. He turned his attention to the Hellenistic cities of the eastern border of Jewish Peraea and the Golan. He conquered the cities of Dium, Pella and Gamala. By the time of his death, the expansion of the Hasmonean kingdom had reached its limit. All of western Palestine except for Ascalon and Ptolemais were his, plus large areas east of the Jordan, including land from Moab in the south to the Golan in the north.<sup>23</sup>

It was in this atmosphere that Salome Alexandra came to the throne. She had inherited a newly enlarged territory, full of new and possibly resentful subjects. And she had inherited neighbors like the Nabateans as enemies who threatened these new acquisitions. Salome Alexandra must have been keenly aware of the precariousness of her situation, and the need to take immediate steps to protect her kingdom. She both levied forces from among her own citizenry, so as to double the size of her military forces, and she built up her own mercenary forces. Josephus implies that this force was more than merely defensive, that it also

---

<sup>22</sup> Kasher, Jews, Idumeans..., pp. 96-97

<sup>23</sup> Stern, "Judea...", p. 46

took the offensive in striking fear into the hearts of surrounding tyrants. For he says that she doubled her forces "so as to terrify the tyrants around about and to take hostages from them."<sup>24</sup> This seems to imply some aggressive actions taken by Salome Alexandra's forces, not merely a passive stance of defense. Aryeh Kasher says that there is little or no information on struggles between Salome Alexandra and the Hellenistic cities, and that perhaps this indicates that there was a lull in their mutual hostilities.<sup>25</sup> However, it seems rather that the references to striking fear and taking hostages is an oblique reference to active steps Salome Alexandra took to minimize the threats from her neighbors, left over from Alexander Jannaeus' reign.

Although Josephus does not tell us of any battles fought between Salome Alexandra and any of her neighbors, the reference to taking hostages makes it likely that there were indeed such battles, and that Salome Alexandra's troops were the victors. There are numerous examples in the ancient world of instances where the victors in warfare took hostages from the vanquished, as guarantors of future peace. In 446/5, the Athenians defeated Chalcis and took hostages, who they said they would hold onto until the time seemed

---

<sup>24</sup> Ant. XIII. 409

<sup>25</sup> Aryeh Kasher, Jews and Hellenistic Cities in Eretz Israel, (1990), p. 170

appropriate to release them.<sup>26</sup> Polybius and Livy<sup>27</sup> both quote the alliance between Rome and the Aetolian League, concluded in 189 BCE. The Aetolians made a variety of promises and concessions to Rome, including promising to deliver over to Rome forty hostages for six years. Philip II of Macedon had been a hostage to Thebes from 369 to 367 BCE, as security against Macedonia invading Thebes. Polybius himself had been among the Achaean hostages taken to Rome after the battle of Pydna in 168 BCE.<sup>28</sup>

These and other examples demonstrate that it was customary for the victor in war to take hostages to guarantee the future good behaviour of the vanquished. So when Josephus tells us that Salome Alexandra's military buildup so threatened her neighbors that she took hostages from them, it seems logical to assume that she had met her neighbors in battle and had defeated them. In this way, Salome Alexandra preserved the peace of her kingdom for her entire reign, without any loss of territory. However, the willingness of her neighbors to join in Aristobulus II's revolt at the end of her reign shows that their hostilities

---

<sup>26</sup> Sir Frank Adcock and D.J. Mosley, Diplomacy in Ancient Greece, (1975), pp. 256-257, document given in translation, found in H. Bengtson, Die Staatsvertrage des Altertums, Vol. II, (1962), # 155, and in R. Meiggs and D.M. Lewis, A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions to the End of the Fifth Century BC, (1969), # 52

<sup>27</sup> Polybius 21,32 and Livy 38,11

<sup>28</sup> Pierre Ducrey, Warfare in Ancient Greece, (1985, translated from the French by Janet Lloyd in 1986)

were merely lying dormant, but were not extinguished, and that they had only been awaiting the opportunity to renew their fight.

The extent of the threat posed by neighboring kings, especially Aretas III, is seen by the use Aristobulus and his friends made of it earlier in her reign. They came to Salome Alexandra to beg her to put a stop to the Pharisees' persecution of them, or at least to allow them to take refuge in Judea. By way of persuasion, they held over her head the possibility that they might take refuge instead with Aretas, or one of the kings in the area, and join in their mercenary forces. This threat was potent enough to lead her to accede to their demands and allow them to take refuge as guards in some of the border fortresses of Judea.<sup>29</sup> In the end, this was an unfortunate decision, for it gave Aristobulus and his friends a base from which they could seize power later on. But at the time, fear of external threats from surrounding kingdoms outweighed other considerations.

Perhaps it was because of Aristobulus' part in this episode that Salome Alexandra decided soon after to send him out of the country on a military mission. Josephus says, "Not long after, she sent her son Aristobulus with an army to Damascus, against Ptolemy, who was called the son of Mennaeus, who was a troublesome neighbor to the city. But

---

<sup>29</sup> Ant. XIII. 411-417

they returned without doing anything worthy of the effort."<sup>30</sup>

Damascus had been left open to conquest by the death of Antiochus XII Dionysus at the hands of the Nabateans in 87 BCE.<sup>31</sup> It was taken in 85 BCE by Aretas III, at the invitation of the city's inhabitants, who apparently preferred his rule to that of Ptolemy, the king of the Itureans, who seems to have been threatening to invade.<sup>32</sup> This was the threat from Ptolemy which may have forced Aretas III to cut short his expedition in Judea against Alexander Jannaeus.

Ptolemy son of Mennaeus ruled the kingdom of the Itureans, which had its capital at Chalcis, and which encompassed much of the area of present-day Lebanon. The kingdom under Ptolemy was growing in size and importance. He had conquered Botrys and Theuprosopon and threatened Byblos and Berytus, as well as Damascus. The district of Panias was under his control. In the time of Aristobulus I, it seems the Galilee was in Iturean hands, or at least the Jews and the Itureans shared common borders.<sup>33</sup> At that time, the two nations seemed to be allied, as both were

---

<sup>30</sup> Ant. XIII. 418

<sup>31</sup> Kasher, Jews, Idumeans..., pp. 106-107

<sup>32</sup> Ant. XIII. 395

<sup>33</sup> Schürer, Vermes, Millar, p. 564

enemies of the Seleucid empire and the Hellenistic cities.<sup>34</sup> However, by the time of Salome Alexandra, relations seemed to be strained, probably because, as with the Nabateans, the expansions of both kingdoms threatened the security and trade routes of the other.

At some point before Tigranes invaded Palestine, Damascus was again harassed by Ptolemy. Salome Alexandra took advantage of this opportunity to send her troublesome son Aristobulus at the head of an expedition to Damascus. Perhaps she hoped a successful conquest of Damascus would help unite her quarrelling subjects.<sup>35</sup> However, any such hopes were dashed when the expedition returned home without accomplishing anything.

The chronology of these events is somewhat uncertain. Most scholars either ignore the question of chronology, or assume that the expedition to Damascus took place in 69, after Tigranes had left Syria to return to Armenia. However, this has been called into question by G.W. Bowersock, in his book Roman Arabia. Bowersock first describes the situation as it is usually accepted to be—that Salome Alexandra sent her army to Damascus in 69 BCE, when Tigranes had left Damascus, but before he had left Syria entirely. Bowersock says this interpretation is in accordance with the context given in Josephus. But then

---

<sup>34</sup> Kasher, Jews, Idumeans..., p. 84

<sup>35</sup> Kasher, Jews, Idumeans..., p. 106

Bowersock proposes that perhaps Salome Alexandra's expedition took place in 72 BCE, after Aretas III was forced out of Damascus, but before Tigranes had arrived. In this scenario, it would have been the Itureans under Ptolemy who had expelled the Nabateans from Damascus, rather than the Armenian invasion.<sup>36</sup>

This second scenario seems to fit in better with the evidence in Josephus. Josephus describes the expedition to Damascus before he tells of Tigranes' coming to Syria. When he then turns to Tigranes, he links this episode to the Damascus episode by saying *κατὰ δὲ τοῦτον τὸν καιρὸν* = "at that time".<sup>37</sup> So according to Josephus' chronology, Salome Alexandra sent Aristobulus to Damascus, and subsequently Tigranes invaded Syria, and then came toward Judea. The invasion of Syria cannot refer to Tigranes' initial invasion, which had been in 83 BCE. But as we have already seen, in 72 BCE Tigranes began a southward incursion to Damascus and then into Phoenicia.

This would lead us to reconstruct events according to Bowersock's proposal: The Itureans forced the Nabateans out of Damascus but could not quite succeed in taking the city. Salome Alexandra took advantage of the disarray in the area to launch her attempt on Damascus. At this point, Tigranes began his own conquest of Damascus, and this forced

---

<sup>36</sup> G.W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, (1983), p. 26

<sup>37</sup> *Ant.* XIII. 419

Aristobulus to leave without having accomplished any of his goals. His return to Judea would have brought the reports of Tigranes' invasion that frightened Salome Alexandra and her people. This scenario fits in with the order in which Josephus relates events, and with his implied chronology.

Josephus tells us the expedition ended with nothing being accomplished. However, there is a possibility that the expedition had positive long-term results for Aristobulus II. Kasher believes that Aristobulus took the opportunity in Damascus to make a personal alliance with Ptolemy son of Mennaesus, instead of fighting with him over Damascus. Kasher sees hints of this in the fact that Aristobulus later gained help from local rulers in his revolt against his mother. Kasher says this help came from the Itureans, and that Aristobulus used his alliance with them to counterbalance his brother and rival's alliance with the Nabateans.<sup>38</sup>

This argument is not conclusive, yet some weight may be given to it, for it could explain why, twenty years later, Ptolemy took in Aristobulus' orphaned children,<sup>39</sup> and later on helped Aristobulus' son Antigonus in his efforts to regain his father's throne.<sup>40</sup> If this alliance did indeed take place, then Salome Alexandra's sending Aristobulus at

---

<sup>38</sup> Kasher, Jews, Idumeans..., p. 108

<sup>39</sup> Ant. XIV. 126

<sup>40</sup> Ant. XIV. 297

the head of the expedition turned out to have been a gross miscalculation.

Salome Alexandra's foreign policy shows a woman who was strong and assertive in taking both defensive and offensive measures on behalf of her country. Her efforts to increase her military power kept her realm secure from her neighboring rivals throughout her reign. She took the initiative in creating diplomatic ties with Tigranes, which dissuaded him from invading Judea. She showed she had ambitions of conquest when she sent the mission to Damascus. In general, her foreign policy was energetic and effective in safeguarding her country, although she did not succeed in winning any new territory. Her greatest mistake lay, not in her foreign policy, but in allowing her fear of her neighbors to cloud her judgement in acquiescing to her son and his friends' entreaties to her, and in entrusting Aristobulus with the expedition to Damascus. These two decisions gave Aristobulus the access to fortresses and the money in them, and possibly to a foreign alliance with Ptolemy, which he needed to launch his rebellion against his mother at the end of her reign.

#### IV. THE PHARISEES AND SALOME ALEXANDRA

No discussion of the reign of Salome Alexandra would be complete without an examination of the role the Pharisees played in her government. However, such an examination has many difficulties. The description Josephus gives of the Pharisees in Bellum Judaicum is very different from the picture presented of them in the Antiquities. Similarly, the motivation for giving them power which Josephus ascribes to Salome Alexandra in Bellum Judaicum is very different from the motivation in Antiquities. Even within each narrative there are inconsistencies as to the origin of the Pharisees and the extent of their power under Salome Alexandra. The evidence of the rabbinic sources is not very helpful in sorting through these contradictions, for the rabbinic stories are more legendary than historical and tell us little about the role of the Pharisees in Salome Alexandra's reign.

In Bellum Judaicum, the Pharisees are first mentioned in connection with the beginning of Salome Alexandra's rule. After describing Salome Alexandra's accession to the throne and her initial activities in setting up her government, Josephus says:

"The Pharisees grew beside her in power, a group of Jews who seem to be more pious than all the rest and

who seem to explain the law more accurately."<sup>1</sup> Salome Alexandra is then depicted as being entirely motivated by religious feeling and a desire to enforce meticulous observance of the ancestral laws. Thus, she expels from political office all who offend against these laws, and she turns to the Pharisees as her advisors because of their reputation as the most pious and accurate expositors of the law. This seems to present the Pharisees as a religious or scholarly legalistic group of Jews. Yet their subsequent actions in assuming the administration of the government, banishing enemies and recalling friends,<sup>2</sup> and exacting vengeance against their enemies,<sup>3</sup> are the actions a political party takes when it comes to power.

The picture one obtains of Salome Alexandra from Bellum Judaicum is of a pious woman who wins the people's love because she opposed her husband's transgressions against the law. She was so concerned with the ancestral law that she "turned a certain extraordinary amount of attention" to the Pharisees. She did not deliberately give them a part in the government, but they, "stealing a march upon the sincerity of the woman", gradually "became the administrators of the whole government".<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Bell. I.110-111

<sup>2</sup> Bell. I. 111

<sup>3</sup> Bell. I. 113

<sup>4</sup> Bell. I. 111

So Salome Alexandra, according to this text, was a good, but naive, woman, who allowed the Pharisees to take advantage of her. However, this picture does not accord with an earlier glimpse Josephus gives us of Salome Alexandra. In discussing the reign of Aristobulus I, Josephus mentions that Aristobulus' wife joined in a plot to trick Aristobulus into killing his favorite brother.<sup>5</sup> This wife is usually taken to be Salome Alexandra, who marries Alexander Jannaeus and makes him king upon the death of Aristobulus. But this cruel and calculating woman hardly fits with the pious, ingenuous woman we later meet.

The narrative in The Jewish Antiquities is much fuller and much different from that of Bellum Judaicum. Unlike Bellum Judaicum, the Pharisees have already put in an appearance before the reign of Salome Alexandra. In the reign of John Hyrcanus, Josephus tells of a banquet in which the Pharisees tell Hyrcanus, who is one of their disciples, that he should relinquish the High Priesthood, because his mother was rumored to have been a captive.<sup>6</sup> As a result of this dispute, John Hyrcanus abrogates any laws that had been promulgated by the Pharisees, and throws his support instead

---

<sup>5</sup> Bell. I. 76

<sup>6</sup> A similar story is told in b. Kiddushin 66a, with Alexander Jannaeus, instead of Hyrcanus I, as the protagonist. However, most scholars see Josephus' version as the more reliable. See, for example, Joseph Sievers, The Hasmoneans and Their Supporters, (1990), p. 148, n. 41, and A. Schalit, "Domestic Politics and Political Institutions", WHJP, Vol VII, (1972), pp. 271-272

to the Sadducees. In this episode, Josephus describes the Pharisees as a group concerned with preserving and teaching the ancestral laws which were not written down in the laws of Moses. They have the support of the masses, so much so that whatever they say about a king or high priest is automatically believed by the people. However, this does not seem to be borne out in the subsequent narrative, for despite opposition from the Pharisees, Josephus tells us that John Hyrcanus lived happily after this and reigned well for thirty-one years. Indeed, he was so favored by God as to merit the gift of prophecy.<sup>7</sup>

After this, the Pharisees disappear, and do not resurface until the end of Alexander Jannaeus' reign. At this point, Josephus relates a scene which is completely absent from the parallel account in Bellum Judaicum. Alexander Jannaeus, lying on his deathbed after a reign filled with foreign and domestic strife, advises his wife, Salome Alexandra, on how to secure the throne for herself after his death. He tells her to share some measure of power with the Pharisees, for they have a great deal of influence among the Jews, and she will be accepted by the people as queen, if the Pharisees support her.<sup>8</sup>

Salome Alexandra does as her husband advises. For the sake of political expediency, she gives power to the

---

<sup>7</sup> Ant. XIII. 288-300

<sup>8</sup> Ant. XIII. 401-404

Pharisees, making them well-wishers and friends. Unlike in Bellum Judaicum, no mention is made of her being particularly pious or concerned with the meticulous observance of the law. Nor is she a guileless woman, duped into ceding her power to the Pharisees. Rather, she is shrewd and calculating in giving power to the Pharisees, commanding the masses to obey them, and restoring whatever of their laws may have been revoked by John Hyrcanus.<sup>9</sup> This picture fits in much better with the depiction of her as the wife of Aristobulus I, coldly plotting the murder of her brother-in-law by her husband.<sup>10</sup> The two versions do agree, however, that Salome Alexandra was beloved by the people because she opposed the deeds of Alexander Jannaeus.<sup>11</sup>

The Pharisees in this passage of Antiquities are different from the group described in Bellum Judaicum. In Antiquities, Josephus stresses that they are influential among the masses, although he does not say why. While in Bellum Judaicum he describes them as a pious group who explain the laws more accurately than any others, in Antiquities there is no mention of either of these traits, other than the passing reference to their introducing customs according to hereditary traditions. Here, they seem

---

<sup>9</sup> Ant. XIII. 408

<sup>10</sup> Bell. I. 76 and Ant. XIII. 308

<sup>11</sup> Bell. I. 107 and Ant. XIII. 407

to be a purely political group, concerned with acquiring and maintaining their power.

In neither version are the Pharisees depicted in a particularly positive light. In Bellum Judaicum, they are opportunists who take advantage of Salome Alexandra's faith in them to steal the government out from under her. In Antiquities, they are hypocrites who are happy to heap praise upon their enemy, Alexander Jannaeus, in return for a share in the ruling power. In both versions, the primary use they make of this power is to exact revenge against those who have been their enemies.

Both Bellum Judaicum and Antiquities say that Alexandra Salome had the name of queen, but the Pharisees had the actual power.<sup>12</sup> However, both texts agree that Salome Alexandra was responsible for the execution of foreign and military affairs. As discussed in Chapter III, she is credited with the strengthening of the army and mercenary forces, with carrying out diplomatic missions, and with initiating a military expedition to Damascus. Further, even though the Pharisees are said to be firmly in charge, Salome Alexandra still is able to shield those victims of the Pharisees who appeal to her for help. At the end of her reign, when her son Aristobulus II rebels, the Pharisees are not heard from at all. It is left to Hyrcanus II and the elders to appeal to the dying Salome Alexandra for help and

---

<sup>12</sup> Bell. I. 111 and I. 112, and Ant. XIII. 408

advice. She takes action by imprisoning Aristobulus II's wife and children, but she dies before she can do anything more. The Pharisees seem to have disappeared from the scene, taking no part in dealing with Aristobulus' revolt before Salome Alexandra's death, or in the subsequent dynastic struggles between Aristobulus II and Hyrcanus II.<sup>13</sup>

Thus we have a wealth of conflicting information as to the character of the Pharisees, Salome Alexandra's motive in giving them power, and the extent of that power. Scholars have tried, with varying degrees of success, to reconcile these disparate pieces of information.

In their History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ, Schürer, Vermes, Millar and Black focus on Josephus' description of the Pharisees as exact expounders of the Oral Law of the Torah. They believe the Pharisees are first and foremost a religious group. They occasionally involve themselves in politics when forced to by governmental interference in their promulgation of their laws, as under John Hyrcanus and Alexander Jannaeus. But their goal is not political power, but the enforcement of their view of the rigorous fulfillment of the Torah. So under Salome Alexandra, "the Pharisees held a leading position in the government which they nevertheless exploited only in the interests of their religious demands. To

---

<sup>13</sup> Bell. I. 117-119, and Ant. XIII. 422-430

politics as such they were always relatively indifferent."<sup>14</sup>

Ellis Rivkin writes of the Pharisees as a law-making scholar class, determined to have their exposition of the law seen as authoritative, and their piety as a model for all Jews.<sup>15</sup> His vision of the Pharisees does not differ very much from Schürer's, except that Rivkin stresses the Pharisees as a legalistic, scholar-class, rather than as a religious group. However, Judaism of the first century BCE was centered so much on the laws of the Torah, it is difficult to see this as a very sharp distinction.

A sharper difference of opinion is seen in the writings of Solomon Zeitlin, who sees the Pharisees as very much a political party. He says they opposed the policies of conquest and expansion of the Hasmoneans, (i.e. John Hyrcanus and Alexander Jannaeus) leading as they did to the forced conversion of conquered peoples and the taxation of the people of Judea in order to support the military operations. This brought the Pharisees to revolt until they were given power by Salome Alexandra and had the opportunity to take revenge against their enemies.<sup>16</sup> This supposed

---

<sup>14</sup> Emil Schürer, Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Matthew Black, The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ, Vol. II, p. 394

<sup>15</sup> Ellis Rivkin, A Hidden Revolution: The Pharisees' Search for the Kingdom Within, (1978), p. 49

<sup>16</sup> Solomon Zeitlin, The Rise and Fall of the Judean State, Vol. I, (1962), pp. 328-337

opposition of the Pharisees to the political and military policies of the Hasmoneans is in direct opposition to Rivkin's view that all the Pharisees objected to in the Hasmonean rulers was their abrogation of Pharisaic law, and as soon as Salome Alexandra restored these laws, the Pharisees were content to acquiesce to her rule, to her son Hyrcanus II as High Priest, and to her foreign policy.<sup>17</sup>

Abraham Schalit agrees with Zeitlin's picture of the Pharisees as a political party, and with his conclusions as to the Pharisees' objections to the Hasmonean policies. But Schalit goes further, postulating that the structure of the government of Judea had been established as far back as the time of Simon Maccabee. In I Maccabees 14:28, Simon was invested with the rulership of the Jews by the priests and the people, princes and elders. Schalit sees this as the four groups making up a national assembly that would have been convened in times of national crisis. For day to day administration of the country, Schalit says the Hasmoneans developed a smaller council composed of representatives from these four groups, with an equal balance of power among them. The Pharisees came to be one of these groups, but as the Hasmoneans became more Hellenized, and adopted policies with which the Pharisees disagreed, the balance of power shifted. The Hasmoneans, beginning with John Hyrcanus, began favoring those elements of the council that backed

---

<sup>17</sup> Rivkin, pp. 69-71

their policies. This diminished the power of the Pharisees, and eventually led to civil war.<sup>18</sup>

Schalit's and Zeitlin's speculations are interesting, but nowhere in Josephus is there any mention of the Pharisees or anyone else objecting to the policies of John Hyrcanus or Alexander Jannaeus. All that Josephus tells us about the Pharisees' supposed objections to John Hyrcanus was that he should not have been High Priest, because of his mother possibly having been a captive. It cannot be that they object to him personally as being over-Hellenized, because Josephus says Hyrcanus is a disciple of theirs, and much beloved by them.<sup>19</sup>

In the revolt against Alexander Jannaeus, Josephus does not say it is the Pharisees who are rebelling, but the people in general, and the reason is unclear. It seems to stem, again, from questions of his fitness to be High Priest, rather than from any objections to his policies of conquest.<sup>20</sup> As for the idea of the council and shifts in the balance of power, Josephus does not mention a council or sanhedrin, either in Bellum Judaicum or in Antiquities, except for the decree of Antiochus III<sup>21</sup>, until the time

---

<sup>18</sup> A. Schalit, "Domestic Politics and Political Institutions", WHJP, Vol. VII, (1972), pp. 255-274

<sup>19</sup> Ant. XIII. 288-300

<sup>20</sup> Ant. XIII. 372

<sup>21</sup> Ant. XII. 138

of Herod.<sup>22</sup> The decree of Antiochus III says nothing about the make-up of this council, or what its powers were. When Josephus mentions it in Herod's time, he takes for granted its existence as an established institution, but this does not help us to know how far back in time we can place its origin. Nor does he tell us anything about what its structure would have been in earlier times. The Pharisees may have had representatives on this or some other kind of advisory council within the government before Salome Alexandra, but there is no evidence to say for sure that they held any real power or influence over events before her reign.

Unlike these other scholars, Jacob Neusner, following in the path of Morton Smith, distinguishes between the Pharisees of the Hasmoneans and the Pharisees that Josephus knew. According to Neusner, the Pharisees were a political party active in the court of the Hasmoneans. Perhaps they wished to teach the people to follow the law, but they were not above using political power to coerce obedience. All that we can say for sure about the Pharisees, says Neusner, is that they are a political party in the Hasmonean era that opposed Alexander Jannaeus, but we do not know why, and they are supported by Salome Alexandra, but we do not know why. After the reign of Salome Alexandra, the Pharisees disappear. They reappear in the time of Herod and Hillel,

---

<sup>22</sup> Ant. XIV. 167-68

but now they are a religious sect, concerned with table-fellowship and ritual purity. We do not know what caused the change, although Neusner speculates that perhaps the teachings of Hillel are a reaction against the time when they were politically active- a time that only ended in bloodshed for all involved.<sup>23</sup>

By distinguishing between stages in the development of the Pharisees in different points in history, Neusner and Smith go a long way toward defining the problem of the character of the Pharisees. From their activities in the time of Salome Alexandra, the Pharisees can only be seen as a political party. All that links this political party with the religious sect of Hillel is the description of them as the most accurate interpreters of the law, and the leading sect. Yet their actions in the time of Salome Alexandra speak louder as to their character than this description of them.

Whether as a religious sect or a political party, Josephus tells us in Antiquities that they rose to prominence because they were very influential among the masses. Most scholars seem to accept this, and indeed this would be a logical reason for Salome Alexandra to grant them a place in her government. However, there is reason to doubt that they were really as influential in this time

---

<sup>23</sup> Jacob Neusner, From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism, (1979), pp. 48-91

period as the version in Antiquities would have us believe.

The basis for believing Josephus' claim as to the Pharisees' influence in Hasmonean times comes from the story in Antiquities of the Pharisees and John Hyrcanus; a story in the rabbinic tradition about Alexander Jannaeus and the leading Pharisee Simeon ben Shetaḥ, which seems to indicate tension between Jannaeus and the Pharisees; and Alexander Jannaeus' deathbed speech to Salome Alexandra, which implicates the Pharisees as leaders of the civil war against him. Each of these stories has problems which, taken all together, cast doubt on the purported influence of the Pharisees at this time period.

It has already been mentioned above that there is an internal inconsistency in the story of John Hyrcanus, in that, despite the Pharisees supposed influence over the masses, John Hyrcanus reigned long and peacefully after his rift with them. Furthermore, in the parallel account of John Hyrcanus' reign in Bellum Judaicum, the Pharisees are not mentioned at all. For these reasons, Joseph Sievers concludes that the story of the Pharisees' influence at this time is dubious, at best.<sup>24</sup> In both Bellum Judaicum and Antiquities, Josephus says the people were jealous of Hyrcanus and his successes, and this was the cause of the unrest at the beginning of his reign. This seems to be a

---

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Sievers, The Hasmoneans and Their Supporters, (1990), pp. 147-155

more likely explanation, and the story of his rift with the Pharisees is a later interpolation back into history.

The story of Alexander Jannaeus' strained relations with Simeon ben Shetaḥ is found in a variety of rabbinic sources, most notably in yBerakhot 11b and Genesis Rabbah 91:3. The story tells that 300 nazirites came to Jerusalem to make sacrifices. Simeon ben Shetaḥ found a way to release half of them from their obligation. He asked Alexander Jannaeus to provide for the other half, saying he would take care of the first half. When Jannaeus discovered that ben Shetaḥ had released his half, and not paid for sacrifices, he became angry and ben Shetaḥ fled. Later, some dignitaries came to dine with Alexander Jannaeus, and asked after ben Shetaḥ. Jannaeus asks his wife (or ben Shetaḥ's sister- we will return to this point later) to send for ben Shetaḥ.

When ben Shetaḥ arrives, he seats himself between the king and queen. Jannaeus asks why he did this, and he responds by quoting ben Sira: "Esteem her (knowledge), so shall she exalt thee and seat thee between princes". Then Jannaeus asks why ben Shetaḥ fooled him concerning the nazirites. Ben Shetaḥ replies he did not fool the king, but rather Jannaeus gave them of his (money), and ben Shetaḥ gave them of his (the knowledge that freed them of their vow). Jannaeus asks why ben Shetaḥ fled, and he responds by quoting Isaiah 26:20 to the effect that he hid until

Jannaeus' anger abated. Then Jannaeus asks him to say Grace, and he says it for the food which Jannaeus and his guests had eaten. When Jannaeus questions this unusual Grace, ben Shetaḥ says he cannot say Grace for food he has not eaten. So Jannaeus has another glass of wine poured for ben Shetaḥ, for which he then says Grace.<sup>25</sup>

Joshua Efron analyzed this story in some detail. He points out that the story tells us nothing about the rift between Jannaeus and the Pharisees. There are no ideological discussions, and overall the tone is mild. Jannaeus is not portrayed as a tyrant or an evil man, but as a ruler with a temper, who nevertheless is observant in his religion, and who ends up reconciling with Simeon ben Shetaḥ.<sup>26</sup> There is no hint in the story that there was a mass exodus of Pharisees fleeing a king they had rebelled against. Only Simeon ben Shetaḥ is mentioned, and he fled because of a specific incident involving him alone, and he is brought back by Jannaeus without further recriminations. Jannaeus accepts his explanations and pours him some wine - not exactly the actions or attitude of a bitter enemy. Finally, there is no hint in this story of the Pharisees having any great influence over the people, or that any difficulties ben Shetaḥ had with Jannaeus were the basis for

---

<sup>25</sup> Genesis Rabbah 91.3

<sup>26</sup> Joshua Efron, Studies in the Hasmonean Period, (1987), pp. 147-151

a civil war.

As this story does not give us any firm evidence for the Pharisees' influence with the people as the basis for civil war, then the only evidence we have left is Alexander Jannaeus' dying advice to Salome Alexandra. This speech is absent in Bellum Judaicum, which makes no mention of the Pharisees in relation to Alexander Jannaeus. In Antiquities, the Pharisees are not mentioned at the outbreak of the civil war, or during the events of the war. But on his deathbed, Alexander Jannaeus suddenly tells Salome Alexandra that the Pharisees are very influential with the people and it was his rift with them that caused the people to rebel. In this deathbed advice, Jannaeus stresses the influence of the Pharisees, saying very much the same thing that was said in the story of the Pharisees with John Hyrcanus, that the Pharisees are so influential with the people that whatever they say about someone will be instantly believed.

Efron attributes the source of this story to Nicholas of Damascus. He says Nicholas wrote this to put the Pharisees in a bad light - as hypocrites and vengeance-seekers, likely to desecrate a corpse, but willing to eulogize Jannaeus in return for power. Nicholas also thus shows the people in a bad light, as stupid enough to follow the Pharisees. And Salome Alexandra is also made to look foolish for giving them power. So the story was made up by

Nicholaus of Damascus for propaganda reasons, and blindly adopted by Josephus.<sup>27</sup>

Morton Smith takes this deathbed speech to be a later reconstructing of history by Josephus, for propaganda reasons of his own. Smith theorizes that Josephus is motivated by different things in writing Bellum Judaicum then he is twenty years later in writing Antiquities. When writing Bellum Judaicum, the Pharisees are just one of many different groups within the Jewish community, but by the time Josephus is writing Antiquities, the Pharisees are becoming the most important group, and are the Romans' best bet to turn to as the leaders of the Jews. Josephus, writing his history of the Jews, is therefore moved to retroject this image of the Pharisees as the leading and most influential sect, back into history. Thus he interpolates the Pharisees into the early unrest in John Hyrcanus' rule, and invents Jannaeus' dying speech, emphasizing in both cases the influence the Pharisees had over people and events.<sup>28</sup>

Zeitlin sees some corroboration for the deathbed scene in a similar story told in the Talmud.<sup>29</sup> In this passage, Jannaeus is quoted as saying "Fear not the Pharisees and the

---

<sup>27</sup> Efron, pp. 173-174

<sup>28</sup> Morton Smith, "Palestinian Judaism in the First Century", Israel: Its Role in Civilization, M. Davis, ed., (1956), pp. 67-81

<sup>29</sup> Zeitlin, p. 334

non-Pharisees but the hypocrites who ape the Pharisees; because their deeds are the deeds of Zimri but they expect a reward like Phineas."<sup>30</sup> Efron believes this story is a legend which has no basis in fact and which is dependent upon the story in Josephus.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the rabbinic story tells us nothing historical. Jannaeus is not telling Salome Alexandra to ally herself with the Pharisees, he is telling her not to fear them. Nor does he blame them for any part in the civil war, implying rather that there is an entirely different group, "hypocrites", who are the real problem she must guard against.

Thus this story seems to be a fabrication, whether invented by Nicholas of Damascus or by Josephus. It makes little sense to take the story at face value, when there is no mention of the Pharisees being involved in the civil war in the version in Bellum Judaicum and no mention of their involvement in the Antiquities version until this speech. As in the unrest in the time of John Hyrcanus, the people in the time of Alexander Jannaeus are perfectly capable of rebelling because of their own discontent, without any pushing from the Pharisees.

If the Pharisees were not truly influential among the masses of the time, then how are we to explain Salome Alexandra's placing them in power? Zeitlin believes that

---

<sup>30</sup> bSotah 22b

<sup>31</sup> Efron, p. 190

Salome Alexandra was firmly allied with the Pharisees even during her husband's rule, because her brother was the leading Pharisee, Simeon ben Shetaḥ.<sup>32</sup> Klausner seems to agree with this assessment. Although he acknowledges that their being siblings is open to question, still Klausner says he was either her brother, or like a brother to her, and he guided her in all things.<sup>33</sup>

Josephus not only does not mention Simeon ben Shetaḥ as being Salome Alexandra's brother, he does not mention him at all, in any context. The origin of this idea comes from the story discussed above, of the quarrel between Simeon ben Shetaḥ and Alexander Jannaeus. In the version of this story given in yBerakhot VII. 11b, Alexander Jannaeus recalls Simeon ben Shetaḥ from exile directly. But in the version in Genesis Rabbah, the text says "He said to his sister: 'Send for him to come here'", without clarifying whose sister is meant. Efron, in analyzing this text, says one version has Jannaeus speaking to Shlomzo - one of the versions of Salome Alexandra's name. However, Efron says there is another version which says **לֵאחֵז יָהּ** = "to his wife". In subsequent versions, this seems to have been miswritten as **לֵאחֵז יָהּ** - "to his sister". This is the sole basis for the theory that Salome Alexandra was the sister of Simeon ben

---

<sup>32</sup> Zeitlin, p. 320

<sup>33</sup> Joseph Klausner, "Queen Salome Alexandra", WHJP, Vol. VII, p. 248

Shetaḥ. Efron further notes that, when Simeon ben Shetaḥ explains his audacity at sitting between the king and queen, he does so by citing the ascendancy of the Torah, not by claiming kinship.<sup>34</sup> However, the text does imply that Salome Alexandra had some knowledge of Simeon ben Shetaḥ's whereabouts, which does indicate some connection between the two of them.

Apart from this story, there is one other rabbinic tradition which places Simeon ben Shetaḥ and Queen Salome Alexandra together. This tradition describes the reign of Salome Alexandra as a time of great prosperity. It is found in a number of different sources, with minor variations. In bTaanith, it says,

"For it so happened in the days of Simeon ben Shetaḥ. [At that time] rain fell on the eve of Wednesdays and Sabbaths so that the grains of wheat came up as large as kidneys and the grains of barley like the stones of olives, and of the lentils like the golden denarii..."<sup>35</sup>

In the Sifra, the same story begins: "There was the case, in the time of Simeon ben Shetaḥ, in the time of Queen Shelamṣu..."<sup>36</sup> And the version in Leviticus Rabbah begins: "It is told that in the days of Simeon ben Shetaḥ

---

<sup>34</sup> Efron, p. 152

<sup>35</sup> bTaanith 23a

<sup>36</sup> Sifra B'Hukkotai 1

and Queen Salome..."<sup>37</sup>

These texts seem to be the basis for Klausner and others to assume that Salome Alexandra was ruled by Simeon ben Shetaḥ. But there really is no firm evidence of this in any of these versions. In Leviticus Rabbah, the version puts them both together in one clause. Yet, the version in the Talmud makes no reference to Salome Alexandra at all, and the Sifra version seems to add "in the time of Queen Shelamṣu" as a clarifier to "the time of Simeon ben Shetaḥ". It is possible to understand the Sifra and Leviticus Rabbah texts to be saying "in the time when Simeon ben Shetaḥ and Queen Salome ruled". Yet it could just as well mean "in the time when Simeon ben Shetaḥ was the leading Pharisee, when Queen Salome ruled", just as in Luke 3:1-2, "In the fifteenth year of the emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, when Herod was prince of Galilee, his brother Philip prince of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias prince of Abilene, during the High Priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas". That is to say, inserting Queen Salome is simply intended to locate Simeon ben Shetaḥ in time, and not to imply anything about his political power relative to Salome Alexandra.

We are left with the Josephan narratives as our only means to determine the extent and nature of the Pharisees' power and the reason for Salome Alexandra to grant it to

---

<sup>37</sup> Leviticus Rabbah 35:10

them. Most scholars, having accepted Josephus' depiction of the Pharisees as being very influential among the people, have also accepted Josephus' statement that the Pharisees had absolute power. They then used this power to take vengeance on their enemies and to enforce observance of the ancestral laws which they considered to be of supreme importance. They allowed Salome Alexandra to conduct foreign and military affairs only because they considered this to be unimportant, as long as she did not interfere with their goals. Thus, as Sievers notes, most scholars seem to see Salome Alexandra as merely an instrument of the Pharisees.<sup>38</sup>

However Sievers, who questions the Pharisees' influence, sees Salome Alexandra as less of a passive puppet in the hands of the Pharisees. He believes that Josephus' conflicting reports as to Salome Alexandra's motivations are basically irreconcilable. Sievers' evaluation of Salome Alexandra focuses only on the facts as to her actions and the Pharisees' actions, discounting Josephus' contradictory and confusing characterizations. Using this methodology, Sievers presents a picture of a woman who took the initiative in military and diplomatic matters; who kept the peace; who minimized potential bloodshed from the Pharisees' vengeance-seeking; who was expected to take the initiative

---

<sup>38</sup> Joseph Sievers, "The Role of Women in the Hasmonean Dynasty", Josephus, the Bible and History, Louis Feldman and Gohei Hata, edd., (1989), p. 139

against her son's revolt even while on her deathbed; and who lived to a ripe old age and died in her bed, unlike so many other members of her dynasty.<sup>39</sup>

Taking Sievers' example and concentrating on the facts Josephus presents, rather than his characterizations, what conclusions can we come to concerning Salome Alexandra and the Pharisees? First, what can we say about Salome Alexandra's motives? The stories of the Pharisees' great influence over the people have been discounted, as have the assumptions about her relationship with Simeon ben Shetaḥ. This leaves the religious motivation ascribed to her in Bellum Judaicum as the only other explanation Josephus offers us. There is no way to say for sure that this was her motivation, but there is some evidence for it. Josephus tells us Salome Alexandra expelled from office anyone who offended against the ancestral law. Perhaps this indicates her devotion to the law, although it is also possible that this was a price she had to pay for the Pharisees' support. There is also the hint in the story of Alexander Jannaeus and Simeon ben Shetaḥ that Salome Alexandra had some connection to him, since she knew of his whereabouts. In the end, though, we can only speculate about her motivations.

One thing that does come across clearly in both of Josephus' histories is that the Pharisees' power centered on

---

<sup>39</sup> Sievers, "The Role of Women...", p. 138

internal affairs, while Salome Alexandra controlled foreign and military affairs. While some scholars believe that the Pharisees allowed Salome Alexandra to rule in this area because it did not interfere with their goals, it seems clear that the opposite is the case. Salome Alexandra did not rule at the sufferance of the Pharisees; rather, they owed their access to power to her support. They held no official position or claim to power before her rule. The stories of their involvement in events prior to her rule are of dubious reliability, but even if we accept them as true, none of these stories give the Pharisees any place in the government of Judea. After Salome Alexandra's death, they disappear from history until the time of Herod, and then again they have no role in the government. It seems they rose to power under Salome Alexandra and fell out of power with her death. Her hold on power came, not from the Pharisees, but from the people themselves. For Josephus says in both Antiquities and Bellum Judaicum that she was beloved by the people because she had opposed the policies of her husband, Alexander Jannaeus.<sup>40</sup>

If she did not need to share power with the Pharisees in order to keep the peace and her hold on the throne, then why did Salome Alexandra give them power? The answer seems to lie within the probable structure of the Hasmonean government. As mentioned above, Abraham Schalit sees the

---

<sup>40</sup> Bell. I. 107 and Ant. XIII. 407

Hasmonean government, from the time of the Maccabees on, as consisting of four groups or classes of Jews - priests and princes, elders and the people. The people, Schalit says, probably does not mean just anyone, but representatives who are well-versed in Jewish law.<sup>41</sup>

It is possible to see at least three of these four groups still operating in the court of Salome Alexandra. The priests do not figure largely in her rule, although they can be seen as being represented by Hyrcanus II in his role as High Priest. The "princes" are the "chief men of rank and influence" who were allied with Aristobulus II.<sup>42</sup> (These people may or may not be equated with the Sadducees). The elders appear at the end of Salome Alexandra's rule, when they accompany Hyrcanus II to seek Salome Alexandra's help against Aristobulus' revolt.<sup>43</sup> If, as Schalit says, the representatives of the people had to have some knowledge of the law, then it would make sense for Salome Alexandra, as a ruler concerned with the accurate observance of the law, to turn to the group with the reputation as the most accurate expounders of the law. Therefore she turned to the Pharisees to fill this role. So we can see all the expected elements of the Hasmonean court (except perhaps the priests) present in Salome Alexandra's reign. However, it is still

---

<sup>41</sup> Schalit, pp. 255-258

<sup>42</sup> Ant. XIII. 411

<sup>43</sup> Ant. XIII. 428

necessary to explain why Salome Alexandra promoted the Pharisees over the other groups at the court.

To answer this question, it is important to remember a point discussed in Chapter II. That is that Hellenistic rulers relied on a hierarchy known as "Friends" of the ruler, to be administrators of internal affairs of the realm, while the king concentrated on military and foreign affairs. Schalit sees a hint that Alexander Jannaeus saw the "chief men" as his "Friends" in the speech they make to Salome Alexandra.<sup>44</sup> In this speech, they describe themselves as loyal followers of their master, whose comrade in arms they were, and who had rewarded them for their faithful service to him. When Aristobulus II goes to the fortresses where they had sought refuge, they are referred to as "his father's friends".<sup>45</sup> Schalit sees this as meaning the official Hellenistic title and function, not a casual expression of loyalty or affection.<sup>46</sup>

Salome Alexandra was a queen in the Hellenistic mold, despite her care for Jewish law. Like Alexander Jannaeus, she too would have had her hierarchy of "Friends" as administrators of her government. She would not have turned to her husband's "Friends" as her chief administrators, for they had allied themselves with her son Aristobulus II, who

---

<sup>44</sup> Antiquities XIII. 411-415

<sup>45</sup> Ant. XIII. 422

<sup>46</sup> Schalit, pp. 283-284

made no effort to conceal his desire to rule in her stead. The priests and elders figure in such a minor and shadowy way in the narrative that it seems they were neither powerful nor effective enough in their roles at court to be viable candidates. She needed a group that already had standing at court, but that had not succeeded in gaining power on their own, and so would be beholden to her for their power. The Pharisees held expertise in the ancestral law which governed the lives of the people, and may have had some sort of legal advisory role in court, although no power, so they were the most logical choice to be her chief administrators of domestic affairs.

In the initial description of the Pharisees' actions at the beginning of Salome Alexandra's rule, the Pharisees are indeed seen as administrators. They bring back people from exile and free people from captivity.<sup>47</sup> Josephus implies this demonstrates that they were absolute rulers, and most scholars have taken this to mean that they used their political power to bring back from exile those Pharisees who had fled during Alexander Jannaeus' rule. However, this could be an administrative action taken on behalf of the new ruler. In the turbulent joint-rule of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II and Cleopatra II, Egypt was subjected to a great deal of civil upheaval. when the co-rulers finally reconciled in 118 BCE, they issued a decree giving general

---

<sup>47</sup> Ant. XIII. 409

amnesty to people for all manner of offenses. In his notes to this decree, Stanley Burstein remarks that this is an example of a general amnesty decree which was usually made at moments of transition, such as at the accession of a new king. This particular decree was issued to end the unrest caused by the civil war between supporters of Ptolemy VIII and Cleopatra II<sup>48</sup>.

The beginning of Salome Alexandra's reign falls into both categories - it was the occasion of the accession of a new ruler, and it marked the end of the civil unrest under Alexander Jannaeus. Rather than seeing the Pharisees' recall of exiles and the freeing of prisoners as the partisan acts of a newly empowered faction, these acts could simply be their implementation of a normal decree of a new ruler.

Finally, we must account for the Pharisees' acts of vengeance against their enemies, who probably were members of other factions at court which had kept the Pharisees from gaining power in previous reigns. These acts of vengeance certainly indicate that the Pharisees held a fair amount of

---

<sup>48</sup> P.Teb 15, as given in Stanley Burstein, The Hellenistic Age from the battle of Ipsos to the death of Kleopatra VII, (1985), # 107, pp. 139-141, and p. 141, n. 2. Also given in C.Ord.Ptol. 53, and in Roger Bagnall and Peter Derow, Greek Historical Documents, (1981), pp. 80-85: "proclaims an amnesty to all their subjects for errors, crimes, accusations, condemnations, and charges of all kinds...except to persons guilty of willful murder and sacrilege....persons who have fled because they were guilty of theft or subject to other charges shall return to their own homes and resume their former occupations..."

power. In both Bellum Judaicum and Antiquities, the account of the Pharisees' revenge is given after Josephus tells us of Salome Alexandra's activities in strengthening her armies and terrorizing her neighbors.<sup>49</sup> While this does not necessarily imply evidence of a chronological sequence of events, it does hint at a possibility. Perhaps Salome Alexandra, pre-occupied with her foreign troubles, left the Pharisees for a time to their own devices. They took this opportunity, "stealing a march" upon Salome Alexandra, as Josephus says,<sup>50</sup> to begin a reign of terror. But when Salome Alexandra returns her attentions to domestic affairs, and Aristobulus and his friends bring the Pharisees' actions to her attention, she takes measures to do what she can to minimize the bloodshed.

Perhaps after this she put a rein on the activities of the Pharisees. In the episode of Aristobulus II's rebellion, the Pharisees are nowhere to be seen. It is Hyrcanus II and the elders who go to Salome Alexandra for help. Perhaps by the end of her reign, as a reaction against the cruelty of the Pharisees, she had taken away much of their power. We do not know, we can only speculate, but it is intriguing that the formerly powerful Pharisees seem to have no role to play in the ensuing dynastic struggles between Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II.

---

<sup>49</sup> Bell. I. 112-113 and Ant. XIII. 409-410

<sup>50</sup> Bell. I. 111

## V. CONCLUSION

As was demonstrated in chapter one, there are a variety of opinions as to the character and achievements of Salome Alexandra. Now, having discussed her life and her queenship in the context of the world in which she lived, we can arrive at our own conclusions.

From her early career as the wife of Aristobulus I, to the last actions of her life, Salome Alexandra shows herself to be strong and decisive, ambitious and occasionally even ruthless. The first time Josephus mentions her, she is plotting to trick Aristobulus I into killing his favorite brother. The next time we meet her is at the death of Aristobulus I. Here again Salome Alexandra acts with initiative and decisiveness, in making Alexander Jannaeus king, and then marrying him. The rabbinic tradition gives evidence that during Alexander Jannaeus' reign, Salome Alexandra acts independently of her husband, and even contrary to his wishes, as she seems to have assisted Simeon ben Shetah in his hiding from Jannaeus.

In her own reign, Salome Alexandra demonstrated prudence and foresight in her foreign policy. Domestically, despite the supposed power of the Pharisees, Salome Alexandra is perceived to have been the one in charge. Even on her deathbed, she is expected to be the one to lead the effort to halt Aristobulus II's rebellion. Her one blind spot in her reign seems to have been Aristobulus II. His

ambition is the one destabilizing element in her reign. The Pharisees' vengeance-seeking has the potential to stir up civil war, yet Salome Alexandra takes action to contain their activities and prevents tensions from escalating into rebellion.

When it comes to Aristobulus, Salome Alexandra tries to minimize his ability to cause trouble, but she is unsuccessful in this. She tries to keep him out of public life, and she tries to keep him occupied in Damascus. But Josephus tells us that in the end, she cannot believe he is rebelling against her until the evidence becomes overwhelming. One is led to wonder what happened to the young woman who did not hesitate to plot against her brother-in-law. Certainly dispatching unwanted relatives was a time-honored tradition among Hellenistic rulers. But when it came to her son, Salome Alexandra does not take action against him until the very end. But when it becomes inevitable, she does not hesitate to tell the elders to do what they must to end the revolt.

The character of Salome Alexandra then is that of a capable ruler, who takes whatever steps are necessary to secure the peace and security of her realm. Her trust in the Pharisees seems to have been ill-advised, yet she dealt with the problems they caused in her reign, and emerged from them still in charge of her government. The fact that she is still in control at the end of her reign, and the

Pharisees are not heard from, is eloquent testimony that, far from being a puppet in the hands of the Pharisees, she was a strong and powerful ruler.

Salome Alexandra's achievements in the domestic sphere lay mostly in quieting the civil war that had marred Alexander Jannaeus' rule. This peace gave the country an opportunity to concentrate on more productive pursuits, leading to an era of economic prosperity, as reflected in the later rabbinic legends of the agricultural bounty during her reign.

It is tempting to assert that the only female ruler over the Jews influenced the improvement of the status of women in Judaism. Indeed, Derenbourg makes this very assertion,<sup>1</sup> although Sievers denies it.<sup>2</sup> Any such speculations are based on the assumption that Salome Alexandra and Simeon ben Shetaḥ are siblings. Simeon ben Shetaḥ is said to have instituted a change in the formulation of the ketubah which would make it easier economically for a man to marry, yet more difficult for him to get divorced.<sup>3</sup> Derenbourg says Salome Alexandra must have influenced her brother to make this change. However, as already discussed in chapter four, their sibling relationship is dubious at best, and Sievers is correct in

---

<sup>1</sup> Derenbourg, p. 107

<sup>2</sup> Sievers, "The Role of Women...", p. 139

<sup>3</sup> bKetubah 82b

saying there is no evidence that Salome Alexandra exerted any influence over him. Furthermore, Markham Geller has shown that the innovation of Simeon ben Shetaḥ is reflected in earlier Demotic marriage deeds in Egypt, going back as far as the sixth century BCE. Whether the innovation in Judaism was due to a shared legal tradition between Egypt and Judea, or cultural ties going back to the Ptolemaic rule in Palestine, or perhaps to Simeon ben Shetaḥ himself having spent time in Egypt while hiding from Alexander Jannaeus, the influence from Egypt is clear.<sup>4</sup> In any case, this is one achievement we cannot ascribe to Salome Alexandra.

Politically, Salome Alexandra seems to have furthered the syncretization of Jewish and Hellenistic forms of government which had begun to develop in the times of John Hyrcanus and Alexander Jannaeus. Her court preserved the Jewish system, going back to the time of the early Maccabees, of having priests, princes, elders, and representatives of the people, as advisors to the rulers. But, due to the conquests and expansions of Hyrcanus and Jannaeus, the kingdom had become large and unwieldy, and needed a more complex form of government, such as the kind the Hellenistic rulers had developed. By the time of Salome Alexandra, the Hellenistic system of "Friends" of the ruler had entered into the Judean court system. Salome Alexandra

---

<sup>4</sup> Markham Geller, "New Sources for the Origins of the Rabbinic Ketubah", HUCA 49, (1978), pp. 240-245

continued with this system, choosing the Pharisees as her "Friends", to help her in the administration of the state.

It is ironic that Salome Alexandra, who owed the very fact of her queenship to the development of the Hellenistic institution of queenship, and who herself ruled in the manner of a Hellenistic queen, also is very concerned with the accurate interpretation of Jewish law, and turns to the experts in that law to be her "Friends". It is especially ironic that the Pharisees, who are usually depicted as the enemies of Hellenism, should fulfill so Hellenistic a role. This would seem to indicate that Hellenism had infiltrated Jewish society to such a degree by this time that even the staunchest supporters of Jewish law and tradition could, whether consciously or unconsciously, take on Hellenistic roles without perceiving any contradiction.

Most scholars see Salome Alexandra's advancement of the Pharisees to power in her government as creating a power struggle between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Zeitlin particularly blames Salome Alexandra for sowing the seeds of dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees that caused the civil war in the time of Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II.<sup>5</sup> However, there is no indication in the narrative that the Pharisees' victims are the Sadducees. The Sadducees appear only briefly in the reign of John

---

<sup>5</sup> Zeitlin, p. 342

Hyrchanus<sup>6</sup> and do not reappear until the early first century CE.<sup>7</sup> Efron points out that the two names of the Pharisees' opponents- Diogenes<sup>8</sup> and Galestes<sup>9</sup> are not even Jewish names.<sup>10</sup>

The main reason scholars see Salome Alexandra's reign in terms of a Pharisee-Sadducee rift is because of the assumption that the Sadducees are to be identified as the aristocrats of Judean society, and so every reference in Josephus to οἱ δύνάται - "the chief men of rank and influence" - has to be a reference to the Sadducees. However, there is very little reason to see this identification as absolute. Josephus says of the Pharisees that they had the confidence of the masses, while the Sadducees had the confidence of the wealthy.<sup>11</sup> But there is a great deal of difference between being supported by a section of the society, and being identifiable as being that section of society.

The Sadducees are consistently identified by Josephus as a school, not as a political body, whereas the group

---

<sup>6</sup> in Ant. XIII. 288-98, but not at all in the parallel narrative in Bell. I. 72

<sup>7</sup> Ant. XVIII. 17-18

<sup>8</sup> Ant. XIII. 411

<sup>9</sup> Ant. XIII. 424

<sup>10</sup> Efron, p. 174

<sup>11</sup> Ant. XIII. 298

known as *οἱ δυνάτοι* seems to have a definite political role in the government throughout this time period. Going back even before the Maccabean revolt, the *οἱ δυνάτοι* are seen fighting for political power.<sup>12</sup> As much later as in Roman times, they are seen as leaders of the Jews, with whom the Roman procurator must deal in order to resolve conflicts with the populace.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, a thorough examination of Josephus' usage of the term indicates that this is an official designation of a particular court role. The people who fulfilled this role changed with each new administration, just as those who filled the role of "Friends" changed with the changing times. Josephus is very explicit when he identifies the administrators of Salome Alexandra's kingdom as Pharisees. If their opposition is the Sadducees, why is he not equally explicit here? There is no basis for claiming these people are Sadducees, and certainly there is no indication in Josephus' narrative that the Pharisees and Sadducees had any role to play in the troubles between Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II. So there is no basis for blaming a situation on Salome Alexandra that did not even exist. The only thing she can be blamed for is having two sons who both wished to rule. As we have seen, she does try to defuse this situation, but she is finally unsuccessful in this

---

<sup>12</sup> Bell. I. 31

<sup>13</sup> Bell. II. 199; II. 301

effort.

As a queen in the Hellenistic mold, Salome Alexandra's chief focus of activity is in the sphere of military and foreign policy. It is here that she showed the greatest effectiveness as a ruler. In a time of great upheavals in the world, with the decline of the Seleucid and Ptolemaic empires leaving the way open to smaller kingdoms to compete for land and power, Salome Alexandra maintains her kingdom intact and at peace. She keeps the upper hand with her troublesome neighbors, and she begins to establish friendly relations with a potential invader. She does not succeed in adding any new territory to Judea, but she preserves intact the vast territories acquired by John Hyrcanus and Alexander Jannaeus. Salome Alexandra was a successful ruler who governed her country in peace, internally and externally, despite the turbulence of the times.

BIBLIOGRAPHYPrimary Sources

Josephus Antiquitates XIII. 398-432  
Bellum Judaicum I. 107-119

Rabbinic Traditions: bKetubah 82b  
 bTaanith 23a  
 yBerakhot 11b  
 Sifra B'Hukkotai 1  
 Leviticus Rabbah 35:10  
 Genesis Rabbah 91:3

Secondary Sources

Adcock, Sir Frank and Mosley, D.J. Diplomacy in Ancient Greece, (1975)

Andreason, Niels-Erik. "The Role of the Queen-Mother in Israelite Society", CBQ, Vol. 45, (1983), pp. 179-94

Archer, Leonie. Her Price is Beyond Rubies, (JSOT Supplement Series 60, 1988)

Austin, M.M., ed. The Hellenistic World From Alexander to the Roman Conquest, (1981)

Bagnall, Roger S., and Derow, Peter. Greek Historical Documents, (1981)

Baron, Salo. A Social and Religious History of the Jews, Vol. I, (1952)

Bellinger, Alfred R. "The End of the Seleucids", Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, vol. 38, (June 1949), pp. 51-102

Bevan, Edwyn. The House of Ptolemy, (1927)

----- "The Jews", CAH, Vol. IX, The Roman Republic 133-44 BC, (1932), pp. 397-402

Bowersock, G.W. Roman Arabia, (1983)

Brown, Francis; Driver, S.R.; Briggs, Charles A. A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, (1906)

Burstein, Stanley M. "Arsinoe II Philadelphos: A Revisionist View", Philip II, Alexander the Great and the Macedonian Heritage, W.L. Adams and E.N. Borza, edd.,

- (1982), pp. 197-212
- ed. The Hellenistic Age from the Battle of Ipsos to the Death of Kleopatra VII, (1985)
- Carney, Elizabeth. "Eponymous Women: Royal Women and City Names", AHB 2.6, (1988), pp. 134-142
- Derenbourg, Joseph. Essai sur L'Histoire et la Geographie de la Palestine, (1887)
- Downey, Glanville. A History of Antioch in Syria, (1961)
- Ducrey, Pierre. Warfare in Ancient Greece, Janet Lloyd, translator, (1985, French; 1986, English)
- Efron, Joshua. Studies in the Hasmonean Period, (1987)
- Fraser, P.M. Ptolemaic Alexandria, (1972)
- Fuks, Gideon. "Josephus and the Hasmoneans", JJS, 41 (1990), pp. 166-176
- Gardner, Percy. A Catalogue of Greek Coins: The Seleucid Kings of Syria, (1878), (British Museum Collection)
- Geller, Markham. "New Sources for the Origins of the Rabbinic Ketubah", HUCA 49, (1978), pp. 227-245
- Graetz, Heinrich. History of the Jews, Vol. II, (1893)
- Greenwood, L.H.G., transl. Cicero, The Verrine Orations, Vol. II, (LCL, 1935)
- Grenfell, Bernard P.; Hunt, Arthur S.; Smyly, J. Gilbert; edd. The Tebtunis Papyri, Vol. I, (1902)
- Gruen, Erich S. The Hellenistic World and the Coming of Rome, Vol. I and II, (1984)
- Harris, William V. War and Imperialism in Republican Rome 327-70 BC, (1979)
- Jones, Horace Leonard, transl. The Geography of Strabo, (LCL, 1917)
- Kasher, Aryeh. Jews and Hellenistic Cities in Eretz-Israel, (1990)
- Jews, Idumeans and Ancient Arabs, (1988)
- Klausner, Joseph. "Judah Aristobulus and Jannaeus

Alexander", The World History of the Jewish People, Vol. VII, Abraham Schalit, ed., (1972), pp. 225-241)

----- . "Queen Salome Alexandra", WHJP, Vol. VII, (1972), pp. 242-254

Lenger, Marie-Therese. Corpus Des Ordonnances des Ptolemees, (1964)

Liddell, Henry George; and Scott, Robert. A Greek-English Lexicon, revised edition, (1940)

Macurdy, Grace Harriet. Hellenistic Queens, (1932)

----- . Vassal Queens and Some Contemporary Women in the Roman Empire, (1937)

Marcus, Ralph, transl. Josephus: The Jewish Antiquities, XIII, (1933), (Loeb series)

Meshorer, Ya'akov. Ancient Jewish Coinage, Vol. I, (1982)

----- . Jewish Coins of the Second Temple Period, (1967), translated from the Hebrew by I.H. Levine

Neusner, Jacob. From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism, (1979)

Ormerod, H.A. and Cary, M. "Rome and the East", CAH, Vol. IX, The Roman Republic 133-44 BC, (1932), pp. 350-396

Paton, W.R., transl. The Histories of Polybius, (LCL, 1927)

Perrin, Bernadette, transl. Plutarch's Lives, (LCL, 1914)

Pomeroy, Sarah B. Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity, (1975)

----- . Women in Hellenistic Egypt: From Alexander to Cleopatra, (1984)

Poole, Reginald Stuart. A Catalogue of Greek Coins: The Ptolemies, Kings of Egypt, (1883), (British Museum Collection)

Regenstorff, K.H. A Complete Concordance to Flavius Josephus, Vols. I-IV, (1983)

Rivkin, Ellis. A Hidden Revolution, (1978)

Rostovtzeff, M. The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World, Vol. II, (1941)

Sage, Evan T., transl. Livy, (LCL, 1936)

Schalit, Abraham. "Domestic Politics and Political Institutions", WHJP, Vol. VII, (1972)

Schürer, Emil; Vermes, Geza; Millar, Fergus. The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 BC-AD 135), Vol. I and Vol. II, (1973)

Scullard, H.H. From the Gracchi to Nero, (1959)

Sievers, Joseph. The Hasmoneans and Their Supporters: From Mattathias to the Death of John Hyrcanus I, (1990)

----- "The Role of Women in the Hasmonean Dynasty", Josephus, the Bible and History, Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata, edd., (1989), pp. 132-46

Smith, Morton. "Palestinian Judaism in the First Century", Israel: Its Role in Civilization, (1956), pp. 67-81

Stern, Menahem. "Judea and Her Neighbors in the Days of Alexander Jannaeus", The Jerusalem Cathedra, Vol. I, Lee I. Levine, ed., (1981), pp. 22-46

----- "The Relations Between the Hasmonean Kingdom and Ptolemaic Egypt Against the Background of the International Framework of the Second and First Centuries, BCE", Zion, Vol. 50, (1985), pp. 81-106, (Hebrew)

Tarn, W.W. and Griffith, G.T. Hellenistic Civilization, (1952)

Tcherikover, Victor. Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews, (1959)

Van 'T Dack, E.; Clarysse, W.; Cohen, G.; Quaegebeur, J.; Winnicki, J.K. The Judean-Syrian-Egyptian Conflict of 103-101 BC, (1989)

Walbank, F.W. The Hellenistic World, (1981)

Watson, John Selby, ed. and transl. Justin, Cornelius Nepos and Eutropius, (LCL, 1890)

Welles, C. Bradford. Royal Correspondence in the Hellenistic Period, (1934)

White, Horace, transl. Appian's Roman History, Part II (LCL, 1912)

Zeitlin, Solomon. The Rise and Fall of the Judean State,

Vol. I, 332-37 BC, (1962)



344507