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Jonathan and Late Sparta

Author(s): Ranon Katzoff

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## JONATHAN AND LATE SPARTA

An intriguing point of contact between Hellenic and Judaic civilizations, though not central, is the curious correspondence reported in I *Maccabees* to have been conducted between Sparta and Jerusalem, in which it is asserted that the Spartans and the Jews have a common ancestry, from Abraham.<sup>1</sup> By the nature of things, many scholars were attracted to the issue, and the very incredibility of the substance of the correspondence led many to doubt or deny its authenticity. It is the object of this note, however, not to examine yet again the question of au-

<sup>1</sup>A version of this study appeared in the privately circulated collection of studies presented to Professor Benjamin Shimron of Tel Aviv University on the occasion of his retirement.

"It is a hard and ungrateful task to wade through the vast literature dealing with this problem." M. S. Ginsburg, "Sparta and Judea," *CP* 29 (1934) 117-22 at 118. Bibliography is available particularly in C. L. W. Grimm, *Kurtzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch zu den Apokryphen des Alten Testaments, III: Das erste Buch der Maccabäer* (Leipzig 1853) 184-91; R. Marcus in *Josephus VII: Jewish Antiquities XII-XIV* (Loeb Classical Library) (Cambridge, Mass. and London 1943) Appendix F, 769; F. M. Abel, *Les Livres des Maccabees* (Paris 1949) 231-33, a particularly useful summary of the various positions taken during the previous generation; B. Cardauns, "Juden und Spartaner," *Hermes* 95 (1967) 317-24 at 317, n. 1. To the works referred to in the above may be added Z. Zebelev, "Jews and Spartans" (in Russian), *Comptes-Rendus de l'Academie des Sciences de l'U.R.S.S.* (1928) 65-70 (not seen); S. Schuller, "Some Problems Connected with the Supposed Common Ancestry of Jews and Spartans and their Relations during the Last Three Centuries B.C.," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 1 (1956) 257-68; Y. Gutman, *The Beginnings of Jewish-Hellenistic Literature I* (Jerusalem 1958) 108-11 (in Hebrew); Moses Hadas, *Hellenistic Culture: Fusion and Diffusion* (New York 1959) 84-87; Angelo Penna, "Διαθήκη ε συνθήκη nei libri dei Maccabei," *Biblica* 46 (1965) 149-80 at 154-55; Wolf Wirgin, "Judah Maccabee's Embassy to Rome and the Jewish-Roman Treaty," *PEQ* 101 (1969) 15-20; M. Stern, *The Documents on the History of the Hasmonean Revolt with a Commentary and Introductions* (second edition) (Tel Aviv 1972) 91 ff. (in Hebrew); M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* (London and Philadelphia 1974) I 72 and II 50-51; A. Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization* (Cambridge 1975) 113-14; Alfred R. C. Leaney, "Greek Manuscripts from the Judean Desert," in J. K. Elliott, ed., *Studies in New Testament Language and Text—Essays in Honour of George D. Kilpatrick. Supplements to Novum Testamentum* 44 (1976) 283-300 at 284; Joseph Sievers, *The Hasmoneans and Their Supporters from Mattathias to John Hyrcanus I* (Diss., Columbia University, 1981) 148-49. By far the fullest and best discussion of the text is J. A. Goldstein, *I Maccabees. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible, 41) (Garden City, N.Y. 1976) 444-62.

thenticity, but rather, assuming the authenticity of Jonathan's letter, to inquire into his motives for sending it.<sup>2</sup>

At I *Macc.* 12 we are told that Jonathan, the brother and successor of Judah Maccabee, in about 143 B.C., after his victory in the plain of Asor, sent emissaries to Rome and to Sparta "to confirm and renew friendship." The text of the letter to be delivered at Sparta, though not the one to Rome, is given in full (12.6-23). In it Jonathan refers to a letter he says was sent by Areus, king of Sparta, to Onias the High Priest, to the effect that the two people are kinsmen.<sup>3</sup> Though the Jews, continues Jonathan, are in no need of military aid, having the aid which comes from heaven, they do wish to renew the pledge of brotherhood. Although the Spartan initiative had gone unanswered for a long time, the Jews have not forgotten their kinsmen and regularly offer sacrifices and prayers on their behalf. Now that the wars, in which the Jews avoided involving their allies, are over, they wish to renew the offer of brotherhood.<sup>4</sup> To this letter is appended that of Areus to Onias (12.20-23) in which the king asserts that it has been found in a document concerning the Spartans and the Jews that they are brothers and of the family of Abraham. The king asks that the Jews write "about their welfare," and offers that "your cattle and property are ours, and ours are yours."<sup>5</sup> To Jonathan's letter the Spartans replied in a short letter (14.20-23) addressed to Simon, who had meanwhile succeeded his brother Jonathan, indicating that the emissaries were received and their message deposited in the public archive.

What, then, were Jonathan's motives in raising the matter of com-

<sup>2</sup>I refer the reader to the argument in favor of authenticity presented by Goldstein (note 1 above). Most scholars during the last half century have given more credence to Jonathan's letter than to Areus'. Though personally convinced by Goldstein's arguments in favor of Areus' letter as well, my argument here concerns the letter of Jonathan, and only *its* authenticity is assumed. What follows, then, is indeed hypothetical, but the hypothesis is, I believe, not unreasonable.

<sup>3</sup>"Dareius" of the manuscripts is an obvious, and apparently ancient, mistake for Areus. Cf. Josephus *AJ* 12.225 and 13.167. Grimm (note 1 above) 185. Of the two Spartan kings of that name, Areus II died a minor in 254 and is probably to be excluded. Areus I, who is no doubt intended, reigned from 309 to 265 B.C. and is remarkable for a rather idiosyncratic rule. V. Ehrenberg, s.v. Sparta (*Geschichte*), *RE* III A 1425. Of several high priests named Onias, most modern scholars identify as the recipient of the letter Onias I, end of the fourth century. Stern (note 1 above) prefers Onias II, whom he dates c. 270, in contrast to the more common opinion dating him to the second half of the third century. Josephus *AJ* 12.225 assigns the letter to Onias III.

<sup>4</sup>An amplified version of the letter is given by Josephus *AJ* 13.166-70.

<sup>5</sup>A version is given by Josephus *AJ* 12.226-27.

mon ancestry a century or more after Areus' letter? Scholars who doubted or denied the authenticity of the letter of course saw no need to explain the motives in events which they believed did not take place. In fact, the lack of apparent motive has served as an argument against authenticity.<sup>6</sup> Of the scholars who did consider the letter authentic, some suggested that Jonathan, despite his assertions to the contrary, was preparing the way for a military alliance.<sup>7</sup> It is difficult, however, to imagine that Jonathan would have considered Sparta, weak and distant, a substantial military ally. It has been suggested that the letter was a gesture to a friendly country with a Jewish community.<sup>8</sup> However, there is not sufficient evidence that there indeed was a Jewish community at Sparta.<sup>9</sup> Others suggest that the aim was to gain respectability in the Greek world.<sup>10</sup> This suggestion, while more plausible than the preceding, remains with the difficulty that the "ticket to entry into European culture" was the association of one's ancestry with Greek history, not the other way around. Here the Spartans are made to descend from Abraham, a figure of Jewish history.<sup>11</sup> Yet others suggest that in addressing Sparta, Jonathan was seeking respectability in Roman eyes. Sparta herself figured prominently in the tradition on Rome's earliest history,<sup>12</sup> and was now enjoying the prestige of a favored Roman satellite.<sup>13</sup>

Along the same line, Goldstein<sup>14</sup> cites as a parallel the events in *SIG* II 591, where we are told that the city of Lampsacus in 197-96 prepared for their embassy to Rome by going first to Massilia, notable for its good relations with Rome. There, pleading common ancestry, the Lampsacene delegation convinced the Massiliotes to send a delegation to Rome to help plead the former's cause. This parallel would be more satisfying were it not for two differences. First, the Lampsacenes could base their request to Massilia on a fact of common ancestry recognized by both sides. Jonathan's address to Sparta, however, was one-sided. Though there was a period in the late fourth and early third cen-

<sup>6</sup>Cardauns (note 1 above) 320.

<sup>7</sup>Schuller (note 1 above) 266; H. Michell, *Sparta* (Cambridge 1964) 92. Wirgin (note 1 above) finds economic motivations in the correspondence.

<sup>8</sup>Michell (note 7 above) 92; Ginsburg (note 1 above) 121 f.

<sup>9</sup>Stern (note 1 above) 91.

<sup>10</sup>Implied by Bickermann, *RE* XIV 786 s.v. *Makkabäerbücher*.

<sup>11</sup>Admittedly, this is not said explicitly by Jonathan himself, but is clearly said in the document attached to his letter.

<sup>12</sup>Momigliano (note 1 above) 113-14.

<sup>13</sup>Stern (note 1 above) 91.

<sup>14</sup>Goldstein (note 1 above) 447-50.

turies when the Greeks could think along those lines, and an idiosyncratic Spartan king could flirt with the notion of descent from Abraham, this period ended a century before Jonathan.<sup>15</sup> Second, the embassy to Sparta seems to have been scheduled for the return trip from Rome, not as preparatory for it.<sup>16</sup>

I would suggest that a motive may lie in the parallel of events in Spartan and Judean history of a few decades earlier. In 189/8 the Achaeans, led by Philopoemen, forced the Spartans to annul the laws and customs of Lycurgus and replace them with those of the Achaeans, "Lycurgi leges moresque abrogarent, Achaeorum adulescerent legibus institutisque" (Livy 38.34.3). Specifically, Philopoemen abolished the Spartan training (*agoge*) and substituted the Achaean education (*paideia*), which was the standard Greek education (Plut. *Vit. Phil.* 16.5).<sup>17</sup> Some time later Sparta did restore her traditional education. While it is not certain when this took place it was probably associated with the events of 178. In any case, the *agoge* later figured as a tourist attraction.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, "this was the only really 'Lycurgan' element of the polity still existing after the destruction of the constitution."<sup>19</sup> In Jerusalem, too, traditional education had been replaced by Hellenistic, and subsequently restored. Indeed, the first act of the Hellenists on getting power was to institute an *ephebeia*, by this time (174/5) an educational rather than a military institution.<sup>20</sup> The *Torah* was reinstated a decade later (165).

Jonathan's assertion of kinship with Sparta, I suggest, was motivated, at least in part, by the desire to identify one feature common to the educational system of each—their non-Hellenic character. Whatever we may think of the archaic origins of the Spartan *agoge*, in the

<sup>15</sup>Momigliano (note 1 above) 92.

<sup>16</sup>Implied by the order in I *Macc.* 12.1–2 and 16–17, and so explicitly stated by Josephus *AJ* 13.164. The fact that by the time the Spartan response was composed the accession of Simon was known in Sparta points in the same direction.

<sup>17</sup>B. Shimron, *Late Sparta. The Spartan Revolution 243–146 B.C.* (Arethusa Monographs III) (Buffalo 1972) 106.

<sup>18</sup>Shimron (note 17 above) 117–18. Perhaps as early as 167, Aemilius Paulus visited Sparta "notable for its educational institutions" (Livy 45.28.4). However, this emphasis may reflect the attraction in the time of Livy, or of his presumed source Polybius, rather than of Aemilius Paulus. Cf. K. M. T. Chrimes, *Ancient Sparta* (Manchester 1949) 47.

<sup>19</sup>Shimron (note 17 above) 128 and cf. N. Kennell, *The Public Institutions of Roman Sparta* (Diss. U. of Toronto, 1985).

<sup>20</sup>H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (New York 1964) 153 ff.

Hellenistic period it differed radically from the standard Hellenistic *paideia*, which was the defining characteristic of Hellenism.<sup>21</sup> Yet Sparta's claim to an honored place in the community of Hellenic states was unimpeachable. Jonathan, I suggest, was asserting the same claim for the Jews to membership in the community of civilized nations, despite the particularistic non-Hellenic character of the Jewish *paideia*. The claim, I would imagine, was made to impress Hellenized Jews, rather than gentiles, into accepting the Hasmonean regime. The struggle between Hellenizers and traditionalists was not over. Hellenizers were still offering armed resistance in the citadel in Jerusalem, and the battle "for hearts and minds," I argue, was still underway. The attitude to Hellenism appears here to be neither the complete rejection portrayed by the religious tradition,<sup>22</sup> nor the basic acceptance suggested by some modern scholars,<sup>23</sup> but a complex one — using Hellenic justification for non-Hellenic separatism.<sup>24</sup>

RANON KATZOFF

BAR ILAN UNIVERSITY,  
RAMAT GAN, ISRAEL

<sup>21</sup>Marrou (note 20 above) 143 ff.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. A. H. M. Jones, *The Greek City from Alexander to Justinian* (Oxford 1940) 33, "the Hasmonean rebellion, which rejected all things Greek."

<sup>23</sup>Cf. M. Smith, "Palestinian Judaism from Alexander to Pompey," in P. Grimal, *Hellenism and the Rise of Rome* (Weidenfeld and Nicholson Universal History, 6) (London 1968) 261–66, "It was not a revolt against Hellenism as such."

<sup>24</sup>For a similar interpretation of some works of Hellenistic Jewish literature, Leaney (note 1 above) 287–89.