

THE RULE OF THE HASMONAEAN<sup>1</sup> HOUSE

(142-63 B.C.)

I. *Simon* (142-134 B.C.)

THE author of 1 Maccabees writes in exalted language of the peace and prosperity of Simon's rule, in which 'he extended the boundaries of his nation and gained full control of the country. . . . Each man sat under his vine and his fig tree and there was none to make them afraid' (1 Macc. 14<sup>6-15</sup>). Having struck the decisive blow for the freedom of his people he enhanced his already great prestige by a treaty of friendship with Rome and Sparta. His brother Judas had previously entered into a treaty with Rome (cf. 1 Macc. 8<sup>17</sup>), and his other brother, Jonathan, had been engaged in similar negotiations just before his assassination (cf. 1 Macc. 12<sup>1</sup>); but the real credit for recognition of the Jews by the Romans must go to Simon, although some scholars (on the basis of evidence in Josephus) would carry this further down still, into the reign of John Hyrcanus. The Romans received the embassy which Simon sent, together with a substantial gift (cf. 1 Macc. 14<sup>24 ff.</sup>, 15<sup>15 ff.</sup>), and guaranteed complete liberty of worship to all Jews throughout their domains.

At this time a momentous decision was taken, which was to affect deeply his own position and that of his children after him. A decree, engraved in bronze, was set up in the Temple, commemorating his services and those of his family to the Jewish nation and declaring him to be appointed 'leader and

<sup>1</sup> The name 'Hasmonaean' is here applied to the High-Priestly House beginning with Simon, and continuing until the year 63 B.C. Strictly speaking it should apply to the whole Maccabaeian family. The word does not appear in the books of Maccabees but occurs in Josephus and in later Jewish literature.

High Priest for ever [i.e. with hereditary rights], until a trustworthy prophet should arise' (1 Macc. 14<sup>41</sup>). Previously the legitimate High Priesthood had belonged to the House of Onias, but this had come to an end. The intervening High Priests—Menelaus, Alcimus, and Jonathan—did not belong to this family; they did not even owe their appointment to the decision of the people but to that of a Syrian king. Now, by an all-important decision of the Council, the High-Priestly office was vested in Simon and his descendants. In the third year of his rule (140 B.C.) he accepted the Council's appointment and agreed to become High Priest, military commander, and official representative of the people (cf. 1 Macc. 14<sup>47</sup>), with the right to pass on his office to his sons. Thus Simon and his descendants, with both priestly and secular power vested in their persons, found themselves with even greater authority than the family of Onias had ever known.

Simon's troubles, however, were not yet over. In 139 B.C. Demetrius II, who had been taken prisoner by the Parthian king Mithridates, was succeeded by his energetic and enterprising brother Antiochus VII (Sidetes) (139-128 B.C.), who now took up the struggle with the usurper Tryphon. In a letter to Simon he invited his co-operation, offering in return to confirm all the rights and privileges already conferred upon him, with the additional right to strike his own coins (cf. 1 Macc. 15<sup>6</sup>). Within a few months, however, when his rival Tryphon was forced to flee and eventually commit suicide, Antiochus' attitude to Simon changed. Permission to mint his own coins was withdrawn<sup>1</sup> and with it his recognition of Judaea as an independent state. He looked with great suspicion on the expansion of Simon's territory and demanded the surrender of Joppa, Gazara, and the Akra in Jerusalem together with tribute received from captured cities outside

<sup>1</sup> A number of coins have been found bearing the name 'Simon'. The claim that these belong to Simon the Hasmonaean has now been discredited; they are to be ascribed rather to another Jewish leader of the same name at a much later period. The first real Jewish coins belong to the reign of John Hyrcanus. See p. 65.

Judaea; in lieu of this he would be prepared to accept an indemnity of one thousand talents. When Simon refused to comply, protesting that all these places were Judaeian territory by right, Antiochus sent his general Cendebaeus against him. In the battle which followed, near the village of Modein, Cendebaeus was routed by Simon's two sons, Judas and John, whom he had placed in charge of the Jewish army. The battle was decisive and peace prevailed during the rest of Simon's rule (cf. 1 Macc. 15<sup>1-14</sup>, 15<sup>25-16</sup><sup>10</sup>).

The Hasmonaean leader, however, was not to be allowed to end his days in peace, for in 134 B.C. he and two of his sons, Mattathias and Judas, were treacherously murdered in the stronghold of Dok, near Jericho, by his son-in-law Ptolemy, who had been appointed captain of the plain of Jericho but who obviously had his eye on a much bigger prize. Offering his co-operation to Antiochus he then sent men to Gazara, where John was in residence, with orders to kill him also. John, however, being warned of their coming, captured and slew them (cf. 1 Macc. 16<sup>11-22</sup>). The account in 1 Maccabees stops at this point, but the historian Josephus records that John made his way to Jerusalem, where he was well received. Ptolemy pursued him there, but eventually withdrew to the stronghold at Dok, where he was besieged by John. Fearful for the safety of his mother, who was in Ptolemy's hands, John raised the siege—but to no avail. Ptolemy killed his mother and made his escape (cf. *Antiquities* XIII. viii. 1; *War* I. ii. 4).

## 2. John Hyrcanus (134-104 B.C.)

In accordance with the ruling of the Council Simon's third surviving son John (commonly known as Hyrcanus I) succeeded his father as High Priest and ruler of the people. Almost at once he ran into trouble. In the very first year of his rule Antiochus VII invaded Judaea, plundered the land, and besieged Jerusalem. When supplies of food were running short in the city Hyrcanus asked for a seven days' truce, which was readily granted by Antiochus, who was no doubt anxious to

avoid a prolonged siege. Shortly afterwards an agreement was reached whereby the Jews had to surrender their arms and pay a heavy indemnity for the return of Joppa and other cities bordering on Judaea. They resisted the demand that a Syrian garrison should be stationed in Jerusalem, and instead handed over to Antiochus a number of hostages, including Hyrcanus' brother, and five hundred talents of silver. Antiochus then destroyed the city walls and withdrew (cf. *Antiquities* XIII. viii. 2-3). Hyrcanus was thus made to realize that independence could be maintained only when Syria was either too busy or too weak to intervene. Fortunately for him this was exactly the state of affairs that prevailed within a few years' time. In 128 B.C. Antiochus VII was killed in a campaign against the Parthians, in which Hyrcanus took part as his ally, and was succeeded by Demetrius II, who had been released from imprisonment in Parthia and became King for the second time (129-125 B.C.). From this time onwards, because of internal strife in Syria, Judaea was able to remain completely independent. According to Josephus, Hyrcanus at this point sent an embassy to Rome, with the result that the Senate confirmed him in his independence and warned the Syrians not to harm the Jews. The indemnity which Hyrcanus had paid for Joppa and the other cities ceased and the long struggle with the Seleucids came to an end.

Hyrcanus now saw his opportunity to extend his borders and so embarked on a series of successful military campaigns. In the north he conquered Shechem and destroyed the Samaritan Temple on Mount Gerizim (c. 108 B.C.),<sup>1</sup> whilst in the south he invaded Idumaea, circumcising many of the inhabitants by force (cf. *Antiquities* XIII. ix. 1). During the latter part of his reign he sent an army against the Greek city of Samaria and razed it to the ground (cf. *Antiquities* XIII. x. 2-3), occupying the Esdraelon valley all the way to Mount Carmel (cf. *War* I. ii. 7).

Josephus reports that during these campaigns Hyrcanus made use of foreign mercenaries, whose expenses he met out of the money plundered from King David's tomb (cf. *Antiquities*

<sup>1</sup> Another suggested date is 128 B.C.

xiii. viii. 4). Such tactics no doubt contributed to the strained relationships which later developed between himself and a section of the people; they at the same time indicate not only his failure to win their confidence, but also his tendency, as with other Hellenistic rulers, to stand over against the people as a prince in his own right. In 109 B.C. he gave expression to his authority by doing something no Jewish ruler had done before him—he minted his own coins bearing his own name. On the obverse side they read, 'John the High Priest, and the Community of the Jews' and displayed on the reverse side a double 'horn of abundance' with a poppy head inside, ancient

## GREEK AND ROMAN COINS

1. Gold stater of Lysimachus of Thrace, very early third century B.C. Obverse: head of Alexander the Great, diademed, with horn in his hair. Reverse: seated Athena, with image of Nikē (Victory) in her right hand.
2. Gold stater of Ptolemy I of Egypt, struck in Cyrenaica, late third century B.C. Obverse: Head of the King. Reverse: probably Alexander, deified, with thunderbolt in chariot drawn by elephants.
3. Silver tetradrachm of Alexander the Great struck in Babylon in 324 or 323 B.C. Obverse: Head of Herakles in lion-scalp head-dress. Reverse: Zeus enthroned.
4. Silver tetradrachm of Ptolemy I of Egypt. Obverse: Head of the King. Reverse: Eagle on thunderbolt.
5. Silver tetradrachm of Ptolemy I of Egypt. Obverse: Heracles in elephant-scalp head-dress. Reverse: Zeus enthroned.
6. Silver tetradrachm of Antiochus IV of Syria. Mint: Antioch. Obverse: Head of Zeus, assimilated to the idealized portrait of the King. Reverse: Zeus enthroned, with image of Nikē (Victory) in his right hand. Legend: King Antiochus, god manifest, bearing Victory.
7. Silver denarius of Rome. Moneyer: L. Mussidius Longus, c. 42 B.C. Obverse: Head of Caesar. Reverse: Cornucopiae on globe, etc.
8. Silver tetradrachm, probably of Antioch on the Orontes. Obverse: Head of M. Antonius. Reverse: Head of Cleopatra.
9. Silver denarius. Struck in the East (perhaps Ephesus) in 28 B.C. when Octavian (later, Augustus) was consul for the sixth time. Obverse: Head of Octavian. Reverse: Crocodile, commemorating the conquest of Egypt and the end of Antony and Cleopatra.
10. Bronze sestertius. Struck at Rome in A.D. 71. Obverse: Head of Vespasian. Reverse: Palm-tree with Jewish prisoners, commemorating the Roman suppression of the First Revolt.



Greek symbols of plenty and fertility, indicating no doubt the prosperity of his reign.

It is in the time of Hyrcanus that the names of the Pharisees and Sadducees first come into prominence (cf. *Antiquities* XIII. x. 5-7).<sup>1</sup> The origins of these two parties are obscure,<sup>2</sup> but it is clear that by this period they were both well-established, exercising a considerable influence on the nation as a whole.

At first, it would appear, Hyrcanus was favourably disposed to the Pharisees, but after a while he broke with them and gave his support to the Sadducees. According to Josephus the occasion of this breach was a banquet given by Hyrcanus to which members of both parties were invited. Declaring his allegiance to the Law Hyrcanus asked his guests to correct him if in any way he had done wrong. All those present then praised his virtues—all except one. This man, Eleazar, a Pharisee, rose up and challenged him to give up the High Priesthood and to content himself with the civil government of the people. When asked to explain himself, Eleazar cast aspersions on the High Priest's birth, suggesting that he was not a fit and proper person to hold this office. Hyrcanus was furious and the other Pharisees indignant. A certain Sadducee named Jonathan, however, at once took advantage of the situation, asserting that this slanderous suggestion in fact met with the approval of the Pharisees as a whole. To prove their loyalty the High Priest then asked the Pharisees what punishment should be meted out to Eleazar, and when they decreed stripes and chains rather than the required penalty of death for slander of this kind, Hyrcanus was convinced of their complicity. He thereupon transferred his support to the Sadducees, forbidding under penalty of severe punishment the regulations laid down by the Pharisees, which hitherto he himself had followed.

Josephus gives as the reason for the Pharisees' hostility to Hyrcanus the fact that they were envious of his successes, and

<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere Josephus assumes they were in existence in the time of Jonathan (cf. *Antiquities* XIII. x. 9).

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 155 ff.

adds: 'So great is their influence with the masses that even when they speak against a king or High Priest, they immediately gain credence' (*Antiquities* XIII. x. 5). Some scholars have seen in this an indication that Hyrcanus had assumed the title of King and believe that this was the real cause of the breach. It is perhaps more likely, however, that their hostility was directed against his assumption of the High Priesthood, which they now saw being profaned before their eyes by political ambitions and the thirst for secular and military power. For a long time there had been a growing discontent with the Maccabees and the Hasmonaean House on the part of the Hasidim and the orthodox Jews generally, not least by reason of the increasing worldliness and secularization of the High Priesthood. It is not surprising that the Pharisees, champions of the Law and spiritual descendants of the Hasidim, should at this juncture voice their protest; nor is it any less surprising that the Sadducees, who belonged for the most part to the wealthy priestly aristocracy and whose antagonism to the Pharisees was obvious to all, should take the opposite side. This decision of Hyrcanus to switch his allegiance to the Sadducees not only casts light on his own worldly ambitions, it also indicates the path which his successors in the High Priestly office were soon to follow.

The Pharisees were not the only spiritual descendants of the Hasidim, however, who voiced their disapproval of the happenings at this time and of those in authority over them. The same could be said of the Essenes, who represented one wing of the Hasidic movement as the Pharisees did another. The relation between the Essenes and the Qumran Covenanters will be considered at a later point.<sup>1</sup> Here we observe that those who were to form the Qumran community, on the shores of the Dead Sea, apparently at this very time expressed open criticism of the Hasmonaean House and of the official Jerusalem priesthood as a consequence of which they (unlike the Pharisees) withdrew into the desert, where they lived an ascetic life ordered by strict discipline and obedience to the Law.

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 164 ff.

3. *Aristobulus* (104-103 B.C.)

According to Josephus (cf. *Antiquities* XIII. xi. 1) Hyrcanus decreed that his widow should succeed him as 'mistress of the realm' and that the oldest of their five sons, Jehuda or Judas (better known by his Greek name Aristobulus), should serve as High Priest. Aristobulus, however, coveting both civil and religious power for himself, imprisoned the members of his family (with the exception of his favourite brother, Antigonus) and allowed his mother to die of hunger. Antigonus' favoured position soon gained him a number of enemies, including Aristobulus' wife, Salome Alexandra. By rumour and false accusation these people stirred up jealousy and suspicion, with the result that Aristobulus had his brother put to death. The remorse which Aristobulus thereafter suffered is said to have hastened his own death within a year's time (cf. *Antiquities* XIII. xi. 1-3; *War* I. iii. 1-6). In this same account mention is made of 'a certain Judas of the Essene group who had never been known to speak falsely in his prophecies', who foretold the murder of Antigonus. This reference is of significance in that it is the first historical allusion to a member of the party of the Essenes.

Josephus records that Aristobulus was the first Hasmonaean to take the title of King (cf. *Antiquities* XIII. xi. 1), adding that he allowed himself to be called 'Philhellene' ('Greek-lover') (cf. *Antiquities* XIII. xi. 3). Neither title, however, appears on the coins issued at this time, their inscription using the Hebrew form of his name and reading simply, 'High Priest Jehuda and the Community of the Jews'. The historian Strabo, moreover, states that it was his successor, Alexander Jannaeus, who first assumed the royal title. It may well be that he did not actually call himself 'king' among his own people because of the opposition this would rouse, but did so in his dealings outside his realm. It is doubtful, too, whether he officially adopted the title 'Philhellene', but no doubt it was given to him by others and for good reason. Josephus describes him as an ambitious and cruel man, intent on gaining power at any price; but this account probably reflects prejudice in the source Josephus was

using, for elsewhere he quotes, apparently with some approval, the words of Strabo, who describes Aristobulus as 'a kindly person and very serviceable to the Jews' (*Antiquities* XIII. xi. 3).

Such 'service' is illustrated by his campaign against the Ituraeans to the north of Galilee, 'a good part of (whose) territory' Aristobulus conquered and added to Judaea. Those who did not flee were compelled to accept circumcision and to observe the Jewish Law, just as Idumaeans in the south had been forced to do in the time of John Hyrcanus. This explains why, in subsequent years, the population of Galilee, though predominantly Gentile by race, was Jewish in religion. Such forcible Judaizing of Gentiles shows that Aristobulus, for all his Greek leanings, was nevertheless an ardent Jew, determined, through proselytization and conquest, not only to conserve but also to enlarge the Jewish state.

4. *Alexander Jannaeus* (103-76 B.C.)

On the death of Aristobulus his widow Salome Alexandra set free his three imprisoned brothers, one of whom, Jonathan or Jannai, she subsequently married. He is generally known by the Greek form of this name, Jannaeus, to which he added the further name 'Alexander'. Alexander Jannaeus succeeded his brother as High Priest, and went beyond him by officially claiming the title of King, which he inscribed on certain of his coins. On some of these the traditional inscription appears: 'Jonathan the High Priest and the Community of the Jews', whereas on others there is a bilingual inscription which reads on the obverse side in Hebrew, 'Jonathan the King' and on the reverse side in Greek, 'King Alexander'. The first type shows a double 'horn of plenty' with a poppy head inside, as in the coins of Hyrcanus; the second type shows an anchor, in imitation of coins of Antiochus VII, possibly in commemoration of his own increasing maritime strength. These anchor coins, bearing the title of 'king' and inscribed in Hebrew and Greek, were probably for use beyond his immediate realm.

Jannaeus was a ruthless man whose character was clearly

revealed at an early stage in his career, when he arranged for one of his two surviving brothers, who might have challenged his authority, to be conveniently put to death. His wife, who was yet to play a significant part in Jewish politics, may have aided and abetted him in these plans. Although High Priest he was essentially a soldier who delighted in war. More often than not he was the aggressor, but despite the help of strong mercenary troops he did not always finish on the winning side. The kingdom he had inherited was a considerable one, embracing Judaea, Samaria, and Galilee; this he now proceeded to enlarge by conquest and proselytization until, in the end, it was as extensive as the ancient kingdoms of David and Solomon (cf. *Antiquities* XIII. xv. 4). Despite his use of Greek on his coins he was not a 'lover of the Greeks' in the way that his predecessor is reputed to have been. This is shown, for example, in his attacks on many Greek cities whose inhabitants he forcibly converted to Judaism. The existence of these cities was a constant menace to the Jewish state, and it in turn was a serious danger to their economic survival. This was particularly so in the case of the coastal cities whose maritime power was now being seriously challenged by the Jews. Having established his power all down the coast from Carmel to Gaza, with the sole exception of Ascalon, Jannaeus engaged in a number of successful campaigns in Transjordan and further to the south. There he encountered serious opposition from the Nabataeans, first under their King, Obodas, at whose hands he suffered a severe defeat (cf. *Antiquities* XIII. xiii. 5), and later under King Aretas, who also defeated him in battle and invaded Judaea (cf. *Antiquities* XIII. xv. 2). This period marked the emergence of the Nabataeans as a powerful people; from their Arab kingdom in the deserts of Idumaea they thrust northwards, subduing the land as far as Damascus, and north-westwards round the southern border of Judaea in the direction of the Mediterranean Sea. After a chequered career as a warrior-king Alexander Jannaeus contracted a disease through his drinking habits and died, leaving the control of his affairs in the hands of his widow, Salome Alexandra (cf. *Antiquities* XIII. xv. 5).

The behaviour of Alexander Jannaeus was hardly likely to win him many friends at home, especially among the orthodox Jews and members of the Pharisaic party. His growing unpopularity was matched only by the growing popularity of the Pharisees themselves, who were openly critical of his manner of life. To them it was quite intolerable that a drunkard and profligate like Jannaeus should claim the status either of High Priest or of King; he had wilfully neglected his spiritual office, sacrificing it to that of a rough soldier whose delight was in war; his sympathies, moreover, were with the wealthy and powerful Sadducean families. The trouble came to a head on the occasion of a celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles at which he was officiating as High Priest. As he was standing in front of the altar and was about to offer the sacrifice, the people pelted him with citrons, which they were carrying for use in the festival, and hurled insults at him, declaring that he was unfit to hold office (cf. *Antiquities* XIII. xiii. 5). The Talmud states that this outburst was occasioned by a contemptuous and stupid action of Jannaeus, who purposely poured a water libation over his own feet instead of on the altar as was required by Pharisaic tradition. The people's reaction so infuriated the High Priest that, according to Josephus, he let loose his mercenaries, who massacred six thousand of them.

Jerusalem after this was seething with unrest, and the people there waited for opportunity of revenge. This came some time later, in 94 B.C., when Jannaeus returned home after fleeing from the Nabataean King Obodas. The Jews, urged on by the Pharisees, broke out in revolt against their ruler. In the civil war which followed and which lasted for six years, Jannaeus, it is reported, slew no fewer than fifty thousand of his own people, with the help of foreign mercenaries (cf. *Antiquities* XIII. xiii. 5). At the end of this period the Pharisees decided to put an end to this indecisive warfare by calling in the help of the Seleucid, Demetrius III (Eukairos). Thus we find successors of the Hasidim<sup>1</sup>, in league with the descendants of Antiochus Epiphanes, fighting against the descendants of the Maccabees!

<sup>1</sup> See p. 160.



Jannaeus, with his mercenaries, was defeated at Shechem and fled to the mountains.

Some scholars see a reference to this situation in the commentary on the Book of Nahum found at Qumran, which tells how 'Demetrius sought to enter Jerusalem on the counsel of those who seek smooth things'. If the people mentioned here are to be identified with Demetrius III and the Pharisees we may find in this incident a reason for the curious turn of events which now took place. According to Josephus, Jannaeus whilst in hiding was joined by six thousand Jews who pledged him their support. The people, it would seem, were faced with two possibilities—life under Jannaeus or life under the Seleucids; many of them chose the former as the lesser of two evils!

This move, however, was ill conceived, for no sooner had Jannaeus re-established his authority and forced Demetrius to withdraw than he set about taking vengeance on his enemies the Pharisees. Many of those who had not joined him he pursued and captured and brought back to Jerusalem, where he took terrible vengeance on them. Whilst feasting and carousing with his concubines he ordered eight hundred of the rebels to be crucified and their wives and children to be slaughtered before their eyes (cf. *Antiquities* XIII. xiv. 1-2; *War* I. iv. 5-6). It is no doubt this event which is referred to in the Nahum Commentary: 'He hanged living men on wood . . . which was not formerly done in Israel'. Josephus reports that the rest of his enemies numbering eight thousand fled by night and remained in exile as long as Jannaeus lived, carrying with them a burning hatred of their King and of the whole Sadducean party, whose members had not lifted a finger to help them in their time of need.

For the greater part of his reign the Pharisaic opposition had been led by one Simeon ben Shetaḥ, reputed to be the brother of the King's wife, Salome Alexandra. Rabbinical stories, for the most part legendary, show him to have been a determined and fiery-tempered man, not afraid to challenge the King openly or even to insult him to his face. When Jannaeus was forced to flee from Jerusalem, Simeon asserted his authority and

established himself as president of the Council, thus assuming the chief religious and political position in the state. When, however, shortly afterwards Jannaeus once more took over the reins of government and set about liquidating his enemies, Simeon, like many others, wisely went into hiding.

A number of scholars believe that the flight of Jannaeus' opponents is to be connected with the founding of the Qumran community, and that he is the Wicked Priest whose name frequently occurs in the Dead Sea Scrolls as the persecutor of the Teacher of Righteousness.<sup>1</sup> It is argued that, though the Qumran Covenanters were not Pharisees and cannot be identified with the Pharisaic opposition to Jannaeus, such opposition would by no means be confined to the Pharisaic party; it may have included also such men as the Teacher of Righteousness and his disciples, whose objection to Jannaeus as High Priest would be every bit as strong as that of the Pharisees themselves. At any rate archaeological evidence shows that the community at Qumran was considerably augmented just at this time. With the flight of these opponents of the King peace prevailed within his kingdom throughout the rest of his reign.

Tradition has it that just before his death at the age of 49 he counselled his wife not to follow his own tactics in her relations with the Pharisees, but rather to take them into her confidence and give them a position of authority within the kingdom. By this means she would win the support of the masses and strengthen her hold over the people (cf. *Antiquities* XIII. xv. 5). Whether Jannaeus actually gave her this counsel or not, this is what she decided to do.

##### 5. *Salome Alexandra* (76-67 B.C.)

Jannaeus' elder son Hyrcanus might have been expected to succeed his father on the throne; but he was a weak and irresolute man who showed few signs that he was fitted for the kingly office. No doubt his mother, Salome Alexandra, shared this view, for on the death of her husband she at once assumed

<sup>1</sup> See p. 167.

the rank of Queen in her own right, ruling over her people for the next nine years. As a woman, however, she was excluded by the Law from the High Priesthood; she accordingly appointed Hyrcanus to this office. These measures did not please her younger son, Aristobulus, an able and energetic young man, whose obvious ambitions the Queen was forced to restrain for the sake of the peace of the realm (cf. *Antiquities* XIII. xvi. 1-2).

The outstanding feature of Queen Alexandra's reign was the revival during this time of Pharisaic influence and the corresponding curtailment of Sadducean power. Josephus, for example, states that 'she permitted the Pharisees to do as they liked in all matters, and also commanded the people to obey them' (*Antiquities* XIII. xvi. 2). Whether acting from conviction or simply from expediency, she gave them her energetic support to such an extent that her reign is regarded in Pharisaic tradition as a veritable golden age, in which even the earth brought forth crops of miraculous size—grains of wheat as large as kidneys, barley as large as olives, and lentils like golden denarii! The balance of power in the supreme Council of the nation, traditionally an aristocratic body almost completely under the influence of the Sadducees, was radically altered. Under the leadership of the Queen's brother, Simeon ben Shetaḥ, the Pharisees now gained overwhelming control and became quite obviously 'the power behind the throne'. Since the Council possessed legislative as well as judiciary powers, they were at last in a position to enforce their ideas on the entire nation and to override the judgements of their opponents in the Sadducean party. Without any delay they reintroduced the Pharisaic regulations that John Hyrcanus had forbidden some years earlier, and required that their views, rather than those of the Sadducees, should be observed in the service and ritual of the Temple. Simeon ben Shetaḥ was again an important figure in these transactions. Tradition ascribes to him, no doubt correctly, the founding of the school system in Jerusalem, which rapidly developed in subsequent years and created throughout the whole country an educated

class not confined to members of aristocratic families but comprising also the common people. Such education would consist chiefly of the study of the Law; but its scope was much wider than this and provided a comprehensive system of elementary training.

Other developments, however, took place during Alexandra's reign which had a much less peaceable outcome. Taking advantage of their position in the state the Pharisees recalled those of their friends and sympathizers who had been banished from the land and set free others who had been imprisoned. Not content with this, they now sought revenge for past sufferings; seizing a number of leading citizens who had acted as Jannaeus' advisers when he had crucified the eight hundred rebels, they put them to death. The Sadducees and their associates, not unnaturally, were alarmed at these things and at once sent a deputation to the palace to lodge a protest with the Queen and to win her favour. A prominent member of this deputation was her own son, Aristobulus, who now openly sided with the Sadducees against the Pharisees and denounced his mother bitterly. Alexandra, in a great quandary, acceded to their request to be permitted to leave Jerusalem for their own safety, and gave them permission to take control of a number of fortresses in different parts of the land (cf. *Antiquities* XIII. xvi. 2-3; *War* I. v. 2-3). Aristobulus, with the backing of considerable military forces in the pay of the Jewish aristocracy, and with many strategic strongholds now in friendly hands, was in a much stronger position than at any time before to assert his authority. But the time to act was not quite yet.

His ability as a soldier was recognized by his mother when shortly afterwards she sent him with an army against Damascus; this expedition, however, proved uneventful and he returned home. Some time later, towards the end of Alexandra's reign, the safety of Judaea was threatened by Tigranes, King of Armenia, who had already invaded and subdued Syria. The Queen, afraid of invasion, sent envoys with valuable gifts to ask for peace. The situation was saved, however, by the Roman commander Lucullus, who just then



attacked the Armenian capital, causing Tigranes to withdraw from Syria (cf. *Antiquities* XIII. xvi. 3-4; *War* I. v. 3).

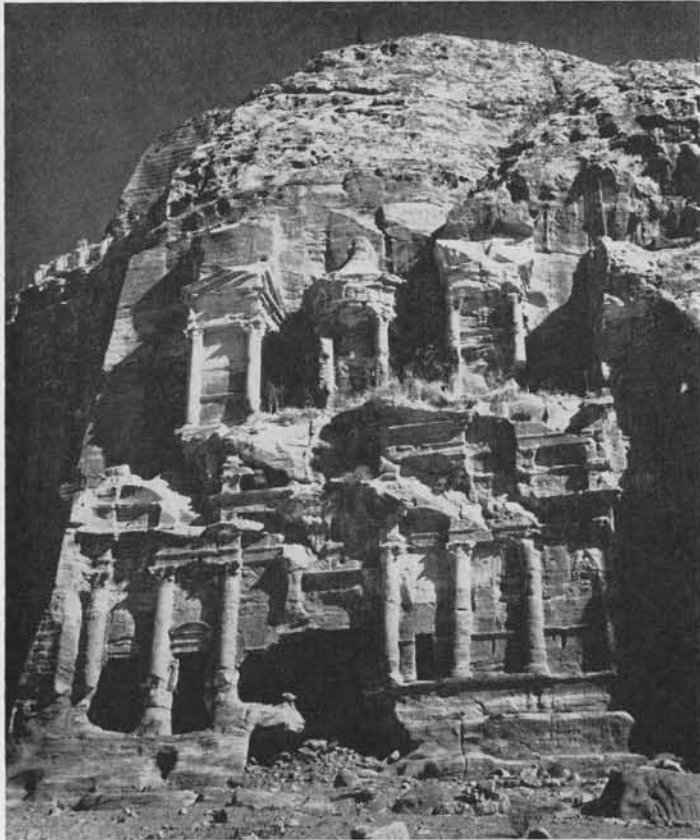
Not long after these events Alexandra, now 73 years of age, became seriously ill. Aristobulus, realizing that his elder brother Hyrcanus must soon be appointed king, decided to take matters into his own hands. Slipping out of the city by night, he set out for the fortresses which were securely in the hands of his father's friends. There he won the pledge of their support, and within fifteen days had gathered a considerable army and gained control of no fewer than twenty-two of these strongholds. Hyrcanus and the leaders of the Jews, in a panic, sought the Queen's advice. She, however, was too ill to be of any service to them and not long afterwards died. The scene was set for civil war (cf. *Antiquities* XIII. xvi. 5; *War* I. v. 4).

#### 6. *Aristobulus II* (67-63 B.C.)

On the death of his mother, Hyrcanus, it would seem, assumed the royal office as Hyrcanus II, but his time as King was short. When the two brothers met in battle at Jericho, Hyrcanus' troops deserted him and joined Aristobulus. Hyrcanus himself fled for safety to the fortress called Baris (later to be known as Antonia), to the north-west of the Temple area in Jerusalem, where he was besieged and forced to surrender. An agreement was reached between the two brothers whereby Hyrcanus was to relinquish his offices of King and High Priest to Aristobulus, and retire from public life with no deprivation of property (cf. *Antiquities* XIV. i. 2; *War* I. vi. 1).

All might have gone well if there had not now appeared on the scene a controversial figure whose family was to play a vital part in the affairs of the Jews for many years to come. This was a man named Antipater (shorter form, Antipas), father of the future Herod the Great and son of that Antipater whom Alexander Jannaeus had appointed governor of Idumaea (cf. *Antiquities* XIV. i. 3). Josephus records that he was actually an Idumaeon by birth, i.e. a descendant of the Edomites, traditional enemies of the Jews. This is not altogether certain,

but even if he was, he would doubtless count himself a Jew and be accepted as such as a result of the forcible Judaizing of the Idumaeans in the time of John Hyrcanus (cf. *Antiquities* XIV. viii. 1). Concerning this enigmatic figure Josephus gives conflicting evidence. On the one hand he describes him as 'by nature a man of action and a trouble-maker' (*Antiquities* XIV. i. 3), capable of bitter hatred and crafty intrigue; on the other hand he portrays him as an outstanding leader and a brave soldier, noted for his good sense and 'distinguished for piety, justice, and devotion to his country' (*Antiquities* XIV. vi. 3, viii. 1, xi. 4). Whatever the true assessment of his character may be, he was already a man of some wealth and standing among the Jews, having won for himself many friends and an influential position within the nation. Envious of the popularity and influence of Aristobulus, he now decided, no doubt with his own advantage in mind, to stir up further trouble between the two brothers and to support the cause of Hyrcanus for whom, it would seem, he had a genuine affection (cf. *War* I. x. 5). By means of intrigues and false accusations he fostered opposition to Aristobulus among the leading Jews and persuaded Hyrcanus that he was in danger of losing his life if he remained where he was. Hyrcanus was at first loath to believe such things about his brother, but finally gave in, leaving Jerusalem secretly by night for Petra, capital of the Nabataean kingdom, in company with Antipater. There Aretas, the Nabataean King, consented to help him regain his position in Jerusalem if he would promise the return of twelve cities and other territory which his father Alexander Jannaeus had confiscated. When Hyrcanus agreed to this proposal Aretas sent an army into Judaea. Aristobulus was defeated and many of his followers deserted him and fled; he himself escaped to Jerusalem where, at the time of the Jewish Passover, the Nabataean army besieged him in the Temple area (65 B.C.) (cf. *Antiquities* XIV. i. 3-4; *War* I. vi. 2). Within the city itself the priests and their followers remained loyal to Aristobulus, whilst the Pharisees and the general populace gave their assistance to the attackers.



A palace tomb in Petra, carved out of the solid sandstone rock. Petra, meaning 'Rock' is perhaps to be identified with the Edomite city called 'Sela' ('Crag') in the Old Testament (cf. Jer. 49<sup>16</sup>). It is situated in an isolated and almost inaccessible position about 60 miles north of Aqabah and is approached (normally on horseback) through a narrow gorge flanked by great cliffs of variegated rock. In the time of the Hasmonaeans it was the powerful capital of the Nabataean kingdom. Hyrcanus II and Herod the Great for a while sought refuge here. It persisted through the Roman period and fell into ruins after the Mohammedan conquest in the seventh century A.D. The Nabataeans adapted the Graeco-Roman styles in architecture to their own medium of rock carving, and there is evidence to prove, from several unfinished façades, that the buildings were cut from the top downwards. The magnificent colourings of the rock formations have given it the name 'a rose-red city half as old as time' (from *Petra* by J. W. Burgon, 1813-88).

In this connexion Josephus refers to a certain Onias whom he describes as 'a righteous man and dear to God' whose prayers for rain in a time of drought had once been wonderfully answered. The followers of Hyrcanus, impressed by his ability in prayer, bade this man place a curse on Aristobulus and his supporters. When he refused he was set in the midst of the mob and forced to speak. Instead of doing what they demanded, however, he prayed that neither side should have its way against the other. The infuriated mob thereupon stoned him to death (cf. *Antiquities* xiv. ii. 1). This incident is of significance in the light of the claim made by some scholars that this Onias may have been the Teacher of Righteousness mentioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls and that either Hyrcanus II or Aristobulus II was the Wicked Priest.<sup>1</sup>

This was the state of affairs prevailing in Judaea when in 65 B.C. the Roman armies appeared in Syria, bent on the greater security of their realm and at the same time seeking opportunity, no doubt, for economic advancement. For some while the whole structure of the Seleucid empire had been crumbling; now it collapsed before the might of Rome. The conquest of Syria was to be but one stage in the extension of Roman authority as far as the river Euphrates. In such circumstances civil war in Judaea was an intolerable embarrassment. Accordingly the Roman general Pompey ordered Scaurus, legate of Syria, to proceed there and effect a speedy settlement. On his arrival in Judaea Scaurus was met by envoys from both Hyrcanus and Aristobulus, each eager to outbid the other for his help. Aristobulus apparently offered the bigger bribe, which was accepted by Scaurus, who now ordered Aretas to raise the siege of Jerusalem and withdraw his army, on pain of being regarded as an enemy of Rome. Before returning to Damascus Scaurus confirmed Aristobulus in office. The latter quickly followed up his advantage by pursuing Aretas' retreating army and inflicting on it a crushing defeat (cf. *Antiquities* xiv. ii. 3).

Aristobulus now sought to win further favour from Pompey

<sup>1</sup> See p. 167.

by sending him a golden vine worth five hundred talents; but, although willing to receive the gift, Pompey was not averse to giving his support to Hyrcanus should the need arise. In 63 B.C., when in Damascus, he received three deputations from the Jews—one led by Aristobulus, who sought to justify his actions by asserting that his brother was incompetent to rule, a second led by Hyrcanus, who insisted that since he was the elder brother he was the legitimate ruler, and a third representing apparently the Pharisaic element among the people which asked for the abolition of the Hasmonaean rule and the reinstatement of the former High-Priestly house. On this occasion, it is reported, Pompey was displeased with Aristobulus' violent manner and decided to withhold his decision until he had settled his affairs with the Nabataeans. Aristobulus, however, was too impatient or too fearful to wait, and set off at once for Judaea. Pompey, fearing the worst, went after him with an army and caught up with him at the fortress of Alexandreion where he had taken refuge. On the advice of friends Aristobulus submitted; but no sooner had he done so than he set off resentfully for Jerusalem, where he began to make preparations for war (cf. *Antiquities* xiv. iii. 1-4). Once again, however, he surrendered himself to Pompey, promising to give him money and to admit him to Jerusalem. When, however, Pompey sent his officer Gabinius to take possession of the city he found the gates securely locked against him. Aristobulus, who was still in Pompey's hands, was put under arrest and the Roman army advanced against Jerusalem.

Within the city loyalties were completely divided. Aristobulus' supporters, determined to put up a strong resistance, took up their position in the fortified Temple area and prepared for a siege. Hyrcanus' supporters decided to capitulate and opened the gates to Pompey's army. For three months those in the Temple area continued to resist, but at last the wall was breached and the Temple itself taken. A terrible massacre followed, in which twelve thousand Jews were done to death, the very priests being killed as they officiated at the altar, preferring to die in the pursuit of their duty rather than

neglect any of their holy offices. The Temple was further desecrated when Pompey and certain of his men entered into the Holy of Holies, an act of sacrilege which greatly shocked the whole Jewish population and was never forgotten. He did not plunder the Temple treasures, however, but instead on the following day gave orders for its cleansing and for the resumption of the customary sacrifices. Hyrcanus was reinstated as High Priest and appointed ethnarch,<sup>1</sup> the title of king being now no longer used (cf. *Antiquities* xiv. iv. 1-4). His authority henceforth was to be exercised under that of Scaurus, whom Pompey left behind as legate of Syria. Aristobulus was taken as a prisoner to Rome together with his two daughters and his two sons Alexander and Antigonus, the former of whom managed to escape on the way there (cf. *Antiquities* xiv. iv. 5). Aristobulus was further humiliated when in 61 B.C. he was forced to take part in a victory-procession in Rome, walking in front of Pompey's chariot as part of the spoils of war.

In this way the rule of the Hasmonaean House came to a dismal end. Further attempts were made, as we shall see, to regain lost ground and restore Hasmonaean authority, but for all practical purposes Pompey's victory put an end to their effective rule. Independence, so dearly bought, was now forfeited; the land, deprived of its hard-won conquests, was greatly reduced in size,<sup>2</sup> and the High Priest of the Most High God became once more the vassal of a foreign power.

<sup>1</sup> This title, meaning 'ruler of the people', was second only to that of 'king'.

<sup>2</sup> See below.