



The “Charter for Jerusalem” and the Seleucid Conquest of the Southern Levant

Problems of Authenticity and Exemplarity

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Abstract

Written soon after the battle of Panium, the letter of Antiochus III to Ptolemy son of Thraseas is a central piece of evidence in any reconstruction of the Ptolemaic-Seleucid transition in the Southern Levant. Its preservation in Josephus’ *Antiquities* raises questions of transmission and authenticity that are here discussed in some detail. The article also considers wider questions pertaining to the use of this document as an exemplary source illustrating Seleucid rule in this region and beyond: is what we have here unusual or standard practice? What can we learn about the image of the king, his enemies and his administrative apparatus that was projected to subjects? And can the document shed important light on royal interaction with non-*polis* communities, as has often been argued?

Keywords

Antiochus III – Josephus – Seleucid empire – authenticity

1 Introduction

We have learned a lot about the Seleucid conquest of the Southern Levant in recent years. Some developments have merely re-established scholarly positions of the mid-20th century: the battle of Panium is now dated to 198 BCE

again, and the recent reappraisals of the Hefzibah dossier have confirmed that Landau's original reading of the dates (202–195) was correct all along.¹ Other findings have opened up new areas of discussion: the ostraca from Maresha show that commercial documents switch from Aramaic to Greek immediately after the Seleucid takeover; the Heliodorus stele shows Seleucid administration in action in 178 BCE; the administrative complex at Kedesh and its sealings show other providers of administrative services in the first half of the "Seleucid" century.² And yet a convincing narrative of the Ptolemaic–Seleucid transition has not quite emerged yet,³ largely because it remains difficult to answer some key questions. Was what unfolded after the conquest of Coele Syria and Phoenicia normal or unusual within a Seleucid context? Can we use parallels from elsewhere to fill in gaps, or was the situation in Mesopotamia and Asia Minor categorically different? What difference did the conquest make to inhabitants, how did the king present himself to his new subjects, and how did the change of sovereignty affect forms of political organization in the new Seleucid province? For all these questions, the letter written by Antiochus III to Ptolemy about the reconstruction of Jerusalem remains a crucial piece of evidence. Given that so many other pieces of the puzzle have recently been re-evaluated, it is about time to take a fresh look to see what it might contribute.

2 Text and Translation

Josephus, *Ant.* 12.138–144 (ed. Niese, with deviations indicated)

(138) Βασιλεὺς Ἀντίοχος Πτολεμαίῳ χαίρειν. τῶν Ἰουδαίων καὶ παραυτίκα μὲν, ἡνίκα τῆς χώρας ἐπέβημεν αὐτῶν, ἐπιδειξαμένων τὸ πρὸς ἡμᾶς φιλότιμον καὶ παραγενομένους δ' εἰς τὴν πόλιν λαμπρῶς ἐκδεξαμένων καὶ μετὰ τῆς γερουσίας⁴ ἀπαντησάντων, ἄφθονον δὲ τὴν χορηγίαν τοῖς στρατιώταις καὶ τοῖς ἐλέφασσι παρεσχημένων, συνεχελόντων δὲ καὶ τοὺς ἐν τῇ ἄκρᾳ φρουροὺς τῶν Αἰγυ-

1 Panium: Lorber, "Numismatic Evidence" (perhaps with some room for debate as the argument is based on coinage from the Phoenician coast). Hefzibah: Heinrichs, "Antiochos III and Ptolemy," with corrections by Savalli-Lestrade, "Le dossier épigraphique"; and Chrubasik, "The Epigraphic Dossier" (see now *CIIP* V/2 7561).

2 Ostraca: Ecker, "The Greek Inscribed Pottery." Heliodorus stele: *CIIP* IV/2 3511. Kedesh: *CIIP* V/1 5965–5971, and for context Herbert, "Snowflakes and Quicksand."

3 Different elements of the transition are discussed in Gerardin, "D'un grand roi à l'autre"; Ecker et al., "The Southern Levant"; Berlin, "Land/Homeland, Story/History"; Johannsen, *Imperialier Wandel und ptolemäischer Imperialismus*, 191–234.

4 With Niese I omit the awkwardly placed μὲν after μετὰ, which has strong manuscript sup-

πτίων, (139) ἤξιώσαμεν καὶ αὐτοὶ τούτων αὐτοὺς ἀμείψασθαι καὶ τὴν πόλιν αὐτῶν ἀναλαβεῖν κατεφθαρμένην ὑπὸ τῶν περὶ τοὺς πολέμους⁵ συμπεσόντων καὶ συνοικίσαι τῶν διεσπαρμένων εἰς αὐτὴν πάλιν⁶ συνελθόντων. (140) πρῶτον δ' αὐτοῖς ἐκρίναμεν διὰ τὴν εὐσέβειαν παρασχεῖν τὴν⁷ εἰς τὰς θυσίας σύνταξιν κτηνῶν τε θυσίμων καὶ οἴνου καὶ ἐλαίου καὶ λιβάνου ἀργυρίου τιμὴν⁸ μυριάδας δύο καὶ σεμιδάλεως ἀρτάβας ἱεράς⁹ κατὰ τὸν ἐπιχώριον νόμον πυρῶν μεδίμνους χιλίους τετρακοσίους ἐξήκοντα καὶ ἀλῶν μεδίμνους τριακοσίους ἐβδομηκονταπέντε. (141) τελεῖσθαι δ' αὐτοῖς ταῦτα βούλομαι, καθὼς ἐπέσταλκα, καὶ τὸ περὶ τὸ ἱερὸν ἀπαρτισθῆναι ἔργον τὰς τε στοὰς κἄν¹⁰ εἴ τι ἕτερον οἰκοδομησῆσαι δεοί. ἢ δὲ τῶν ξύλων ὕλη κατακομιζέσθω ἐξ αὐτῆς τε τῆς Ἰουδαίας καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἄλλων ἐθνῶν καὶ ἐκ τοῦ Λιβάνου μηδενὸς πρᾶσσομένου τέλους. ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις, ἐν οἷς ἂν ἐπιφανεστέραν γίγνεσθαι τὴν τοῦ ἱεροῦ ἐπισκευὴν δεοί.¹¹ (142) πολιτευσέσθωσαν δὲ πάντες οἱ ἐκ τοῦ ἔθνους κατὰ τοὺς πατρίους νόμους, ἀπολυέσθω δ' ἡ γερουσία καὶ οἱ ἱερεῖς καὶ γραμματεῖς τοῦ ἱεροῦ καὶ ἱεροψάλται ὧν ὑπὲρ τῆς κεφαλῆς τελοῦσιν καὶ τοῦ στεφανιτικοῦ φόρου καὶ τοῦ περὶ τῶν ἄλλων.¹² (143) ἴνα δὲ θάττον ἡ πόλις κατοικισθῆ, δίδωμι¹³ τοῖς τε

port and is in the text of Villeneuve et al., *Flavius Josèphe*. Instead of the γερουσία, the Latinus has *cum senioribus et principis* (perhaps reflecting a μετὰ τῶν γερόντων καὶ τῶν ἀρχόντων).

- 5 There is good manuscript support for ἀνθρώπους instead of πολέμους, but the connection between wars (pl.) and destruction has a strong parallel in Zeuxis' contemporary letter to Heracleia (*SEG* 37.859 II, l. 13–14: διὰ τοὺς πολέμους καὶ τὰς κα[ταφθ]οράς).
- 6 Codex Palatinus bibl. Vat. 14 reads πόλιν; for a consideration of this reading see section 4.3 below.
- 7 The article is omitted by Niese but well-attested in the manuscripts and present (without notes) in LCL and Villeneuve et al., *Flavius Josèphe* (but neither translates it: "an allowance," "une contribution"). The reference to the ἐπιχώριος νόμος in § 140 makes it plausible that "the contribution" is seen here as a fixed need defined by local regulations.
- 8 Well-attested but omitted by Niese; both LCL and Villeneuve et al., *Flavius Josèphe* have it in the text. Niese arguably thought it superfluous because all genitives can depend on σύνταξιν. Adding τιμὴν prepares the switch to the accusative (ἀρτάβας) better; it also creates an even stronger parallel with *Ant.* 11.16, on which see below, n. 17.
- 9 With LCL and Villeneuve et al., *Flavius Josèphe* (Niese: ἱεράς).
- 10 With Niese (and against LCL and Villeneuve et al., *Flavius Josèphe*) I retain κἄν against the strong manuscript support for καί; it is both the *lectio difficilior* and the grammatically preferable reading as we are dealing with possibility, not wishful thinking.
- 11 Δέοι is in all manuscripts and gives a suitable sense as a potential optative. Niese nevertheless prints δέη and is followed by LCL; Villeneuve et al., *Flavius Josèphe* restore δεοί. On the potential significance of the mood see below, section 3.
- 12 Niese maior follows the manuscripts, but Niese minor emends to ἀλῶν, followed by LCL; Villeneuve et al., *Flavius Josèphe* print ἄλλων but translate ἀλῶν, noting that "la cor. est necessaire." It may not be; see below, end of section 3.
- 13 The Latin has *donamus*; for a consideration of this reading see below, section 3.

νῦν κατοικοῦσιν καὶ κατελευσομένοις ἕως τοῦ Ὑπερβερεταίου μηνὸς ἀτελέσιν εἶναι μέχρι τριῶν ἐτῶν. (144) ἀπολύομεν δὲ καὶ εἰς τὸ λοιπὸν αὐτοὺς τοῦ τρίτου μέρους τῶν φόρων, ὥστε αὐτῶν ἐπανορθωθῆναι τὴν βλάβην. καὶ ὅσοι ἐκ τῆς πόλεως ἀρπαγέντες δουλεύουσιν, αὐτοὺς τε τούτους καὶ τοὺς ὑπ' αὐτῶν γεννηθέντας ἐλευθέρους ἀφίεμεν καὶ τὰς οὐσίας αὐτοῖς ἀποδίδοσθαι κελεύομεν.

(138) King Antiochus to Ptolemy, greetings. Since the Judeans, immediately when we entered their land, demonstrated their generosity towards us and, once we had reached their city, received us splendidly and met us with their *gerousia*, provided the supplies for the soldiers and the elephants in abundance, and even joined in expelling the guards of the Egyptians who were in the citadel, (139) we, too, have resolved to requit them and to restore their city, which has been destroyed by events relating to the wars, and to settle it as those who have been dispersed return to it. (140) Firstly, we have decided out of piety to provide them with the contribution to the sacrifices, 20,000 silver (drachmas) worth of sacrificial animals, wine, oil and frankincense, and sacred *artabae* of fine flour according to the law of the land, (and) 1,460 *medimnoi* of wheat and 375 *medimnoi* of salt. (141) I want these things to be granted to them as I have ordered, and the work pertaining to the temple to be completed, the porticoes and whatever else may be necessary to build. The timber for the woodwork is to be brought from Judea itself, the other peoples and the Libanon, without anyone demanding a tax. The same goes for the other things that might be needed for the restoration of the temple to become more splendid. (142) Everyone belonging to the *ethnos* shall conduct their affairs in accordance with their traditional laws. The *gerousia*, the priests, the scribes of the temple and the temple singers shall be made exempt from the contributions they pay per head, from the crown tax and from the tax they pay with regard to the other things. (143) In order that the city is settled faster, I grant to those who live there now and to those who will return until the month of Hyperberetaios that they shall be tax-exempt for three years. (144) We also exempt them for the future from the third part of the taxes, so that their loss is made good. And those who are slaves because they have been carried off from the city: we set them and those born from them free, and we order that their possessions be restored to them.

3 Authenticity

The hope that our document might answer any of the questions outlined above very much depends on the assumption that it is, in fact, an authentic letter that Antiochus III sent, in more or less exactly this form, to Ptolemy son of Thraseas, the governor and high priest of Coele Syria and Phoenicia. Given the state of the debate, a return to this basic question may appear tedious, but a thorough re-evaluation cannot just skip over some uncomfortable questions. It is true that the question of authenticity is a non-issue in current scholarship. While the other two letters of Antiochus preserved by Josephus are frequently presented with at least an introductory caveat, no recent treatment casts even a shadow of a doubt on the letter to Ptolemy. Where the issue is raised at all, the most frequent solution is to assert that Bickerman has conclusively proven authenticity in his seminal article of 1935.¹⁴ It is all the more important to occasionally remind ourselves that Bickerman did not solve all the problems that come with the letter, and that the Seleucid royal letters published since then – i.e., more than half of the entire corpus – have not brought us any closer to a solution.¹⁵

To start with the basics: with the exception of some early propositions that are not worthy of further discussion because they are basically unargued, no one has suggested dismissing the entire document as a forgery. Several passages find very good parallels in Seleucid inscriptions relating to other events and other places, and when faced with the question whether what we have in front of us can be believed to be a text of the early 190s BCE written by a Seleucid king, this search for parallels remains the only tool available. Of course, a capable forger might know diplomatic conventions, but to take just one example from the very beginning: Ptolemy is addressed without patronymic or title, just as he is in the Hefzibah inscription, which thankfully includes other information that allows us to identify him as Ptolemy son of Thraseas. Would a forger have remembered the name of the first Seleucid governor of Coele Syria and Phoenicia, as well as the peculiar Seleucid custom to address their "friends" by first name only?¹⁶ As for content, it is clear at least since Bickerman that there is nothing extraordinary in a king granting tax relief or the right to use their own laws to the Judeans. Insofar as this is a document that moves from commending the Judeans of Jerusalem for their support during the siege and its aftermath to

14 Bickerman, "La charte Séleucide." For the dissenting voices of Alt and Gauger, see below.

15 For a recent catalogue, see Bencivenni, "The King's Words," 165–69.

16 On this feature of Seleucid letter writing see Ceccarelli, "Image and Communication," 237–38.

awarding them a certain number of time-limited privileges to rebuild the city and its economy, there is nothing suspicious about it. The problem is that we have rather more than that; indeed, everything that is strange about this document is concentrated in one single stretch of text, § 141–143.

This is the section that deals with privileges for specific groups within the population: the *gerousia*, the priests, the temple scribes and the temple singers. It is also the section that makes this document look very similar to the decrees by Persian kings and especially Artaxerxes in the Esra tradition, where similar grants to individual groups connected to the temple are listed in some detail.¹⁷ Personal privilege and an existing literary tradition could provide a purpose and a means of falsification, but of course this alone is not an argument. More important are the formal oddities that start to creep in from precisely the moment of transition to the detailed privileges. § 140 begins with *πρῶτον δ' αὐτοῖς ἐκρίναμεν ... παρασχεῖν*, but after this “first,” no “second” follows. Bickerman notes this in a footnote but does not explain it.¹⁸ It would appear that this section connects to something that is missing. The remainder of the sentence is not problematic: although it remains common to translate *διὰ τὴν εὐσέβειαν* as referring to the piety of the Jews (which would raise the question why the king should feel obliged to reward it with privileges), there can be little doubt that what is in view here is the piety of the king – a perfectly good reason to support a temple, and a claim made by Seleucid kings elsewhere.¹⁹

17 Esr 7.24; cf. the comparative table in Girardin, *L'offrande et le tribut*, 125–26. But an even stronger parallel is 1 Esdras 8.22. The overlap between these traditions also extends to the grants made earlier in the Antiochus letter. Compare 1.) Cyrus' letter in 1 Esdras 6.29: *ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ πυρὸν καὶ ἄλα καὶ οἶνον καὶ ἔλαιον ἐνδελεχῶς κατ' ἐνιαυτὸν, καθὼς ἂν οἱ ἱερεῖς οἱ ἐν Ἱερουσαλημ ὑπαγορεύσωσιν*; 2.) the same letter in Josephus, *Ant.* 11.16: *συγχωρῶ δὲ αὐτοῖς καὶ τὴν ἐκ προγόνων εἰθισμένην τιμὴν κτηνῶν καὶ οἴνου καὶ ἐλαίου δραχμὰς εἴκοσιν μυριάδας καὶ πεντακισχιλίας καὶ εἰς σמידαλιν πυρῶν ἀρτάβας δισμυρίας πεντακοσίας*; 3.) § 140 of the Antiochus letter: *ἐκρίναμεν διὰ τὴν εὐσέβειαν παρασχεῖν εἰς τὰς θυσίας σύνταξιν κτηνῶν τε θυσίμων καὶ οἴνου καὶ ἐλαίου καὶ λιβάνου τιμὴν ἀργυρίου μυριάδας δύο καὶ σמידάλεως ἀρτάβας ἱεράς κατὰ τὸν ἐπιχώριον νόμον πυρῶν μεδίμνους χιλίους τετρακοσίους ἐξήκοντα καὶ ἄλλων μεδίμνους τριακοσίους ἐβδομηκονταπέντε*. Perhaps worryingly, the overlap between the letters of Antiochus and Cyrus is closer in Josephus' two versions than if we only compare his Antiochus letter to 1 Esdras. On the relationship between these traditions, see below, end of section 3.

18 Bickerman, “La charte Séleucide,” 12 n. 2.

19 Cf. Antiochus III's *πρὸς τὸ θεῖον εὐσέβεια* in Welles, *Royal Correspondence*, 179–185 no. 44, l. 27–28, or Seleucus IV's determination to give the gods their due in *CIP IV/2 3511*, l. 18–20, 36–37. That the piety in question is the king's was already noted by Bickerman, “La charte Séleucide,” 12; both the Loeb translation (“on account of their piety”) and Villeneuve et al., *Flavius Josephus* (“compte tenu de leur piété”) miss the mark here. It is unclear why Girardin, *L'offrande et le tribut*, 132 insists that *εὐσέβεια* “ne renvoie pas au roi, mais au peuple juif.”

But in §141, where we would have expected an ἔπειτα (vel sim.) to follow up on the πρῶτον, no such transition is provided and the king suddenly speaks in the singular: "I wish" (βούλομαι) that things should proceed "as I have ordered" (καθὼς ἐπέσταλκα). In the Greek tradition of the text, the singular remains until §144 where the plural returns with ἀπολύομεν, but the Latin tradition makes the switch a bit earlier with *donamus* (Greek: δίδωμι) in §143; given that this is where the character of the regulation changes (back to Jerusalem as a whole rather than individual groups), it is tempting to prefer the Latin here. Throughout §141–142, we also have a series of third person imperatives (κατακομιζέσθω, πολιτευέσθωσαν, ἀπολυέσθω) rather than the command/grant + infinitive constructions that characterise not only the remaining parts of the letter, but also the letters of Antiochus III that survive on stone. Finally, two sentences in §141 introduce possibilities with ἄν followed by optatives: a perfectly valid choice in Classical or Classicizing Greek, but one without parallel in any Seleucid royal letter.²⁰

This combination of unusual factors certainly requires explanation. However, Bickerman addresses neither the imperatives nor the optatives. He does notice the switch to the singular but does not think much of it: a footnote points to Antigonus' letter to Scepsis of 311 BCE and Attalus II's letter to Athenaeus of 142 BCE, two cases where first person singular and plural are used in the very same letter.²¹ But this will not do. Antigonus' letter predates the introduction of Hellenistic kingship, and Attalus II makes a point of having taken the decision about the priesthood of Dionysus together with Eumenes' son Attalus III, which may well explain the change to "I and him" after the initial *plurale maiestatis*. More importantly, neither Antigonus nor Attalus were bound to the style of the Seleucid chancellery, which was more rigid than any other in demanding the first-person plural whenever the king wrote.²² Leaving aside the letter

20 On the general lack of the optative in Hellenistic royal letters see Welles, *Royal Correspondence*, lxxi. In Seleucid royal letters, its only attested use is in indirect speech: *SEG* 37.859, l. 3 (Antiochus III to Heracleia); *SEG* 39.1284, l. 11 (Laodice III to Sardeis); *SEG* 41.1003, l. 7 (Antiochus III to Teos). Seleucid officials occasionally use it in the "you would do well ..." clause (Meleager in Welles, *Royal Correspondence*, 69–71 no. 13; Zeuxis in *SEG* 54.1353), but the king opts for future tense instead (Seleucus IV in *CIIP* IV/2 3511, frg. e l. 11–12). Potentials with ἄν invariably go with the subjunctive: Welles, *Royal Correspondence*, 61–62 no. 10 (l. 6), 62–63 no. 11 (l. 21), 63–64 no. 12 (l. 8), 90–100 no. 18 (l. 14), 141–42 no. 31 (l. 24–25), 142–43 no. 32 (l. 23); 179–85 no. 44 (l. 40–41); *I. Iasos* 4 = Ma, *Antiochus III*, 329–35 no. 26 (l. 28); *CIIP* V/2 7561 (l. 33); *SEG* 61.1236 (l. 19).

21 Antigonus: Welles, *Royal Correspondence*, 3–12 no. 1. Attalus II: Welles, *Royal Correspondence*, 265 no. 65.

22 Stressed by Gauger, *Authentizität und Methode*, 133. Virgilio, "La correspondance du roi hellénistique," 119–22 (and in other publications) has questioned this principle, but like

of Seleucus I to Miletus,²³ written at a time when no Seleucid royal tradition was established yet, there are only two possible exceptions to this rule. Of the three Tean letters, written around the same time as our document and not yet known to Bickerman, the first has the plural and the other two have the singular. The most plausible explanation for this shift between letters (not within the same letter) is that one was written by Antiochus III while the other two were written by his son, who carried the royal title but remained in an inferior position.²⁴ The other possible exception is the Baitokaike dossier, which can now be dated to 143 BCE and has Antiochus VI use the singular – but this is a re-inscription of the later Roman period and therefore prone to modification.²⁵ Given that none of the possible exceptions can break the rule, it remains highly unlikely that Antiochus III wrote βούλομαι, ἐπέσταλκα and (if we go with the Greek) δίδωμι. We have also maintained here that it would be unusual for him to write κατακομιζέσθω, πολιτευέσθωσαν and ἀπολυέσθω, and that there is no parallel for a Seleucid king using an optative like δέοι.

If these observations are accepted, then what are the implications? Leaving aside the remote possibility that transmission errors consistently affect precisely the part that gives grounds for suspicion in other ways, there are two serious solutions on the table. Gauger proposes to see the entirety of § 141–143 as a later interpolation: in his view, the section surrounding the privileges of the *gerousia* and the priests (but not the high priest, who goes unmentioned) was invented by the supporters of Hyrcanus II in the throne war of 65–63 BCE, when the *gerousia* sided with Hyrcanus against the incumbent high priest Aristobu-

Ceccarelli, “Image and Communication,” 246 n. 37, I remain unconvinced. Virgilio adduces 1.) a dossier from Teos, on which see below, n. 24; 2.) the letter to Ptolemy in Josephus; 3.) the letter to Zeuxis in Josephus. Obviously one letter preserved only in Josephus cannot vindicate an anomaly in another letter preserved only in Josephus. The few other examples adduced relate to the queen, not the king.

23 Welles, *Royal Correspondence*, 33–40 no. 5.

24 SEG 41.1003–1005; for this explanation see Ma, *Antiochus III*, 320–21.

25 Welles, *Royal Correspondence*, 280–88 no. 70. The copy can be dated to 259/60 CE because of the letter of Valerian and Gallienus that precedes it. Welles had thought the privileges for the sanctuary of Baitokaike to have been granted “not much if any earlier than 109 B.C.” (p. 283), but the discovery of another, earlier copy that has preserved the original date now makes speculation superfluous: Hallof, “Das Datum des Briefes.” As the letter largely uses passive constructions with infinitives (ἐκρίθη συγχωρηθῆναι etc.), the use of the singular is deduced from a single μοι in l. 4. Unfortunately, this part of the letter is not extant in the new copy, which Hallof tentatively dates to the Augustan period. The new text thus does not help us decide the question whether the μοι reflects a new approach to kingship under Tryphon (who used the young Antiochus VI as a pawn), or if it is a later alteration of an original plural as has frequently been assumed.

lus II.²⁶ But apart from the question how exactly tampering with the privileges accorded by Antiochus III would have helped the Hyrcanus side in any way to regain power, the absence of the high priest can be explained in other ways, and the passage also includes material that cannot serve any polemical purpose. Perhaps an earlier solution by Alt deserves to be reconsidered: we might be dealing with two separate documents that were combined into one.²⁷ Alt imagines that both were letters by Antiochus III on two separate issues (the restoration of the city and the restoration of the temple), and that the combination already occurred in the Seleucid chancellery – meaning that what we have in Josephus is the authentic document as it circulated at the time. But this does not explain the singular. A slightly more radical solution would be to propose a later combination of two documents:

1. a letter by Antiochus III that stretches from §138 to §140 and then perhaps already resumes in §143 (if we follow the Latin) but certainly in §144;
2. a letter by a Seleucid official, perhaps Ptolemy himself, that seeks to put the general provisions of that royal letter into specific practice, the core of which is preserved in §141–142.

Five observations strengthen this proposal:

- a. The first brings us back to *ἐπέσταλκα*: there is no parallel for a Seleucid king using *ἐπιστέλλω* as an active word, plural or singular. *Τὰ ἐπιστάλμενα* can frequently designate the king's orders conveyed in written form, but a royal decision is introduced with other words, frequently a form of *συντάσσω*. Where we do find *ἐπεστάλακαμεν*, it is used by a Seleucid official, not the king.²⁸ Seleucid officials also tend to use the plural, but the rule was less rigid here than for kings,²⁹ so it is quite possible to imagine Ptolemy himself writing *ἐπέσταλκα*.

26 Gauger, *Authentizität und Methode*, 202–203.

27 Alt, "Zu Antiochos' III. Erlaß."

28 Welles, *Royal Correspondence*, 101–102 no. 19 (Covering letter of Metrophanes, 254/3 BCE), l. 13–16: ... ἐπεστάλακαμεν δὲ καὶ Τιμοξένωι τῷ βιβλιοφύλακι καταχωρῆσαι ... καθάπερ ὁ βασιλεὺς γέγραφεν.

29 Zeuxis in particular is known to use the plural; so does Menedemus in the Kermanshah copy of the decision to appoint high priestesses of Laodice (*I. Estremo Oriente* 272, l. 2), and the same is true for Dorymenes and Heliodorus in the Olympiodorus dossier from Maresha (*CITP* IV/2 351, l. 2 and 8). Because Seleucid officials frequently use passive constructions ("attached is the letter ...") without active verbal forms, the evidence is mostly limited to personal pronouns; see the Philomelion copy of the Nicanor dossier of 209 BCE

- b. A similar observation holds for the sequence of third person imperatives, which is more naturally associated with Seleucid officials than with Seleucid kings. Seleucid kings could very occasionally use third person imperatives to conclude a list of orders (“everything is to be carried out”), but they did not use them to give those individual orders.³⁰
- c. The third observation is a parallel: in a fragmentary document found in Sardeis, at least some of the provisions surrounding the recovery of an unknown city were not regulated in detail by the king, but left to someone else who could refer to the kings; this includes mention of the right to use the laws that had previously been used, fiscal exemptions, and specific sums of money, all of which we have in our segment.³¹
- d. The fourth observation comes back to the old question of the missing high priest: it has previously been suggested that the high priest of Jerusalem is not specifically mentioned in the letter to avoid confusion with the addressee Ptolemy son of Thraseas, who was after all ἀρχιερεύς of the satrapy.³² This argument could perhaps be strengthened further if we suppose that it was Ptolemy himself who wrote this part of the letter: one

(Malay, “A Copy”; *SEG* 54.1353) for a singular μοι (l. 17). Ptolemy himself uses singular verbal forms in the Hefzibah inscription (*CIIP* V/2 7561), but this might be regarded as a special case given that he writes to the king.

30 Thus, in the letter appointing a chief-priestess of Laodice (Welles, *Royal Correspondence*, 157–63 no. 36; 204 BCE), Antiochus III sums up his instructions with “all of the above-mentioned things are to be carried out accordingly,” συντελείσθω πάντα τοῖς προγεγραμμένοις ἀ[κο]λουθῶς (l. 21–22); the following ἀνατεθήτω (l. 25) can be explained as following on from that grammatical choice. See also l. 20 in the Hefzibah dossier (*CIIP* V/2 7561): γενέσθω οὖν καθάπερ ἄξιοι. Another example of a third person imperative used by a Seleucid king known to me occurs in the late documentation of Antiochus VI’s privileges for Baitokaike (above, n. 25), which has the king address Euphemus thus: ἐδόθη ὁ κατακεχωρισμένος ὑπομνηματισμός. γενέσθω οὖν καθότι δεδῆλωται ... This introduction is rather odd: one would not expect the king to refer to his own decision as a “memorandum,” but no petitioner is mentioned – whereas the exact verbal parallel in Antiochus V’s response to a petition of the Sidonians in Jamnia (*CIIP* III 2267) makes it very clear that the “memorandum” is the petition by the Sidonians, not the decision by the king. Perhaps the editorial introduction in the Baitokaike dossier has shortened the wording or merged different documents – one wonders if the Roman versions of the Baitokaike dossier have undergone the same kind of process postulated below for what would have been the Jerusalem dossier, with the king “taking over” words originally used by his administrators. As for administrators, third person imperatives are used by Metrophanes in the covering letter cited above, n. 28 (l. 12–13), and by Aineas in the copy of the Nicanor dossier cited in the previous note (l. 11–12 for a whole sequence).

31 Ma, *Antiochus III*, 352–53 no. 36.

32 Eckhardt, *Ethnos und Herrschaft*, 175–76.

might forgive him for not addressing someone else with the very title that he had to regard as his own.

- e. Finally, if part of the letter as we have it was written by Ptolemy himself, this at least gives us a possible answer to a crucial question that otherwise has to be left wide open: how did Josephus come to know the document? We know that Antiochus wrote to Ptolemy, but there is no mention of publication or any other instructions of passing on the letter.³³ But if Ptolemy then wrote to the leaders of Jerusalem, perhaps referring to the king's decisions just as the unknown official from the Sardeis inscription did, that would give us a context for both documents ending up in Judean hands, where they were then combined into one at a later stage, naturally under the name of the more prominent of the two authors.

There is a final caveat to this altogether optimistic conclusion. If the final redaction is Judean, then there remains some room for manipulations or adjustments. They are ultimately unprovable, but coming back to §142, we should at least note how odd it actually is to have a Seleucid document that exempts a rather large elite from any taxes whatsoever without a time limit. The issue is only marginally affected by the reading (ἀλῶν or ἄλλων, the salt tax or "other taxes" at the end of the sentence?).³⁴ While it is not at all unusual to find a regulation as in §143–144 (exemption from taxes for three years, and reduction of a third afterwards, for all inhabitants of Jerusalem), there is no parallel for specific groups of the population being singled out for very extensive and permanent tax exemptions as per §142.³⁵ The only good parallel for this kind of list is the Artaxerxes decree in the Esra tradition, where priests, Levites, singers and others are exempt from tribute. The connection has of course been

33 The problem of transmission is also highlighted by Gauger, *Authentizität und Methode*, 198.

34 Niese's editio minor has replaced the manuscripts' ἄλλων with the much more specific ἀλῶν, and this is followed by influential translations (notably the Loeb and Villeneuve et al., *Flavius Josephus*). Girardin, *L'offrande et le tribut*, 139–40 has made a case for returning to the original reading; cf. already Taylor, *Seleucid Rule in Palestine*, 89–90.

35 And yet according to Girardin, *L'offrande et le tribut*, 141, this was perfectly normal, and "le clergé samaritain a ainsi obtenu les mêmes privilèges, de même que de nombreux autres sanctuaires de Coelé-Syrie." However, the Samaritan case rests entirely on Magen's observation that building activity on Mount Gerizim intensified under Antiochus III (which tells us nothing at all about tax exemptions for priests), and there is simply no evidence for the priesthoods of "numerous other sanctuaries." The accompanying footnote points to Byblos (because a copy of the Olympiodorus dossier was found there) and to the tax exemption for the Sidonians of Jamnia (*CIIP* III 2267). It is unclear what these references contribute to the question. We also note that the exemption for Jerusalem is not limited to the clergy but includes the entire *gerousia*.

seen before: Girardin regards it as a potential argument for historical continuity (if the Artaxerxes documents are genuine, which seems unlikely);³⁶ Gauger suggests that this section of the Antiochus decree might have been modelled after the Artaxerxes tradition;³⁷ Honigman prefers it the other way around, based on the assumption that the entire letter to Ptolemy is one, unadulterated document.³⁸ The debate is potentially significant for our assessment of the letter: if the Artaxerxes tradition is old, the case for a manipulation of the Antiochus letter based on that tradition gains support; if the Antiochus letter is genuine throughout, the argument that the Artaxerxes tradition was developed in response to it may be the more attractive one. However, it is difficult to build on these proposals because arguments would quickly become circular: Gauger's solution presupposes anteriority of the Artaxerxes tradition, whereas Honigman's proposal presupposes authenticity of § 142 of the Antiochus letter. Perhaps our reassessment of the letter can point the way towards a solution: the only solid pillar in all this is the unusual character of the tax exemptions in § 142 within a Seleucid context. This would suggest that we should avoid arguments that only work if the exemptions listed in § 142 are a genuine Seleucid administrative measure. A plausible scenario for its later invention can certainly be envisaged: we can postulate a stage where Antiochus III was re-evaluated as a good monarch in contrast to his son Antiochus IV, leading to the creation of the three-letter dossier we now have (including the *programma* for the temple and the letter regarding a Jewish military colony).³⁹ In this process, embellishments informed by the literary tradition could certainly occur, and this is what we may see in the tax exemptions supposedly granted by Antiochus III to specific groups of people. The list in § 142 must be regarded as suspect and should perhaps be ignored in reconstructions of Seleucid policy.⁴⁰

4 Exemplarity

The following observations are not meant as an exhaustive commentary or as a full discussion of what the text has to offer historians of the period. Instead,

36 Girardin, *L'offrande et le tribut*, 135–37. He notes that Antiochus III would then have been somewhat less generous than Artaxerxes.

37 Gauger, *Authentizität und Methode*, 204.

38 Honigman, "Antiochus III's Decree."

39 Cf. the suggestions by Gauger, "Antiochos III. und Artaxerxes," who sees Rome as the addressee of such a re-evaluation; for a Hasmonean context see Eckhardt, "Memories of Persian Rule."

40 Aperghis, *The Seleukid Royal Economy*, 164 notes "that certain classes of the population

I would like to single out five thematic areas where our text can serve – or has been used – as an example that elucidates more general reconstructions of Seleucid policy both within and beyond the Southern Levant.

4.1 *Royal Representation*

How much this letter owes to general assumptions about the king as benefactor hardly requires elaboration. The role of the king as purveyor of benefactions is evident throughout, and it chimes well with the contemporary notion that “on the whole, being king means to strive for the benefaction of men.”⁴¹ That the king uses the support of the temple to emphasize his own piety is also not surprising; at best we can note that this aspect appears to have become more prominent in Seleucid royal letters around this time.⁴² One specific aspect of royal representation nevertheless deserves a closer look, because it seems to have been overlooked in previous discussions.

Our text is unusual among Seleucid royal letters in that it seems to include a direct acknowledgment of the fact that the king was in competition with others for authority over the region. In other post-conquest letters, this is usually glossed over and the competition is never named. The citizens of Iasos are reminded by Laodice in 196 BCE of the “unexpected calamities” their city had fallen into; there is no mention of the Antigonid garrison that Antiochus had expelled from the city.⁴³ Zeuxis notes that Herakleia under Latmos has suffered from “poverty which has befallen the city from preceding times, on account of the wars and the destructions”; the city’s Ptolemaic occupation is passed over in silence.⁴⁴ The epigraphic dossier relating to the reconquest of Sardeis never mentions Achaïos. But in our letter, the Judeans and their elite are explicitly praised for their help in expelling “the garrison of the Egyptians” (§138). Perhaps the king could be more direct in a letter addressed to a Seleu-

could be exempted by royal decree,” but the only evidence adduced there is §142 of our letter.

41 *I. Iasos* 4 = Ma, *Antiochus III*, 329–35 no. 26, l. 45–47: καὶ τὸ [κα]θ’ ὅλον τὸ βασιλεύειν νενομικότος [sc. Antiochus III] πρὸς εὐεργεσίαν [...]σθαι ἀνθρώπων. Given that this is one of the very few explicit definitions of Hellenistic kingship on record, the loss of the verb is particularly frustrating; my “strive” is just an attempt to give the general sense.

42 Cf. the documents cited above, n. 19, and on Seleucid royal εὐσέβεια, Ameling, “Seleukidische Religionspolitik in Koile-Syrien,” 347.

43 *I. Iasos* 4 = Ma, *Antiochus III*, 329–35 no. 26, l. 6–8: ὡς τὴν ὑμετέραν πόλιν συμπτώμασιν περιπεσοῦσαν ἀπροσδοκῆτοῖς ἀνακτισάμενος [sc. Antiochus III]. The “unexpected calamities” are probably not related to the earthquake mentioned in other inscriptions, cf. Vacante, “*Leuergesia* di Antioco III,” 47–50.

44 *SEG* 37.859 = Ma, *Antiochus III*, 340–45 no. 31, l. II 12–14.

cid official rather than a subject community, but he must have expected that the letter would end up in Judean hands as it indeed did, and the whole part that praises the Judeans for their support could well be designed to be ultimately read by them. The formulation has not drawn attention in scholarship so far,⁴⁵ but it gives a unique insight into the way a Seleucid king could frame his rivals. For it is rather unlikely that Antiochus meant to say that the garrison members themselves were Egyptians: this is not the meaning of the Greek, and we do know that Scopas (who had put the garrison there) recruited in Aitolia.⁴⁶ The “Egyptians” are clearly the Ptolemies, and the word choice is clearly an insult. Egyptians were at the very bottom of the ethnic hierarchy of Ptolemaic Egypt; in their own view and that of many others, the Ptolemaic kings were fellow Macedonians. Antiochus thus employs ethnic labelling to present himself as the benevolent conqueror who frees Jerusalem from a foreign menace. He might even be responding to the Ptolemaic tendency to assimilate the Seleucid to “Persians.” Perhaps the Syrian Wars had created a rather more tense ideological battleground than the more frequent changes of allegiance that we find in Western Asia Minor.⁴⁷

4.2 *Urbanism and the Polis*

Moving on from the image of the king to the image of subject communities, the letter has regularly been used to elucidate the interactions of a Seleucid king with a community that was not a *polis* but shaped by traditional structures determined by a temple and ethnic affiliation.⁴⁸ Of course, both the *ethnos* and the temple are mentioned in the part that we have defined as Ptolemy’s letter, but it is all the more important to note that Antiochus’ letter (§ 138–140 + 143–144) revolves neither around a temple nor around an *ethnos* but around a city, Jerusalem.⁴⁹ The city is mentioned in the opening clause, because it is where the king arrived (§ 138, παραγενομένους δ’ εἰς τὴν πόλιν). It is mentioned again in the following paragraph where the aim of repairing it is expressed (§ 139,

45 But see now Paul Kosmin’s essay in this same issue, where he also notes the peculiarity of this formulation and develops his own explanation.

46 Pol. 15.25.16.

47 For Seleucids as Persians, see e.g. the Canopus decree (*OGIS* 56, l. 9), and generally Sherwin-White and Kuhrt, *From Samarkhand to Sardis*, 39.

48 E.g. Sherwin-White and Kuhrt, *From Samarkhand to Sardis*, 226; Capdetrey, *Le pouvoir Séleucide*, 97–100.

49 Contrast formulations like “the king’s benefactions to the temple and the nation of the Judeans” (Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, 35), which leave out the city entirely, or indeed Gera, “The Seleucid Road,” 25: “in his [Antiochus’] eyes there were two essential elements in Judea. There was the temple, and alongside it the *ethnos* of the Jews.”

τὴν πόλιν αὐτῶν ἀναλαβεῖν). It then disappears from view in what I have called Ptolemy's letter, only to return again as the king's letter resumes: the city is to be "quickly inhabited" (§ 143, ἵνα δὲ θάπτον ἢ πόλις κατοικισθῆ), and those carried off into slavery "from the city" (§ 144, ἐκ τῆς πόλεως) are to be brought back. This is very concentrated language: πόλις is the most frequently used noun in the document, even if we include the part that I have ascribed to Ptolemy. It is all the more surprising that the document has often been used as the primary, in fact the only example of Seleucid kings operating in a non-*polis* environment. There are several things to unpack here.

It is a widely held view that some cities in the Hellenistic empires had *polis* status while others had not. It is also widely known that all cities in the Hellenistic empires could be called *polis*, because *polis* was the Greek word for city. Scholars have found numerous ways to distinguish the cities they believe to have "*polis* status" from cities that are called *poleis* in the sources but do not have that status: a city without *polis* status is not a "*polis* in a Classical sense," not a *polis* "in its original legal meaning," not a "political *polis*," and so on.⁵⁰ All of these solutions are based on preconceived notions of what makes a *polis*, and all of them have in common that they have no relation to actual Hellenistic administrative language. Hellenistic kings simply did not make a terminological distinction between different kinds of city. They did on occasion create cities with Greek institutions such as a gymnasium, *phylai*, and the corresponding notion of citizenship – but where these were introduced into existing settlements, they did not "create a *polis*" but a privileged group of citizens within a *polis*, and the entire institutional setup was designed to reinforce that privilege.⁵¹ There is nothing surprising, untechnical or "incorrect" about Antiochus III calling Jerusalem a *polis* despite the lack of Greek constitutional

50 Quotations in this order: Kreifsig, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 74; Sanger, "Contextualizing a Ptolemaic Solution," 123; Mairs and Fischer-Bovet, "Reassessing Hellenistic Settlement Policies," 73. What the Classical, original, political *polis* would be is often left unspecified, perhaps because it is taken for granted. Recent authors are rarely as explicit as Tcherikover, "Was Jerusalem a *Polis*," 66: "if we wish to see Jerusalem as a *polis*, we must require the existence of a *demos*, a citizen body gathering at fixed times and places for fixed purposes (the election of officials, etc.), and of a council, changing frequently, and of officials elected by the people. We must also require the existence of a *gymnasion* and an *ephebeion* as municipal educational institutions to train young people to Greek citizen life. In the absence of all these institutions, no city may be considered a *polis*." Needless to say, this is a modern definition based on Classical Athens, not something ancient people thought.

51 The best example is Babylon, on which see van der Spek, "Multi-Ethnicity and Ethnic Segregation."

arrangements, and Jerusalem did not “become a *polis*” only when a gymnasium was introduced under Antiochus IV.

The Seleucids certainly were both city founders and city transformers, and they had now conquered a region where the Ptolemies had done very little of this sort, with only a few cities recognisable as Ptolemaic foundations (Philoteria, Philadelphia, Scythopolis).⁵² The Seleucid footprint in the Southern Levant is very evident from the emergence of several Antiochs and Seleuceias, and plenty of evidence for urbanistic and constitutional change.⁵³ However, how much of it can be attributed to Antiochus III is debatable. For Antioch-Hippos, a recent article connects its transformation “from Ptolemaic fortress to Seleucid *polis*” with Antiochus III, but there is little to no evidence to support this.⁵⁴ The fortification wall of Seleuceia-Gadara has been dated to the early second century BCE and could be taken as evidence for urbanistic activity under Antiochus III.⁵⁵ Looking at constitutional change, the first evidence for ephebes at Tyre dates to the reign of this king.⁵⁶ We do not know when the “Antiochians in Ptolemais” or the “Seleukeians in Gaza” were established.⁵⁷ Debate tends to center on Antiochus IV, but there may be more continuity than is sometimes assumed; we may note in passing that the so-called “*polis* at Babylon,” the introduction of a group of “citizens” (*pulitai*) who use a gymnasium, has been attributed to Antiochus III rather than Antiochus IV in some recent contributions.⁵⁸ Perhaps our letter can serve as early evidence for a new focus on the city as the main building block of empire right after the battle of Panium. It is certainly testimony to the overarching importance of cities in Seleucid political thought, and it is surprising how often this clear focus of the text has been lost in modern discussions.

4.3 *Foundation Language*

Our letter throws some further light on Antiochus as a friend of cities and city founder, because in some respects, the king presents himself as the founder of

52 On these, see Greenberg et al., *Bet Yerah. Volume III*, 115–16.

53 A full discussion of this process remains a desideratum. See for the moment Thiel, *Studien zum hellenistischen Siedlungswesen*, 363–79.

54 Eisenberg, “A Military Portrait of Hippos.” The best evidence for the transformation adduced there is the creation of a moat.

55 Jansen, *Die hellenistische Befestigung*. Cf. the later inscription mentioning the “Seleukeians in ...,” *SEG* 50.1479.

56 *IGLTyr* 1, l. 2–4 (188/7 BCE): --- Δημητρίο[υ] ἐφήβους πάλη[ν] νι[κ]ήσας.

57 On the evidence for these, see Cohen, *The Hellenistic Settlements in Syria*, 213–14, 286.

58 Clancier and Monerie, “Les sanctuaires babyloniens,” 211–12; Graslin-Thomé, “Le règne d’Antiochos III,” 227–29.

Jerusalem. There is, of course, no question that Jerusalem already exists, and that in practical terms the issue at hand is not foundation but re-peopling. The Loeb translation actually uses this very word: "to repeople it by bringing back to it those who have been dispersed abroad" (§139). But the Greek deserves attention here: τὴν πόλιν αὐτῶν ἀναλαβεῖν ... καὶ συνοικίσει τῶν διεσπαρμένων εἰς αὐτὴν πάλιν συνελθόντων. Antiochus is not the active agent of the συνελθόντων clause: dispersed people "come together into" the city, and in doing so they contribute to the king's main policy, which is συνοικίσει – literally, to "bring together in one dwelling place." The language is, quite literally, that of *synoikismos*, the formation of a new city by combining originally separate parts.⁵⁹ This can be compared to §143, where foundation language occurs again with κατοικίζειν. In §139, it is only the πάλιν that potentially detracts from the notion that Jerusalem is re-founded by the king, because it is a reminder that the people coming to the city now have lived there before. But an argument can be made that πάλιν does not actually belong in the text: at least one manuscript has πόλιν here, and given the language of *synoikismos*, it would make rather perfect sense to say that "the dispersed people come together into one and the same city," εἰς αὐτὴν πόλιν. Naturally, convenience is no good reason to change the text, and an argument on *lectio difficilior* could cut both ways. At the very least, the variant shows how easily Antiochus' re-peopling could be transformed into full-scale refoundation.

Who are the dispersed? §143 makes reference to returnees (κατελευσομένοι), and §144 specifically mentions people sold into slavery (who are presumably distinct from the returnees who have to be back by the month of Hyperboretaios). But the circle of the "dispersed" in §139 is potentially broader, especially if πάλιν were to be replaced with πόλιν. Take this description of the synoecism that created Sparta, preserved in identical form in several branches of Byzantine scholarship:

ἢ Σπάρτη πρότερον, ἀπὸ Σπαρτοῦ τοῦ Ἀμύκλαντος τοῦ Λέλεγος τοῦ Σπαρτοῦ, ἢ διὰ τὸ τοὺς πρώτους συνοικίσαντας τὴν πόλιν Λέλεγας. διεσπαρμένους γὰρ εἰς ταῦτόν συνελθεῖν καὶ μίαν οἴκησιν ποιήσασθαι.

(Sparta is supposedly named) either after Spartos, son of Amyklas son of Lelex grandson of Spartos, or because those who first settled the city were Lelegans. For (it is said that) dispersed people came together to the same place and created a single settlement.⁶⁰

59 On *sympoliteia* and *synoikismos*, see Walser, "Sympolitien und Siedlungsentwicklung."

60 Stephanus of Byzantium s.v. Λακεδαίμων; the same in Eustathius of Thessalonike, *Commentary on Homer's Iliad*, 1:454 van der Valk.

There is no way to know how old this tradition is, but I would note that the passage has all our verbs, *συνοικίζω*, *διασπείρω* and *σύνειμι*, in the same order as in our letter, and it is about the creation of a new city through the incorporation of people that had hitherto lived “dispersed,” i.e. not in one single community. There is thus a distinct possibility that the resettlement of Jerusalem envisaged by Antiochus includes people who have hitherto lived “dispersed” in its surroundings. The text gives us an unusually detailed view into Seleucid foundation language, but it is not unique in employing the language of *synoikismos*. There are at least two further instances where such terminology is used in the context of re-peopling a community affected by war, and both involve Antiochus III. The Sardeis dossier of 213 BCE is particularly close to the letter for Jerusalem: the second letter of Antiochus uses the same language of “recovery” revolving around *ἐπαρνόρθωσις*, and in the first letter, wood is to be cut as a contribution *εἰς τὸν συνοικισμόν τῆς πόλεως*, which Ma understandably translates as “rebuilding,” but the implications of the word go well beyond that (and of course houses would be needed for new settlers coming in).⁶¹ The second case is a decree of Amyzon of 201 BCE that praises the policy of the Seleucid *epistates* over the Artemision: he summons citizens who live “in the autonomous (cities)” *εἰς τὸν συνοικισμόν τοῦ Ἀρτεμισίου* – surely not as workers to rebuild the sanctuary but in order to settle them in the area.⁶² Both of these documents are short and somewhat inconclusive on their own. But when they are read together with the more extensive letter to Ptolemy, a rhetoric of Seleucid “re-peopling” emerges that is very much a rhetoric of re-foundation – and very much tied to Antiochus III.

4.4 Seleucid Ethnē

The other “constitutional” term, *ethnos*, does not require detailed discussion as the meaning in the text is quite clear. A few remarks are nevertheless in order. A traditional understanding of the Seleucid empire divides it into Greek *poleis* and oriental *ethnē*, based on a conception of Hellenistic political thought that can be traced back to Droysen and was influentially promoted by Bickerman.⁶³ The question of exemplarity is particularly pertinent here, because

61 SEG 39.1283; Ma, *Antiochus III*, 284–85 no. 1, l. 3.

62 Ma, *Antiochus III*, 298–300 no. 10, l. 14–16: φροντίζει δὲ διὰ τέλους καὶ ὑπὲρ τῶν ἄλλων ἡμῶν πολιτῶν τῶν κατοικούντων τὰς αὐτονόμους προσκαλούμενος εἰς τὸν συνοικισμόν τοῦ Ἀρτεμισίου.

63 A concise definition is offered by Bickerman, *Institutions des Séleucides*, 164: “La polis, c’est une cité grecque ou grécisée, l’ethnos, c’est le cadre de la vie des indigènes d’Asie”; cf. more recently Schwentzel, *Juifs et Nabatéens*, 18. Bickerman explicitly derived his definition from Droysen, who had plucked it out of thin air; see the history in Eckhardt, “Vom Volk zur Stadt.”

the only example for an “oriental *ethnos*” – or any particular *ethnos*, for that matter – mentioned in any actual Seleucid document are the Judeans. It is this dearth of evidence for a supposedly fundamental form of organisation that has made our document so important for the reconstruction of “non-*polis*” environments – when it is in fact first and foremost about a *polis*. Within the letter itself, *ethnos* does not appear to be a loaded term. It comes up once in the plural, where the meaning is simply territorial, a subdivision of the satrapy (wood is to be brought “from Judea, the other *ethne* and the Libanon”).⁶⁴ We then have the famous statement that “all from within the *ethnos*”, πάντες οἱ ἐκ τοῦ ἔθνους, should “conduct their affairs in accordance with their traditional laws.”⁶⁵ As there are several parallels for *hoi ek tou* formulations where the reference is to a territory or a political subdivision,⁶⁶ the meaning is presumably the same as before. The Seleucid administration thus treats Jerusalem as the only city within the administrative subdivision that was Judea, and that subdivision is called an *ethnos*, much like Roman provinces could later be called *ethnos*. The text itself does not require us to fill the term with any meaning beyond that.

4.5 Seleucid Governmentality

Was the right to use the “traditional laws” an innovation? While this has often been assumed, sometimes with wide-ranging implications, there is no reason to believe that Judea had not been governed autonomously and in accordance with traditional law before the battle of Panium.⁶⁷ But by making the status quo explicitly dependent on royal fiat, with the logical corollary that a future lapse in loyalty would give reason to revoke what now had to be regarded as a privilege, Antiochus III asserted his authority over newly conquered territory. Even the traditional laws of Judea were now his to give, and while no information about them was required for this gesture, the letter does make sure to suggest at least some knowledge within the royal administration when it refers to the

64 Cf. Cadpetrey, *Le pouvoir Séleucide*, 92.

65 On the question how to render πολιτεύεσθαι see Baslez, “Vivre en citoyen,” 85–90.

66 E.g. οἱ δημόται [ο]ἱ [ἐ]κ τοῦ Ἀ[ρ]χίππου μέρους καὶ Στησίου (Rhamnous II 180, 339/8 BCE); οἱ δὲ βασιλικοὶ λαοὶ οἱ ἐκ τοῦ τόπου (IMT Skam/NebTäler 238, Ilion 274/3 BCE); οἱ ἐκ τοῦ Καρίου (I. Priene 37 + 38, 2nd c. BCE).

67 The assumption that Antiochus’ grant *obligated* people in Judea to adhere to a specific version of their “traditional laws” (Bickerman, “La charte Séleucide,” 27–28, followed by many) certainly overstates the king’s investment in the matter. The image of Ptolemaic suppression of local traditions looms large in some of the literature, but Tcherikover, “The Political Situation,” 62 likely got it right: “There is little doubt that he [Antiochus III] reaffirmed the rights accorded to the Jews by his predecessors, the Ptolemaic kings.”

Judean ἐπιχώριος νόμος. This is the first time that we see the legal traditions of Judea defined as “local law” in need of explicit confirmation; two decades later, an Aramaic marriage contract from Idumea also takes care to specify that it follows the “law (*nwmws!*) of the daughters [of Edom].”⁶⁸ Traditional legal systems – what had once been just “law” – can become “local law” through interaction with an imperial order that sets its own standards, and it would appear that in Coele Syria and Phoenicia, Seleucid control forced this interaction.

The connection between local knowledge and the pretension of total control is visible elsewhere in the letter as well. The royal grant of silver, flour, wheat and salt comes from the king’s own coffers; it requires transport but does not rely on a complex administrative network beyond that. In contrast, the king’s order regarding the provision of wood presupposes that it will be possible for Ptolemy to not only arrange for transport but also create a system that distributes the burden among several areas, two of which are specifically named (Judea and the Libanon) whereas others are implied to be known. The image created here is one of complete imperial control and a good overview over regional affairs: the order requires an administrative presence in several areas of Coele Syria and Phoenicia, or at the very least a network of contacts that could easily be activated, and of course it also requires a full understanding of who the “other peoples” are.⁶⁹ We can compare the locally specific reference to wood cut “from the forests in Taranza” in the first letter to Sardeis: using the names of locales and regions suggests familiarity and authority.⁷⁰ Whether all of these conditions were indeed in place is perhaps less important than the pretension that they were. There is nothing to surprise this administration, and nothing that it has no control over. We know from the Hefzibah inscription that the real picture could be much messier, with rogue Seleucid agents roaming Ptolemy’s villages and carrying off inhabitants into slavery, but even there, the other impression we can get is that a finetuned administrative machine with several layers is working hard to come to terms with any problems Ptolemy might have had.⁷¹ This visibility of the adminis-

68 Eshel and Kloner, “An Aramaic Ostrakon.”

69 A matter of debate in scholarship. I am less convinced than Bickerman, *Institutions des Séleucides*, 138 or Finkielstzajn, “Administration du Levante sud,” 470–71 that we can map the list of ἔθνη in Strabo 16.2.2 onto Seleucid territorial division.

70 SEG 39.1283; Ma, *Antiochus III*, 284–87 no. 1, l. 2–4: ... καὶ ξυλὴν εἰς τὸν συνοικισμὸν τῆς πόλεως κόψαι καὶ ἐξαγαγέσθαι ἐκ τῶν ἐν Ταρανζοῖς ὕλων καθ’ ἂν συνκρίνη Ζεῦξις.

71 CIIP V/2 7561. Chrubasik, “The Epigraphic Dossier,” 122 correctly points out that what we have in the Hefzibah inscription is not the official publication envisaged by Antiochus III, but the documents clearly indicate that publication was indeed envisaged, just not in this form.

trative apparatus, and the concomitant impression that things are going the way they should within an orderly, authoritative and all-knowing system, is indeed a feature of the Seleucid takeover of the Southern Levant: from the first 35 years of Seleucid rule, we have such dossiers on stone from Hefzibah, Maresha, Byblos and Jamnia, and we may add the petition of the Sidonians of Shechem preserved in Josephus.⁷² A century of Ptolemaic rule has not produced a single comparable document. We do not need to assume that the entire Seleucid apparatus was new: Ptolemy had been in post before the battle of Panium, and some of the people we see in the Hefzibah dossier may well have worked under him when he was still in Ptolemaic service. But the outward appearance of this apparatus and the role it played within royal representation seems to have changed significantly under the Seleucids, and the charter for Jerusalem is another piece of evidence to support this conclusion.

5 Conclusion

Our reassessment of a much-studied text confirms some conclusions previously reached in scholarship, calls into question some more recent suggestions, and raises several new issues. It remains plausible to see the letter preserved in *Antiquities* 12.138–144 as recording genuine Seleucid measures, but some modifications of the current consensus are in order. The formal oddities, concentrated in one coherent stretch of text, have too easily been explained away since Bickerman's foundational discussion. The solution proposed here – two letters written by different people, merged into one under the name of the more prominent of the two – has the advantage of making sense of the formal deviations while maintaining the authenticity of most of the text. It does however raise new questions about the emergence of the version we have now: if we do imagine a Judean redaction, the most plausible context would be a reassessment of Antiochus III's role in Jewish history, perhaps as one small part of a wider Hasmonean historiographical project.⁷³ It is in this context that the unusual regulations of § 142 may have crept into the text, modelled on the Artaxerxes tradition. At any rate, the common assumption that we have in Jose-

72 Byblos: Yon, "De Marisa à Byblos." Jamnia: *CIIP* III 2267. Sidonians of Shechem: Josephus, *Ant.* 12.258–263, with Bertrand, "Réflexions sur les modalités." There is also the fragment from Anhedon, *CIIP* III 2439.

73 I have tried to sketch some features of this – putative – project in Eckhardt, "Hasmonean Historiography."

plus one genuine, basically unadulterated letter of Antiochus III is in need of serious reconsideration.

The document as we have it remains crucial for understanding the Seleucid conquest of the Southern Levant, but it has to be read alongside other evidence that points to rupture rather than continuity.⁷⁴ A document such as this will always strike a balance between continuity and innovation, and we should not expect it to highlight as innovative only what was really new, or as traditional only what was actually well-established. To take just the privilege that has been discussed the most: it is of course very likely that the Judeans had lived according to their own laws before, and that the Seleucids merely confirmed what they were expected to confirm. However, granting the privilege again was a way of asserting power; autonomy and financial subsidies were only one side of a process that had subjection at its core, turning Judea into a well-defined part of the Seleucid empire. Even within our document, restorative rhetoric is coupled with foundation language and a clear sense of new beginnings. The defeat of the “Egyptians” ushers in an era of flourishing urban life, an impression that maps rather well onto changes observed elsewhere in the region.

Is what happened to Jerusalem a paradigm for how things worked in the Seleucid empire? The conquest of the Southern Levant was unique in an important respect: it was only here that Seleucid rule was preceded by a century of Hellenistic administration. We have noted that some of the measures taken and perhaps some of the knowledge required of Antiochus III’s apparatus rely on Ptolemaic precedent, which Ptolemy son of Thraseas himself would have been able to provide. Given this seemingly unproblematic succession of kindred empires, it is all the more remarkable that aspects of a specifically Seleucid agenda can be clearly identified. Reading our letter together with other evidence for change, the Southern Levant can potentially serve as a laboratory where distinctive Seleucid policies can be observed precisely in a context where one would expect to see wide-ranging continuity.

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74 Cf. the examples given at the beginning of this article.

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