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**King and God**

Conceptions of Rule and God in *3 Maccabees*

**Abstract:** In *3 Maccabees*, kingship as a form of rule is addressed on two levels: On the political level the question about a good king is addressed against the background of Hellenistic understandings of kingship, using the example of Ptolemy IV Philopator. This king is portrayed at the beginning of *3 Maccabees* as a successful, positive, Hellenistic ruler, but one whose good rule goes off the rails. This analysis of the ideal of Hellenistic rule (cf. *3 Macc.* 3:12–29; 6:24–28; 7:1–9) is then taken to a theological level: the God of Israel is portrayed as the true good king, the Soter who saves his people in their time of greatest trial (6:29, 32; 7:16). By these means the many divine epithets that are a striking feature of *3 Maccabees* are incorporated into the narrative (cf. 2:2–3). Thereby *3 Maccabees* not only thematises the conflict with a Hellenistic king who exploits his power in diverse ways but also focuses in a concentrated way the notion of a good (Hellenistic) king into the notion of God as king and ruler.

**Keywords:** Maccabees, Hellenistic kingship, Xenophon, Cyropaidia, Isocrates, God in *3 Macc*

## 1 Introduction

In the book so-called *3 Maccabees* we learn nothing about the Maccabees or about the period of the Maccabees. Rather, the book portrays events that took place during the rule of the Ptolemaic king Ptolemy IV Philopator (222/1–205/4 BCE). The relationship of King Ptolemy IV to the Jewish community is narrated in two episodes:<sup>1</sup> the threat posed by the king’s desire to enter the temple in Jerusalem (1:1–2:24), and the attempt, initiated by the king, to kill the Jews of Alexandria in the hippodrome (2:25–7:22). *Third Maccabees* ascribes to King Ptolemy IV Philopator the deliberate plan to annihilate the Jews with the help of his administration and his army. There is no historical basis for the story; in the time of Ptolemy IV the government apparently had no major problems with the

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<sup>1</sup> Contra the widespread division of the two sections as “prehistory” and “primary history,” as in, for example, KNÖPPLER, *Makkabaion III.*, 1417.

Jews.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the terrifying story, told in vivid detail, of the oppression and planned murder of the Jews in Egypt is attached to Ptolemy IV. It is true that the story repeatedly recounts events that can be verified historically, but as a whole the story must be considered fictional;<sup>3</sup> it is believable precisely because it includes elements that are historical. If one assumes that *3 Maccabees* was composed around 100 BCE,<sup>4</sup> then it appears that more than 100 years after the time of King Ptolemy IV Philopator, it was thought appropriate to attach such heinous acts to this king, who was by all accounts blameless towards the Jews. It is noteworthy that already the earliest reception history contains many negative reports about Ptolemy IV. He is described “as a debauched voluptuary, indifferent to affairs of state; and helpless in the hands of selfish and intriguing favorites”<sup>5</sup> (cf. Polybius 5.34; 14.11–12). Already in the oldest sources Ptolemy IV is referred to as “Tryphon,” the “opulent” or the “extravagant one.”<sup>6</sup>

In this way the early reception history connected Ptolemy IV to the image of a bad king. It is precisely here, I believe, that we have a starting point for understanding *3 Maccabees*. It has often been noticed not only that the king has a central role in *3 Maccabees* but also that “kingship is ... a powerful subtheme of this text.”<sup>7</sup> Philip Alexander and Loveday Alexander have carefully analyzed the observation that *3 Maccabees* “offers an implicit critique of the concept of absolute monarchy,” inasmuch as Ptolemy IV “represents a form of rule typical for Oriental monarchies.”<sup>8</sup> In the reflections that follow I take up this inspired observation, but do so in order to show that the context of this critique is not a reaction against Oriental despotism, but rather is much more located in the Greek-Hellenistic reflection about what the characteristics of a good king are. For this reason my first step will be to outline the characteristics of Hellenistic kingship. Against this background I will then investigate the image of kingship in *3 Maccabees*. Finally, the question will be asked what influence this Hellenistic concept of kingship had on the theology of God in *3 Maccabees*.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. HUB, Ägypten, 449.

<sup>3</sup> JOHNSON, *Historical Fictions*, 2004; JOHNSON, *Third Maccabees*, 185–197.

<sup>4</sup> See, with a discussion of the relevant literature, ORTH, *Makkabaion III*, 316–317.

<sup>5</sup> HADAS, *Maccabees*, 30.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Luc. *Calumn.* 16; *FGrHist* 260 Porphyry of Tyros F 44; Plin. *Nat.* VII 208; Ael. *Var.hist.* XIV 31, examples in HUB, Ägypten, 469. In current scholarship the reign of Ptolemy IV Philopator is not evaluated negatively at all, but rather as thoroughly successful. Moreover, he was an intellectual with great interest in literature and religion. See HUB, Ägypten, 405.417.466–472; similarly HADAS, *Maccabees*, 30.

<sup>7</sup> ALEXANDER/ALEXANDER, *Image of the Oriental Monarch*, 92.

<sup>8</sup> ALEXANDER/ALEXANDER, *Image of the Oriental Monarch*, 104.

## 2 Aspects of Hellenistic Kingship

Alexander the Great fundamentally and permanently altered not only the political map of the eastern Mediterranean littoral but also the system of political rule. With and following Alexander, kingship imposed itself as a new form of rule,<sup>9</sup> one that had previously—at least in the Greek space—been widely rejected. This first changed with the advent of Alexander and the times following him. In the struggle to succeed him, three independent monarchies arose, ruled by Alexander’s former generals, all of them originally from Macedonia. This led to a problem of legitimation for the new kings, inasmuch as none of them could point to dynastic predecessors.<sup>10</sup> There is evidence for three arguments in favor of legitimacy, which were not mutually exclusive but rather influenced each other.<sup>11</sup> First, legitimacy was based on election, and here the *imitation* of the divine Alexander played an ever greater role as time went by.<sup>12</sup> Second, legitimacy was based on dynastic and genealogical tradition; in the early generations of the Diadochi connections were made to the Argead dynasty, partly via Alexander but also independently of him. The third principle of legitimacy was the effectiveness, above all as military success, demonstrated by individual monarchs and by which they could make themselves independent of Alexander. Military success became one of the most important elements by which Hellenistic royal rule could be legitimated.<sup>13</sup> Hellenistic kingship was

not inherited by nature, i.e., by royal inheritance, nor by just conduct, but rather by the ability to lead an army and to manage political affairs with prudent calculation. In other words, the monarchy was especially dependent on success; rule was directly dependent on the requirement of success.<sup>14</sup>

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**9** Cf. SCHMITZ, Tradition und (Er)Neuerung, 721–736.

**10** On the difficulties of describing Hellenistic royal ideology, see GRUEN, Hellenistic Kingship, 116–125.

**11** Cf. EDELMANN, Religiöse Herrschaftslegitimation, 213–230.

**12** On the transformation and functionalization of Alexander, see HEUSS, Alexander der Große, 65–104.

**13** So also WALBANK, Monarchies and Monarchic Ideas, 63.

**14** “...nicht erworben durch die Natur, also die monarchische Erbfolge, noch durch gerechtes Verhalten, sondern durch die Fähigkeit, ein Heer zu führen und die politischen Angelegenheiten mit vernünftiger Kalkulation zu handhaben. Anders gesagt, die Monarchie war besonders erfolgsgebunden, die Herrschaft stand geradezu unter Erfolgswang.” GEHRKE, Geschichte, 47; on “Erfolgswang” (the requirement of success), see also GEHRKE, Der siegreiche König, 277.

It is no accident, therefore, that Antigonus Monophthalmos was the first, after Alexander, to adopt the title of king following his great victory in 306 at Salamis. The legitimacy of the Hellenistic king is, therefore, grounded in his own person: The king must produce victories, thereby proving his ability (δύναμις), virtue / competence (ἀρετή) and readiness for battle (ἀνδραγαθία). For this reason Hellenistic kings lead wars themselves and personally fight at the front (Cf. Plut. *Pyrrh.* 7.7ff., 16.11, 22.6ff., 24.5, 30.6ff., 31.3). Dressed in magnificent armor and battle gear they stage their entry into battle (see Plut. *Pyrrh.* 16.11; *Demetr.* 21.5f.; 41.6). In contrast to the way the Romans would later conduct their wars, the Hellenistic kings were more likely to pursue limited aims in their wars, which were not aimed at the annihilation of their opponents but rather to make possible the pursuit of new wars.<sup>15</sup> Although the king's ability to fight is definitely an ancient ideal,<sup>16</sup> it now becomes—as it hadn't been in the past—the decisive criterion for a good king.

The success of a king is now displayed openly: royal might is revealed through great building projects (royal palaces cover approximately one-third of the area of Alexandria), but also through great feasts featuring processions and parades (for example, the Ptolemaia or the great celebration of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in Daphne by Antioch in 166 BCE),<sup>17</sup> and in the king's glamorous appearance and style of clothing (cf., e.g., Plut. *Demetr.* 41.4).<sup>18</sup> Also important were the donations, gifts, or reductions in taxes, by which the king reveals himself to be a benefactor (εὐεργέτης)<sup>19</sup> and shows his philanthropy (φιλανθρωπία), which brings him loyalty (εὐνοία), honor (τιμή) and prestige (δόξα). The public display of success included the titles that the kings collected for themselves: the king is described as “savior” (σωτήρ), “benefactor” (εὐεργέτης), “epiphany” (ἐπιφανής), “victor” (e.g., Nikephoros) or “founder” (κτίστης). These titles are found also on coins, for example, which, because of their wide distribution and daily use become valuable pictorial media for the royal display of self.

<sup>15</sup> See on this point WALBANK, *Monarchies and Monarchic Ideas*, 81.

<sup>16</sup> In Homer, for example, the task of the leader is “to be always the best (ἀριστεύειν) and to be superior to the others,” II. 6.208.

<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, this celebration had served a counterfactual function: Antiochus IV organized in 166 BCE the greatest spectacle in Hellenistic history, lasting a whole month; not coincidentally, it took place following the “day of Eleusis,” the withdrawal from Egypt that Rome compelled him to make in 168 BCE (Polyb. 30.25f.; Athen. 5.194cff.; 10.439bff.; Diod. 31.16).

<sup>18</sup> For the description, see WALBANK, *Monarchies and Monarchic Ideas*, 67.

<sup>19</sup> See on this point BRINGMANN, *Der König als Wohltäter*, 83–95.

With monarchy as a new form of rule, there arose the need to consider what were the distinguishing characteristics of a good king.<sup>20</sup>

It is common knowledge that there was an extensive and wide-ranging *peri basileias* literature.<sup>21</sup> However, not a *single* one of these writings has been preserved, leaving aside for a moment the account of the symposium in the *Letter of Aristeas*. The state of the sources is truly bleak. It is interesting, however, that on the question concerning the marks of a good king, it can be shown that there are many connections between *3 Maccabees* and the *Letter to Aristeas*<sup>22</sup>—two writings that, precisely when looking at the king, “represent two sharply different viewpoints.”<sup>23</sup> Since the two writings probably originate in the same period, they attest to what was common knowledge at the time. But how can we reconstruct the tradition-historical connections when none of the *peri basileias* texts have survived?

It is interesting that significant reflections on the marks of a good ruler were formulated already before the time of Alexander. Xenophon (430/425–ca. 355 BCE) in his *Cyropaidia*, presents the Persian king Cyrus as the ideal ruler, and Isocrates (436–338 BCE) discusses what makes a good king in three speeches *Ad Nicoclem*, *Nicocles*, *Evagoras*).

The fourth century before the common era is, however, not only the century in which the *political language* concerning autocracy was essentially formulated on the fundamental level of basic content, to the extent that it became a blueprint for later ancient authors.<sup>24</sup>

In Xenophon’s presentation the oriental king Cyrus becomes the *paradeigma* of a good king.<sup>25</sup> Already in the first description of Cyrus that precedes the com-

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**20** Cf. the full discussion in SCHMITZ, Concepts of Kingship (forthcoming).

**21** Diogenes Laertius ascribes writings with the title “On Kingship” (περὶ βασιλείας) to a long list of authors, e.g., Antisthenes (ca. 445–365 BCE; Diog. Laert. 6.1–19), Persaios of Kition (born ca. 307/306 BCE; Diog. Laert. 7.36), Xenokrates (ca. 396/395–314/313 BCE; Diog. Laert. 4.6–15), etc.

**22** Philanthropy (φιλιανθρωπία: *Arist.* 208, 257, 265, 290), self-control (σωφροσύνη: *Arist.* 237, 248, see 211), bravery (ἀνδρεία: *Arist.* 199, 281), wisdom (σοφία: *Arist.* 207, 260), justice (δικαιοσύνη: *Arist.* 209, 232, 259, 267, 278, 281, etc.), virtue (ἀρετή: *Arist.* 215, 277, 278), diligence (ἐπιμέλεια: *Arist.* 245, 282), beneficence (εὐεργεσία: *Arist.* 205, 249, 273), continence (ἐγκράτεια: *Arist.* 278), good council and frank speech (*Arist.* 264), etc. For more discussion, cf. EMMET, Third Book of Maccabees, 156.

**23** GRUEN, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 231.

**24** “Dieses vierte vorchristliche Jahrhundert ist aber nicht nur das Jahrhundert, in dem die *political language* über die Alleinherrschaft auf der inhaltlichen Ebene in ihren basalen Konstanten ganz wesentlich ausformuliert wurde, so daß sie für spätere antike Autoren geradezu eine Blaupause darstellte.” HAAKE, *Zwischen Alexander dem Großen und Arcadius*, 67.

prehensive presentation, his beauty (κάλλος), philanthropy (φιλανθρωπία), love of learning and knowledge (φιλομάθεια) and generosity (φιλοτιμία) are highlighted as his outstanding qualities (*Cyr.* 1.2.1, cf. *Evag.* 22–24). In the presentation that follows, these character traits are taken up repeatedly.<sup>26</sup> The notion of Cyrus’ philanthropy (φιλανθρωπία) is a “characteristic feature,”<sup>27</sup> that is also found in Isocrates (*Evag.* 43; *ad Nic.* 15). In the later Hellenistic conception of kingship philanthropy becomes the central<sup>28</sup> topos and plays an important role in the self-presentation of the Hellenistic kings.<sup>29</sup> Additional virtues named in the *Cyropaedia* are: self-mastery (σωφροσύνη), justice (δικαιοσύνη), continence or self-control (ἐγκράτεια), bravery (ἀνδρεία), virtue (ἀρετή), beneficence / gift-giving (εὐεργεσία), solicitude (ἐπιμέλεια), modesty / moderation (μετριότης) as well as the importance of good “friends” and advisers, the seeking of good advice and to be able to accept criticism, and to promote frank speech (παρρησία, cf. also *Evag.* 39 and 44).

Like Xenophon, Isocrates was a well-known and widely read author also in later times. He too promoted, already in the period before Alexander the Great, good kingship (in contrast to tyranny) and through his widely read publications he prepared the way for the Hellenistic conception of kingship.

*Evagoras* is an encomium, a panegyric on King Evagoras I of Cyprus, who had recently died.<sup>30</sup> A key goal of the encomium is to clarify the difference between a bad tyrant and a good king (*Evag.* 25–26, 32, 34, 39, 40, 41, 66, 71 etc.). In *Ad Nicocles*, Isocrates stresses the importance of frank speech (παρρησία) and the freedom to criticize friend and foe (*ad Nic.* 3, see also 27–28), which he sees as the most fundamental difference between “autocrat” and “tyrant” (*ad Nic.* 4). Unlike a tyrant, a good king is led by the utmost benevolence (πρόνοια), by a healthy lifestyle and a virtuous life (ἀρετή; *ad Nic.* 6, 8). To be a good lord means to love both the people (φιλόδηρον) and the polis (φιλόπολιν, *ad Nic.* 15; cf. *Evag.* 43) and to take care of both (ἐπιμέλεια). In Nicocles’s speech the issue is again legitimacy, which flows from the king’s ability to achieve results (cf. *ad Nic.* 29). These achievements are—according to the Nicocles portrayed by Isocrates—grounded in the king’s virtues (ἀρετή), of which self-control

<sup>25</sup> So also DUE, *Cyropaedia*, 146.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Cyr.* 1.4.1, 3; 4.2.10; 8.2.1; 8.4.7–8; 8.7.25; towards a subordinate cf. 3.1.34; 3.2.12; 3.3.45; 4.4.6; 7.1.41; 7.2.10; 7.5.73; 8.1.1; 8.4.34; 8.7.25.

<sup>27</sup> DUE, *Cyropaedia*, 163.

<sup>28</sup> So also MURRAY, *Philosophy and Monarchy*, 13–28, 24.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. SANDRIDGE, *Loving humanity*, 44, 57, 120.

<sup>30</sup> ALEXIOU, *Euagoras*, 51–64.

(σωφροσύνη) and justice (δικαιοσύνη) are especially stressed (*ad Nic.* 29, cf. 30). These two virtues are developed separately at greater length: justice (δικαιοσύνη) in *Nicocles* 31–35 and self-control (σωφροσύνη) in *Nicocles* 36–41.

Xenophon and Isocrates initiated the discourse about the good king in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE and shaped it decisively. Both authors were read widely; their views were taken up during the time of Alexander as well as after him and became seminal for the Hellenistic ideology of kingship. Xenophon and Isocrates together, therefore, form the tradition-historical context from which the later *peri basileias* literature could have drawn, as did the writer of the *Letter of Aristeas*.

The conceptions of Xenophon and Isocrates function as an early model. Against this background, we will now investigate how Ptolemy IV Philopator is portrayed in *3 Maccabees*.

### 3 King Ptolemy IV Philopator in *3 Maccabees*

Ptolemy IV is introduced in the story as a successful and victorious king. Numerically his forces are inferior to those of his stronger opponent, Antiochus III, who bears the epithet *megas*, “the Great,” but Ptolemy IV is the victor in the battle of Raphia (1:1–7). This victory is no ordinary military success; after the battle of Issos (301 BCE), it is the greatest battle of that time. With the victory, therefore, Ptolemy reveals himself to be a victorious, successful king, who lives up to his name “Ptolemaios,” “the warrior.” He is victorious not only on the battlefield; with the help of the canny Dositheus he also escapes Theodotus’ plot to have him killed<sup>31</sup> (1:2–3). Like a good king, after his victory he visits the surrounding cities in order to “boost their morale” (παρακαλέσαι, 1:6) and cheer them up (εὐθαρσής, 1:7; cf. Polyb. 5.86). For this reason he is characterized as *Philanthrop* and *Euergetes* and is generally seen in completely positive terms.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to the other cities, Ptolemy visits Jerusalem. But in Jerusalem the good intentions of the king, who is initially received favorably by the people, become a problem. He not only makes an offering to the Most High God (τῷ μεγίστῳ θεῷ, 1:9), he decides to enter the Temple (εἰς τὸν ναὸν εἰσελθεῖν 1:10). The people of Jerusalem are horrified and try with various arguments to dis-

<sup>31</sup> Collins sees here an instance of subtle irony: An apostate Jew saves the king, who then initiates a persecution of the Jews: COLLINS, *3 Maccabees*, 918.

<sup>32</sup> So also RAJAK, *The Angry Tyrant*, 121, and CROY, *3 Maccabees*, 38.

suade him. But the king is unperturbed and insists on his desire (1:11–15). Here is the crux of the whole narrative: the question—is the king allowed to enter the Temple, i.e., the Holy of Holies of the Temple?—is at the heart not only of the first section of the narrative (1:1–2:24) but also of the second (2:25–7:22). In the decree ordering the arrest of the Jews Ptolemy names the events in Jerusalem as the decisive reason for all that follows (cf. 3:17–18).

What is the problem? It seems to me that here it is not yet a question of a defiant attitude on the part of the king, but rather a conflict between different cultural and cultic constructs. While it is not a problem for the Ptolemy of 3 *Maccabees* to enter the temple of another deity in the context of the cult of the θεοὶ φιλοπάτορες,<sup>33</sup> from the Jewish perspective, a pagan was forbidden from entering the Temple on pain of death.<sup>34</sup> Even Jews were not permitted to enter the Holy of Holies, only the High Priest was allowed to enter, once a year (1.11; cf. Exod 30:10; Lev 16:34; Jos. *Bell.* 1.152; Philo, *Embassy* 306–307; *Heb.* 9:7). There is a clash of different cultural, theological, and cultic traditions and constructs. What for the Jewish side is sacrilege appears to be incomprehensible to Ptolemy IV. That it is not from the perspective of the king a matter of improper behavior is clear also from the term used for God: the king presents an offering, as stated explicitly in 1:9, to the Most High God (τῷ μεγίστῳ θεῷ). From the point of view of the Ptolemaic king, that is, the sense of an *interpretatio graeca*, the chief deity must be intended. It is his duty to honor this deity. Moreover, it should be noted that the Ptolemy of 3 *Maccabees* visits the temple without any hostile or violent intentions (such as robbery, plunder etc. Cf., for example, Heliodorus in 2 Macc 3). From the Jewish point of view, the behavior of the king is not acceptable at all, not to mention his intransigence. It is interesting that it is at this point that negative evaluations of the king begin to appear in the narrative:<sup>35</sup> His motives are now described as “the mad impulse of one so wickedly bent on seeing it through” (1:16), he acts “wickedly” (1:21), with an “arrogant

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**33** The desire to enter a temple was apparently quite common among conquerors: Alexander the Great visited the Temple of Zeus-Ammon in the Siwa Oasis (331 BCE; cf. Arrian, *Anab.* 3.3–4) and according to Josephus also the Jerusalem Temple (Jos. *Ant.* 11.329–339). The Pithom-Stele shows that Ptolemy IV also visited temples in Syria (according to Pompeius; cf. Jos. *Bell.* 1.152). Another close parallel is the story of Heliodorus’ entry into the Temple (2 Macc 3).

**34** Cf. KNÖPPLER, *Makkabaion* III., 1424.

**35** Cf. other descriptions of him as profane and godless, one who arms himself with audacity and military power (καταπονουμένοις ὑπὸ ἀνοσίου καὶ βεβήλου θράσει καὶ σθένει πεφρυγαμένου 2:2), an audacious and godless man (ὁ θρασὺς καὶ βέβηλος 2:14), “who had become exceedingly puffed up with pride and presumption” (τὸν ὕβρει καὶ θράσει μεγάλως 2:21), etc.



mind” (1:25), and is “bold and dismissive” (1:26), one who defies the advice of his closest advisors (1:27).

In the second section (2:25–7:22) there are two very different evaluations of the king: one comes from the king himself, the second is offered from the perspective of the narrator, i.e., the characters.

In three instances the narrator offers a window into the king’s thinking: in his letter containing the decree against the Jews (3:12–29); in his speech berating the court courtiers (“friends,”<sup>36</sup> 6:24–28); and in the letter in which the king withdraws his first letter and promises the Jews they can return and that they will receive compensation (7:1–9).

In his first letter (3:12–29) the king stresses that the successful conduct of the military expedition was not only the result of the support of the gods (3:14) but also shows his “clemency” (ἐπιείκεια) and “beneficence” (φιλανθρωπία 3:15). He treated the people well (εὖ ποιῆσαί 3:15) and granted the temples enormous revenues (3:16). So also in Jerusalem, where the people only appeared to welcome him, but where in fact he met with insincerity (3:17). When he wanted to enter the Temple, and provide it with the most beautiful offerings, he was prevented because of the arrogance of the people (3:17–18). The Jews thereby rejected his protection (ἀλκή) and benevolence (φιλανθρωπία) (3:18). He was met with ill-will (δυσμένεια), even though he had always shown himself to be a “benefactor” (εὐεργέτης) (3:19) and had always acted with benevolence towards all peoples (φιλανθρώπως 3:20). His offer to give Jews citizenship (πολιτεία) in Alexandria (3:21) was rejected (this is a willful [re]interpretation of the events!, 3:22–23). Because the Jews were hostile, it was the king’s duty to take precautions in order to protect his kingdom (3:24). He will therefore take savage measures (3:24–25), in order to restore a time of stability and proper order (ἐν εὐσταθείᾳ καὶ τῇ βελτίστῃ διαθέσει 3:26).

This (very idiosyncratic) view of the events is not only “a skillful piece of pro-Ptolemaic and anti-Jewish propaganda,”<sup>37</sup> but also shows that the king sees himself as a good king measured against the expectations of Hellenistic times; the benevolence of the king is mentioned no less than three times (3:15, 18, 20). This point of view continues in the two further self-presentations—in different ways.

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<sup>36</sup> The advisors who surround the king are referred to by the official court title “friends” (2:26; 5:3, 19, 26, 29, 34, 44 etc., cf. also 2:23, “friends and bodyguards,” φίλοι καὶ σωματοφύλακες and 2:25, “drinking companions and comrades,” συμπόταικαὶ ἑταῖροι). Historically it appears that the “friends” had a striking degree of influence on Ptolemy IV, cf. HUB, *Ägypten*, 458.

<sup>37</sup> CROY, 3 *Maccabees*, 65.

The decisive salvation of the Jews through God's intervention (6:18–19) provokes the king to completely renounce his earlier position: he now blames his friends for leading him to make the wrong decisions – a very convenient excuse (6:24–28): the “friends” have governed badly (παραβασιλεύω), had even exceeded the tyrants (τύραννοι), had attempted to rob the king of his dignity and his life's breath, had acted secretly and did not do what was good for the kingdom; he, on the other hand, was a “benefactor” (εὐεργέτης 6:24).

In the second letter (7:1–9) the king again blames the “friends” for their wickedness and does not take responsibility himself (7:3–4). On the contrary: he acts mildly towards all people (πρὸς ἅπαντας ἀνθρώπους ἐπιείκειαν 7:6).

A very different view of the king is given not only in the pervasive negative evaluations,<sup>38</sup> but also via other figures that appear in the narrative: the “Greeks” in the city, for example, judge the decree (διάθεσις) of the king to be “tyrannical” (3:8).<sup>39</sup> The narrator twice compares the cruelty of Ptolemy with that of the Sicilian tyrant Phalaris (5:20, 42). Phalaris (ca. 570–555 BCE) ruled Akragas on the west coast of Sicily and was known already in antiquity for his cruelty (cf. Cicero, *Off.* 2.7.26; *Att.* 7.12.2). It was said that Phalaris had a golden steer made, in the innards of which he imprisoned his opponents in order to then roast them over a fire; the screams of the tortured could be heard by those standing by and sounded like the screams of a real steer (cf. Polyb. 12.26; Diod. Sic. 9.19.1). It is noteworthy that the comparison was made not with an oriental but with a Greek despot. This shows how thoroughly *3 Maccabees* is rooted in the Greek discourse about the qualities of a good king. The next step is to ask what effect this discourse may have had on the speech about God in *3 Maccabees*.

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. 2:26, 27; 5:47 etc.

<sup>39</sup> The word “tyrant” (τύραννος) is taken up again in 6:24 in the context of the method of rule practice by the “friends.”

## 4 The Characterization of God in *3 Maccabees*

There are long lists of divine attributes in *3 Maccabees*,<sup>40</sup> which stand out in comparison with biblical texts and other texts of the same period.<sup>41</sup> In its speech about God, *3 Maccabees* displays a dense nominal style, in which God is described by various titles and labels.<sup>42</sup> The longest series is found at the beginning of the prayer in 2:2–3:<sup>43</sup>

κύριε κύριε βασιλεῦ τῶν οὐρανῶν καὶ  
δέσποτα πάσης κτίσεως ἅγιε ἐν ἁγίοις  
μόναρχε παντοκράτωρ πρόσχες ἡμῖν  
καταπονουμένοις ὑπὸ ἀνοσίου καὶ  
βεβήλου θράσει καὶ σθένει  
πεφρυαγμένου  
σὺ γὰρ ὁ κτίσας τὰ πάντα καὶ τῶν ὄλων  
ἐπικρατῶν δυνάστης δίκαιος εἶ καὶ τοὺς  
ὑβρεὶ καὶ ἀγερωχίᾳ τι πράσσοντας  
κρίνεις

Lord, Lord, king of the heavens and  
sovereign of all creation, holy among  
the holy ones, sole ruler, almighty,  
hearken unto us, who are being op-  
pressed by a vile and unholy man,  
grown insolent with presumption and  
power.

For you, the founder of all things and  
the governor of all, are a just ruler,  
and you judge those whose deeds are  
marked by pride and arrogance.

Some of the designations for God appear rarely in the LXX<sup>44</sup> or are *hapax legomena*.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, it is striking that many of these titles are specific to the LXX (“almighty”, παντοκράτωρ 2:2, 8; 5:7; 6:2, 18, 28)<sup>46</sup> and, moreover, have their

<sup>40</sup> Besides the one in 2:2–3 there are in *3 Maccabees* other lists: “called out with an irrepressible cry and with tears to the Almighty Lord, Ruler of every power, their merciful God and Father” (5:7); “the manifest God, Lord, King of kings” (5:35); “O king, dread sovereign, most high, almighty God, who govern all creation with compassion” (6:2) and “the sons of the Almighty, heavenly, living god” (6:28).

<sup>41</sup> Lists of divine titles can be found in Ps 17:2–3<sup>LXX</sup>; Neh 9:32; 2 Macc 1:24–25; Jdt 9:11–12. But none of these is as long as the one in 2:2.

<sup>42</sup> A list and categorization of those that appear in *3 Maccabees* can be found in KNÖPPLER, Gottesvorstellung, 209–221, who counts “more than 100 names for God” (213).

<sup>43</sup> On the prayer, cf. CORLEY, Divine Sovereignty and Power, 359–386.

<sup>44</sup> So, e.g., “holy among the holy” (ἅγιος ἐν ἁγίοις 2:2, 21, cf. Isa 57:15<sup>LXX</sup> diff. MT; cf. 2 Macc 14:36) or “rescuer” (ρύστης, 7:23, cf. by way of beginning Ps 17:3, 49; 69:6; 143:2<sup>LXX</sup>).

<sup>45</sup> So “sole ruler” (μόναρχος, 2:2), “the primal one” (προπάτωρ, 2:21), “dread sovereign” (μεγαλοκράτωρ, 6:2) or “you who hate insolence”, 6:9.

<sup>46</sup> παντοκράτωρ is used in the LXX above all in those texts that are not translations; for example, 2 Macc 1:25; 3:30; 5:20; 6:26; 7:35, 38; 8:11, 18, 24; 15:8, 32; cf. 3:22; 2:2, 8; 5:7; 6:2, 18, 28; Jdt 4:13; 8:13; 15:10; 16:5, 17.

origins in a political context; for example, “sole ruler” (μόναρχος) or “savior” (σωτήρ: 6:29, 32; 7:16). Against the background of the Hellenistic conception of kingship clearly evident in *3 Maccabees*, the question arises whether this conception has influenced not only the speech about the king but also the speech about God. This possibility will be investigated in what follows via three selected aspects: the epiphany motif, the understandings of creation and the designation as savior.

#### 4.1 God as the Epiphany

God saves the Jews in *3 Maccabees* by means of two epiphanies (*3 Macc.* 2:21–22; 6:18–19).<sup>47</sup> It is precisely in the final rescue in 6:18 that the constantly repeated plea of the Jews to God in their desperate need, that God should show himself (“show, reveal,” ἐπιφάινω, cf. 2:9; 6:4.9), is heard. Thereafter God does in fact “show” himself, in that he—the beginning of the epiphany—reveals his holy face (ἐπιφάνας τὸ ἅγιον αὐτοῦ πρόσωπον, 6:18, similarly in 6:39), the emerging angels cause such an uproar among the elephants that the animals destroy their own army. The God of Israel thereby emerges victorious out of both of the two conflicts with King Ptolemy that are narrated in *3 Maccabees*; a vanquished king and defeated army is left behind. Against the background of the Hellenistic royal ideology sketched above, this has a distinct and familiar ring: the real victor and king is not the brilliant victor of Raphia, but rather the epiphany of the God of Israel in this victory. This fact is especially revealing, since “Epiphanes” (ἐπιφανής) is a common epithet for Hellenistic kings, known in Biblical literature above all because of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (1 Macc 1:10; 10:1; 2 Macc 2:20; 4:7; 10:9, 13; *4 Macc.* 4:15). It appears that Antiochus IV (175–164 BCE) adopted this epithet after his successful and uncontested seizure of power, when he was acclaimed by the population of Antiochus with this name (*App. Syr.* 45.234).<sup>48</sup> Not long after the name was ascribed to him it begins to appear on coins:<sup>49</sup> *2 Maccabees* not only uses the epithet ἐπιφανής for Antiochus in prominent passages (2 Macc 2:20; 4:7; 10:9, 13), it also makes of the group of motifs connected to the lexeme ἐπιφάν- a decisive “key word.”<sup>50</sup> This is

<sup>47</sup> On epiphanies and their tradition-historical location in Greece, see SCHMITZ, Antiochus Epiphanes, 253–279. Cf. Heliodorus in 2 Macc 3 and Antiochus’ death in 2 Macc 9.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. on this point EHLING, Untersuchungen, 97.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. MØRKHOLM, Studies in the Coinage of Antiochus IV.; LE RIDER, Antioche de Syrie; HOUGHTON / LORBER, Seleucid Coins.

<sup>50</sup> So HABICHT, 2. Makkabäerbuch, 187.

clear, for example, in the fact that six epiphanies are adumbrated in the foreword (2 Macc 2:21; 3:24–26, 31–34; 5:1–4; 10:29–30; 11:8; 12:22; 15:11–16, 25–36) in which God intervenes in events, usually via handsome, strong, combat-ready young men in shining armor, and thereby helps the Maccabees to victory. Since the 5<sup>th</sup> century the word “epiphany” (ἐπιφάνεια) referred, in Greece, to a sudden and unexpected appearance, above all the sudden appearance of an enemy in a military engagement, and later is also used to refer the saving intervention of a divine figure.<sup>51</sup> In the victory achieved by God’s intervention via an epiphany, the God of Israel reveals himself as the true and decisive ruler (δυνάστης, 2 Macc 3:24; 12:15, 28, cf. 3:28, 38). The story that begins with Antiochus IV *Epiphanes* ends, therefore, with the God of Israel as *kyrios epiphanes* (2 Macc 15:34). He is thereby given—as in *3 Maccabees*—the features that distinguish the new type of Hellenistic ruler: he is victorious and shows himself therein as the Epiphanes.

## 4.2 God as κτίστης

Among the less well known but also important epithets of the Hellenistic kings is κτίστης, “Founder.” The founding of cities belongs to the deeds by which Hellenistic rulers distinguished themselves. By doing so, they could attach themselves to the tradition of the founding of Greek colonies and cities outside of Greece, a common practice since the 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century. Whereas the earlier foundings were undertaken in the name of the home city after the Delphic oracle had been consulted and were under the leadership of an οἰκιστής, “colony founder, founder of a city” (from time to time the title ἀρχηγέτης was also used), the idea of founding a city changed in Hellenistic times. The founding of cities is now something reserved for kings and is no longer initiated by mother cities.<sup>52</sup> To describe this activity, the term κτίστης, which is first securely attested in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, begins to be used. In Egypt one can point not only to *Alexandria ad Aegyptum* but also to the many places that have Ptolemaios in their names. Beginning in Hellenistic times κτίστης becomes the usual term. Antiochus IV, for example, who founded a whole series of cities, is designated a κτίστης in a Greek inscription (θεὸς σωτὴρ τῆς Ἀσίας καὶ κτίστης τῆς πόλεως OGIS 253).<sup>53</sup> This widely discussed inscription shows that κτίστης, like Soter,

<sup>51</sup> PRITCHETT, *The Greek State of War*, 11–47.

<sup>52</sup> See also BONS / PASSONI DELL’ACQUA, κτίζω, 173–187; CASEVITZ, *Vocabulaire*, 13–72.

<sup>53</sup> A similar inscription has been found referring to Eumenes II: σωτὴρ καὶ εὐεργέτης καὶ κτίστης τῆς πόλεως (OGIS 301) cf. LESCHHORN, *Gründer der Stadt*, 241.

Epiphanes or Euergetes, is used as a kind of honorific but unlike the latter never became an official title or a cultic name—and therefore never appears on coins, for example. The *epithet* κτίστης is more likely to be used in connection with concrete actions that the founder has undertaken on behalf of the city. In *3 Maccabees* God is described as “sovereign of all creation” (δέσποτα πάσης κτίσεως, 2:2), “the founder of all things” (ὁ κτίσας τὰ πάντα, 2:3), “ruler of all creation” (τῷ τῆς ἀπάσης κτίσεως δυναστεύοντι, 2:7; cf. 2:9; 5:11; 6:2).

In the context of the Hellenistic conception of kingship the question arises whether these descriptions were not understood or heard not primarily in the usual theological sense of creation but rather much more (also) in terms of their connotations of the royal founding of cities (cf. similarly *Jdt* 9:12; *2 Macc* 1:24; 7:23; 13:14; *4 Macc.* 5:25): the God of Israel reveals himself not only as the founder of individual cities but as the founder of the whole world (cf. 2:2, 3).

### 4.3 God as σωτήρ

Another name that Hellenistic kings used as an epithet is Soter (σωτήρ). The term σωτήρ is used to refer to humans but also gods (above all Zeus, Apollo, Asclepius) who have intervened a particular situation in a saving way.<sup>54</sup> Typical situations where one needed saving included trouble at sea, the danger of war and sickness. In a military battle a person’s ability and action to save would be especially apparent. This conception of a saving intervention is often connected to the idea of an epiphany. The sudden appearance and helpful intervention<sup>55</sup> arouses astonishment, wonder and joy among people, who out of thankfulness give the savior who was helpful the title σωτήρ. The traditional combination of the concept of salvation in a time of need and the resulting honoring of the σωτήρ was ideally suited for application to the Hellenistic kings. The first to be included in the ranks of the saving divinities were Antigonos Monophthalmos and his son Demetrius, even before they began to use the title of king. In the period after these two, there is a marked increase in the use of this epithet for Hellenistic kings (cf., for example, Ptolemy I Soter). The title is combined with others, very commonly with Epiphanes or Theos. In *3 Maccabees* God is designated as “savior” at the end of the narrative: he is the Soter Israel (ὁσωτήρ, 6:29, 32; 7:16, cf. 6:13, 33, 36; 7:16, 22; and ὁ ῥύστης Ἰσραηλ, 7:23).

<sup>54</sup> Cf. on this issue JUNG, ΣΩΤΗΡ.

<sup>55</sup> On this understanding of epiphany see LÜHRMANN, Epiphaneia, 185–199.

These three examples show that the notion of Hellenistic kingship has also changed the speech about God in *3 Maccabees*: by adopting Hellenistic concepts of kingship that ascribe special importance to military victory and the founding of cities and that are expressed in epithets like “Epiphanes” and “Soter” etc., new elements are taken up into the speech about God. These new concepts are political, inasmuch as they are used to describe Hellenistic kingship. The “new” type of Hellenistic ruler, who manifests his identity as king through his success and his victories, who openly displays his sovereignty, his wealth, his benevolence and philanthropy, is discovered to be a new reservoir for speech about God; this speech is reflected upon and elements of it are integrated into the speech about God. This process goes hand in hand with a heightening of God’s power, by which he omnipotently brings about all that is, leading to a stress on the soteriological function of his kingship. In and of themselves, none of these motifs are new, but nevertheless by being taken over and refined from the ideal of Hellenistic kingship they become more precise and gain a new profile and new connotations.

## 5 Conclusion

The book *3 Maccabees* not only tells the story of a conflict in Egypt that gets out of hand and becomes a deadly threat for the Jewish community. Much more, *3 Maccabees* portrays sovereignty and power on the political and theological level. This study of *3 Maccabees* has produced two conclusions:

*First:* In *3 Maccabees* the question concerning a good king is posed within the context of Hellenistic times using Ptolemy IV Philopator as an example. In Greece after the time of Alexander, kingship is accepted as a form of rule within Greek self-understanding, one that is even valued under certain conditions. It was taken for granted that the king would be successful in both internal and external affairs and that such success was the way that the king legitimated his rule. The king reveals himself to be Soter and, as an epiphany, Savior in a time of need, concerned about the welfare of his subjects and showing philanthropy. His successes are celebrated in festivals and visible in the founding of cities. Initially *3 Maccabees* portrays Ptolemy as a successful, positive Hellenistic ruler who then loses all sense of propriety during the conflicts over his entry into the Jerusalem Temple, even though he knows—as is clear from his speeches and letters in the narrative—how a good king should in fact conduct himself. Thus *3 Maccabees* uses the figure of Ptolemy IV Philopator to take issue with the ideal

of Hellenistic kingship and narrates how a good king should behave, that is, how he should not behave.<sup>56</sup>

*Second:* Like other Jewish writings from the Hellenistic period, *3 Maccabees* takes issue with Hellenistic royal ideology not only on a political level but also on a theological level. As can be observed already in Assyrian and Persian times, in Hellenistic times too the political models current at the time are adopted and made the subject of theological reflection. In *3 Maccabees* the God of Israel is presented as the one true good king, who as Soter saves his people in their time of greatest need. The belief that God reveals himself in an epiphany is confessed not only in prayers (2:9; 5:8, 35, 51), but is visible in the form of two epiphanies (2:21–22; 6:18–21.39), by which God intervenes decisively to save the Egyptian Jews. At the end of the story, therefore, the many divine epithets in the story—above all the long series in 2:2–3—are fulfilled: the God of Israel shows himself to be Lord (κύριος), king (βασιλεύς), master (δεσπότης), the sole ruler (μόναρχος), omnipotent (παντοκράτωρ) and a just ruler (δυνάστης δίκαιος). His successes are celebrated in a 40-day festival of salvation (6:30–40), a festival of wine to celebrate the salvation (7:18), and an annual festival (7:19). In *3 Maccabees* God shows himself therefore as the decisive savior (σωτήρ, 6:29, 32; 7:16). It comes as no surprise, therefore, that *3 Maccabees* ends with a hymn of praise to God as the redeemer (ῥύστης) of Israel (7:23).

In other words, *3 Maccabees* not only thematizes the conflict between a Hellenistic king who uses his power in hybrid ways, but also incorporates in a concentrated form the conception of a good (Hellenistic) ruler into the conception of God as king and ruler.

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<sup>56</sup> When the king faithfully fulfils his role as king, then the Jews are always portrayed as loyal subjects devoted to the king (1:3; 3:3, 6, 21; 6:25–26; 7:7).



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