

Publisher's Note

Defining Documents in World History series, produced by Salem Press, offers a closer look at important historical documents by pairing primary source documents with essays written especially for the series by a diverse range of writers. This established series includes nine titles that present documents selected to illuminate specific eras, events, and geo-political regions in world history including *Ancient World* (2700 BCE – c. 500 CE), *Middle Ages* (476–1500), *Renaissance & Early Modern Era* (1308–1600), *Women's Rights* (1429–2017), and *The 17th Century* (1601–1700).

This set, *Defining Documents in World History: Middle East* (141 BCE–2017), offers in-depth analysis of fifty-seven primary source documents that span twenty-two centuries.

The material is organized under four historical groupings:

- **Early, Medieval, and Early Modern History**, starting with the revolt of the Maccabees in 141 BCE, the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem by the Romans, and several passages from the fourteenth-century travels of Ibn Battuta, including his pilgrimage to Mecca and travels to Baghdad, Cairo, Damascus, Jerusalem and Mali.
- **Ottoman Endurance and Collapse** traces the Ottoman Empire, starting with the treaty of Kuchuk Kainardji, describes the Battle of Navarino and the siege of Kandahar and on to the call for the establishment of a Jewish state, the Sykes-Picot agreement, the Balfour Declaration, and the Palestinian Mandate.
- **Twentieth-Century Troubles** begins with the White Paper of 1939 and the Charter of the Arab State, the Truman Doctrine speech, while the century draws to a close with the Ayatollah Khomeini's speech about "The Great Satan," the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty, and the Oslo Accords.
- **Recent Realities** bring the set into the twenty-first century by examining documents such as George W. Bush's address to the nation concerning military operations in Iraq, the U.N. Security Council's 1973 resolution on Libya, and the Syria Report by the Human Rights Watch.

These documents provide a compelling view of many important aspects of Middle Eastern history, including religion, conflicts, politics, empires, and ethnic identities by drawing on religious tracts, political speeches and treaties, travel writing, first-hand reports, correspondence, and more.

Designed for high school and college students, the aim of the series is to advance historical document studies as an important activity in learning about history.

Essay Format

The Middle East includes fifty-seven historical documents, including both familiar and lesser known writings on a variety of topics. These documents, many of which are presented in their entirety, offer the reader a window into a number of pivotal events and developments in the history of the Middle East, including invasions, conquest, trade, war, peace, and religion.

Each document is supported by a critical essay, written by historians and teachers, that includes a Summary Overview, Defining Moment, Author Biography, Document Analysis, and Essential Themes. Readers will appreciate the diversity of the issues addressed throughout these documents. An important feature of each essay is a close reading of the primary source that develops broader themes, such as the author's rhetorical purpose, social or class position, point of view, and other relevant issues. In addition, essays are organized by sections, listed above, highlighting major issues of this important geo-political region, from nation- and empire-building to peace accords and war resolutions.

Each section begins with a brief introduction that defines questions and problems underlying the subjects addressed in the historical documents. Each essay also includes a Bibliography and Additional Reading section for further research.

Appendixes

- **Chronological List** arranges all documents by year.
- **Web Resources** is an annotated list of websites that offer valuable supplemental resources.
- **Bibliography** lists helpful articles and books for further study.

Editor's Introduction

The Middle East is both a cradle of civilizations and a central region linking three different continents: Africa, Europe, and Asia. It has been an area of strategic importance throughout history and continues to be so today, particularly in light of its economic importance, which centers mainly on oil resources. Ongoing hostilities between Muslim extremist groups operating in the region and various Middle Eastern and Western governments add to the political importance of the area. For the past three-quarters of a century or more there has been enough turmoil in the region to threaten the peace of the world, more than once.

No universally accepted definition of the “Middle East” is forthcoming, although more and more, scholars have come to agree on the broad outlines. In times past, the entirety of the East—or “Orient,” as opposed to the “Occident” (Western countries)—was divided into the Near East, the Middle East, and the Far East. The term Near East referred to the area closest to Europe, Middle East to central and south Asia, and Far East to what we consider East Asia today. For the past several decades, however, the term “Middle East” has generally been employed for the large area situated between Turkey and Pakistan, and including parts of North Africa. For our purposes, then, the Middle East will include the following countries and territories: *in Asia*, Afghanistan, Bahrain, Cyprus, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, the Palestinian Territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey (Anatolia), United Arab Emirates, and Yemen; *in Africa*, Egypt, Libya, and the Sudan, as well as Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia; and *in Europe*, Turkey (Eastern Thrace), with some additional “spillover” areas in the southern Caucasus and locations around the Black Sea. The spillover areas (Caucasus and Black Sea) fall outside the usual boundaries of the Middle East, strictly speaking, but we include some coverage of them here because of their historic links to the region.

Peoples, Languages, and Religions

The peoples of the Middle East, broadly conceived, are far more diverse than is commonly understood in the West. Major ethnic groups, as defined by language, religion, geography, and cultural traditions, run into the tens of dozens, or even the hundreds depending on how “granular” one wants to make the data (sect, dialect,

tribe, locale, etc.). Nevertheless, three main linguistic groups can be identified: Semitic, Iranian, and Turkic.

Semitic languages are spoken by a majority of the area's population. Arabic, the most widespread such language, originated in the Arabian Peninsula and spread outward with the rise of Islam and the Arab conquests of the seventh century. The Koran standardized the written language, even as the spoken language fragmented into different dialects. Today, Arabic is spoken on the Arabian Peninsula; in much of the Mesopotamian region (Iraq) and the Levant (Mediterranean border countries); and in North Africa and (Northern) Sudan. Smaller groups continue to speak Syriac, Aramaic, and Hebrew as well as such non-Semitic languages as Berber and Coptic.

Iranian languages, dominant in ancient times but challenged by Arabic after the rise of Islam, are centered, of course, in Iran. Farsi (Persian) is the language of the largest number of Iranian speakers. Although Farsi is linked to Indo-European languages, it is written in an Arabic script. Other Iranian-group languages spoken in the Middle East are Kurdish, spoken by Kurds in Turkey, Iraq, and Iran; Baluchi, spoken in Iran; and Pashto, one of the two official languages of Afghanistan—the other being Dari.

Turkey is the official language of the Turkish republic and was the main language of the old Ottoman Empire, although that empire was so expansive that other local languages and dialects were often used as well. In Ottoman times, Turkish was written in an Arabic script; but after World War I reformers created a modified Latin alphabet for the language.

The Middle East is well known for having given birth to Judaism and Christianity in ancient times, and, in the early medieval era, to Islam. It is equally well known for the tensions that have arisen between these religions at times, not to mention the tensions between sects *within* these religions (Eastern and Western forms of Christianity; Sunni and Shiite Islam, etc.). Under Islamic rule, Jews and Christians generally were granted protected status, primarily on the basis of the monotheistic beliefs (Abrahamic religion) that they share with Islam. But conflict came, often enough, from one side or the other. Today, Christians and Jews remain a small but significant minority: around 5 percent of Middle Easterners identify as Christian and about 1 percent as

Jewish—even as Israel stands, of course, as a majority Jewish state.

History: The First Millennium

The ancient period of Near Eastern history, from the third millennium BCE to c. 500 CE, is covered in a separate title in the present series, *Defining Documents in World History: The Ancient World* (2015). In the present volume, therefore, while we do include a small number of documents from the pre-Islamic era, the bulk of our coverage concerns Middle East history from the Islamic founding period up to the present day.

Islam, founded by the Prophet Mohammed, had spread throughout the Arabian Peninsula by the time of his death in 632 and throughout most of the rest of the Middle East in the century that followed. Less than a generation after Mohammed's death, however, the unity of the Islamic religion was cast into doubt over the question of the rightful succession to leadership among Mohammed's closest followers. The ensuing dispute led to the establishment of two rival sects: the Sunni (Sunnī) Muslims, who believed in the succession of a line of caliphs (leaders) elected by the leaders of the community of believers; and the Shia (Shī'ī) Muslims, who believed in the rightful succession of the descendants of Ali (601–61), who was both the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet. The Shiites later split into rival subsects. While the Sunnis remained more uniform in their beliefs, differences over the interpretation of religious laws eventually led to the creation of four different schools of thought. Today, the majority of Muslims in the Middle East are Sunni; but Shiism is the state religion of Iran, and a majority of the population in Iraq and Lebanon, as well as sizeable minorities in other countries, are Shias.

The post-founding period is marked by a succession of caliphates: the Rashidun/Quraysh (632–61; to which Ali belonged), the Umayyad (661–750), the Abbasid (750–1258), and Fatimid (909–1171), as well as by a string of tribal and regional dynasties including the Seljuks (originally Turkoman invaders; 1055–1171). The latter eventually fell victim to internal strife, and during this troubled period the Byzantine Greeks and European Crusaders mounted a successful attack against the Islamic Middle East, retaking large portions of Anatolia as well as parts of Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. The Crusaders in turn lost Jerusalem in 1187 but were not expelled from the area until 1291. By this time Iran and the Islamic east came under the rule of

Mongol invaders, even as some western areas continued to be defended by Seljuk remnants and Mamluk (“warrior-slave”) dynasties.

From out of the ruins of the Mongol presence in Asia Minor arose the beginnings of the Ottoman Empire (1300–1923). The Ottoman Turks dominated the part of Anatolia that lay closest to the Byzantine capital of Constantinople. They rapidly extended their rule, and by the 1360s had crossed into Europe. Under Sultan Mehmed II (reigned 1451–81), Constantinople fell to the Ottomans and the Byzantine Empire was extinguished. Ottoman military and political expansion continued for several centuries, with the Balkans and southern Russia eventually coming under its sway and Mamluk rulers in Syria and Egypt falling as well (in 1516 and 1517, respectively). Soon the empire stretched from North Africa to the Iranian plateau, from the Balkans to Mecca. Under Sulayman I (reigned 1520–66) Ottoman civilization reached its height. The sultan reigned supreme, controlling a large bureaucracy and commanding an elite military corps—the Janissaries—made up of enslaved former Christians and their descendants.

Meanwhile, the Shia Safavids succeeded in consolidating rule in Iran beginning in 1501. After the dynasty's founder's death in 1524, however, a period of unrest ensued and was only brought to bay with the arrival of the fifth dynastic leader, Shah Abbas I (reigned 1588–1629). A shah is considered “God's shadow” on earth; Abbas built many of the mosques and buildings of the religious center of Isfahan (most still exist today) and supported the arts, culture, and trade. In wars with the Ottomans he extended his rule over Iranian Azerbaijan (Tabriz and environs) as well as much of the Persian Gulf and Iraq. In Persia, however, unlike with the Ottomans, the power of the tribes remained strong, the central government was less dominant, and the religious establishment was largely independent. After a long series of wars with the Ottomans, Uzbeks, Turkomans, and others, the Safavid empire fell into anarchy and collapsed in 1736.

Although the Ottomans persisted through the nineteenth century and even into the twentieth, variously forming alliances with or combating other powers of the time, already by the mid-1700s the empire was in decline. In 1774, the Ottomans faced political humiliation under the treaty of Kuchuk Kainardji, being forced to give up territory to the Russians and permit Russian shipping through their territorial waters. Meanwhile,

internal religious debates between moderates and conservatives, as well as poor economic planning, served to weaken the Ottoman court in the ensuing decades. In peripheral areas such as Libya and the Sudan in the nineteenth century, and parts of Arabia in the twentieth, traditionalist forces inspired Islamic revival movements that were at odds with the Ottoman rulers' own inclinations, who if anything sought modernization to keep the empire relevant. The challenge of European imperialism was also ever present. Napoleon invaded Egypt in 1798, only to withdraw three years later and leave a power vacuum there that was filled by one Mohammed Ali, who would go on to rule (1805–48) over an increasingly independent Egypt. Soon enough, other Ottoman client states began to fall away. The British backed the Greeks in their war of independence in 1820. The French gained a protectorate over most of Lebanon in 1860, the British over Cyprus and Egypt in 1878 and 1882, respectively. Nationalist uprisings took their toll as well. The absolute power of the Ottoman sultan Abdul-Hamid II (reigned 1876–1909) was sharply limited in 1908 as a result of a nationalist-constitutionalist revolt headed by the Young Turks, as they were known. A similar change had occurred in Iran nearly two years earlier, affecting the shah's power. By then the D'Arcy oil concession had begun delivering most of Iran's oil wealth to Britain.

History: The Modern Era

With the advent of World War I, the Young Turks hoped to reestablish Turkish power in the region, joining with Germany and Austria-Hungary in the fight against the Allied Powers. Their military efforts were admirable at times but unsustainable over the course of the war. Other entanglements with the West were also problematic. British armies occupied large areas of Iraq and elsewhere, and sought to project into the Arabian Peninsula. In exchange for British guarantees for an Arab kingdom after the war, Hussein ibn Ali (also known as Sharif of Mecca) promised to lead an Arab revolt against the Ottoman overlords. The revolt began in early 1916, led by Hussein's son Faisal; but within a month the British headed in a different direction diplomatically. Under the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916), the French and the British agreed to divide the lands of eastern Arabia between them: the French would gain control of Syria, Lebanon, and parts of Anatolia while the British would obtain most of Iraq and areas surrounding the Persian Gulf. Russia, too, would acquire lands around the Bos-

porus and the Black Sea. Sharif Hussein and his Arab revolt were left in the lurch.

Also around this time, in November 1917, the British issued the Balfour Declaration, which supported the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. This helped bolster the actions of leaders of a growing Zionist movement that aimed to repatriate European Jews in the Holy Land. By 1922, a Palestinian Mandate—essentially a colony sanctioned by the League of Nations—was in place under British administration. It would last, not without conflict, until the declaration of the state of Israel in 1948.

At this low point in Middle Eastern history, with most of the area under direct or indirect foreign rule, nationalist forces once again arose. In Iran, the Persians refused to accept British oversight. General Reza Khan (later Reza Shah Pahlavi) led a military coup and established a nationalistic, modernizing government (1921). In 1925, he removed the last of the Qajar royals and became shah. Meanwhile, in Turkey, General Mustafa Kemal Atatürk rallied his fellow countrymen. Within a few years he had put down opposition, both inside and outside of Turkey; angled to get a fair peace settlement from the Allies; and created a secular, nationalist republic (1923). This marked the end of the Ottoman Empire. In later years, the Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (ruled 2003-present) would seek to recapture the glory of Atatürk's political muscularity while turning away from secularism and toward Islamic conservatism.

On the Arabian Peninsula, a long string of post-World War I tribal wars continued into the 1920s. By 1926, however, the powerful Al Saud family had gained the upper hand, putting down Sharif Hussein and other opponents. In 1932, the peninsula was united as a kingdom under Abdul al-Aziz ibn Saud (reigned 1932–53). Oil was discovered in the kingdom in the mid-1930s, and through the consortium known as Aramco (made up of American and British oil companies); vast sums of money were transferred to the Saudi rulers. The House of Saud, not known for its liberal outlook but nevertheless a transactional, global player, would remain ascendant well into the twenty-first century.

By the end of World War II, most of the Middle Eastern nations had attained independence; the French gave up their mandates in Syria and Lebanon, for example, but fought to maintain control in Algeria in a long, ugly war (1954–62). The British continued to maintain significant economic and political influence in a number of states, backed by a military presence. It was

only with the start of native military coups led by populist figures like Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt (ruled 1956–70) that some of the older constitutional monarchies were overthrown and British influence in the region was lessened. An attempt to arrange a peaceful transfer of power in Palestine in 1948 did not work out; instead, war erupted between the newly proclaimed Israeli government and the Palestinian Arabs backed by Jordan and Egypt. Over the next few decades, Jewish-Arab relations would hardly improve, and wars would again be fought over Israel and the status of the Palestinians in 1967 and 1973. Peace accords signed in 1979 (Egypt-Israel) and 1994 (Jordan-Israel) proved constructive, but a comprehensive peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians remained elusive and a highly fraught affair.

Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria each absorbed significant populations of Palestinian refugees after the 1948–49 war. Lebanon was undoubtedly the most seriously affected. In 1970, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) moved its headquarters to Lebanon and began military raids into northern Israel. The Christian-dominated Lebanese government attempted to stop them, and in response the PLO sided with Lebanon's Muslims in their conflict with Christians. A vicious civil war ensued, pitting numerous political and religious factions against each other. Syrian and UN troops worked to maintain a cease-fire from 1976 to 1982, but in 1982, Israeli forces invaded the country in an effort to drive out Palestinian forces. After 1985, the Israelis maintained a buffer zone inside Lebanon, but guerrillas from the Lebanese Shia militia, Hezbollah, clashed regularly with Israeli troops. The Israelis withdrew from Lebanon in 2000, but tensions remained high—and government in Lebanon remained a fragile thing.

In other parts of the Middle East, the Cold War would make itself known through intrigue involving the Soviet Union and the United States as they sought strategic advantage. In Iran, in 1953, the United States carried out a British-sponsored plan to overthrow the left-leaning nationalist Mohammed Mossadegh in order to install the pro-Western Mohammad Reza Shah (son of Reza Shah Pahlavi). The action would come back to haunt the Americans, though, when in 1979, Iran's Islamic revolution cast out Western influences and left the government there a sworn enemy of the United States. In Iraq, in contrast, U.S. policy favored the dictator Saddam Hussein (ruled 1979–2003) as a means of countering the Soviets, only to find that Saddam was

not trustworthy and in fact posed a threat to security in the region. This lesson was learned, though, only after observing repeated violations of international norms, including Iraq's invasion of Iran (the Iran-Iraq War, 1980–88), its gassing of Iraqi Kurdish communities (1988), and its invasion of Kuwait, over which the United States launched a war (the Gulf War, 1990–91).

After the Iranian Revolution other forms of political Islam were taken up by nationalist leaders and non-state actors alike, all seeking to challenge the predominance of secular government in the Middle East. At the end of 1979 the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, trying to exploit the situation and install a puppet government. After a decade of grueling combat, however, the Russians were expelled, and the success (comparatively speaking) of the Afghan mujahideen (religious freedom fighters) became an example for other Islamist insurgent groups. Afghanistan itself would scarcely know peace for the remainder of the decade and beyond, as war lords battled each other and the United States launched a war there in 2001 in retaliation for the 9/11 attacks against it. U.S. forces entered Iraq for the same reason in 2003, albeit on the basis of faulty intelligence and misaimed political determination. Both of these wars (Afghanistan: 2001-present; Iraq: 2003–11) would have devastating consequences for the countries in which they took place and for the region as a whole. Saddam Hussein, now an enemy, was removed and killed, as was, eventually, the leader of the 9/11 attacks, Osama bin Laden. But out of these conflicts grew new varieties of harsh and destructive Islamic extremist organizations, including the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, or ISIS), which wreaked havoc in the region and internationally for several years in the 2010s.

A so-called "Arab Spring" occurring in other parts of the Middle East between 2010 and 2012 saw some democratic changes being made under traditionally authoritarian governments; but in some cases, such as Egypt's, a reversion to form soon made itself evident. In other cases, such as Libya's, the country became a basket case as competing groups struggled for control. In most of the Gulf states, a façade of democratic reform hid a reality of strict royalist, autocratic rule. In Iran, there was no "Persian Spring" under an absolutist regime backed by a revolutionary guard. In Turkey, a coup took place (2016) but was harshly put down. The worst outcome by far was in Syria, where Arab Spring protests barely got under way before being blasted out

of existence by the Russian-backed regime of Bashar al-Assad (ruled 2000–present). A terrible civil war there (2011–present) has left the country in ruins, its populace scattered.

Today, the Middle East remains a challenge for all of those hoping for stability and progress in the region, and yet it also continues to inspire those who recognize its legacy of history, faith, learning, experience, and endurance.

—Michael Shally-Jensen, PhD

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EARLY, MEDIEVAL, AND EARLY MODERN HISTORY

As noted in the Introduction, the Middle East is known for having given birth to Judaism and Christianity, and Islam. In a separate volume in the present series, *Defining Documents in World History: The Ancient World* (2015), we cover the ancient period of Middle Eastern history from the third millennium BCE to c. 500 CE. In the current volume, we do include a few documents from the pre-Islamic era to set the context.

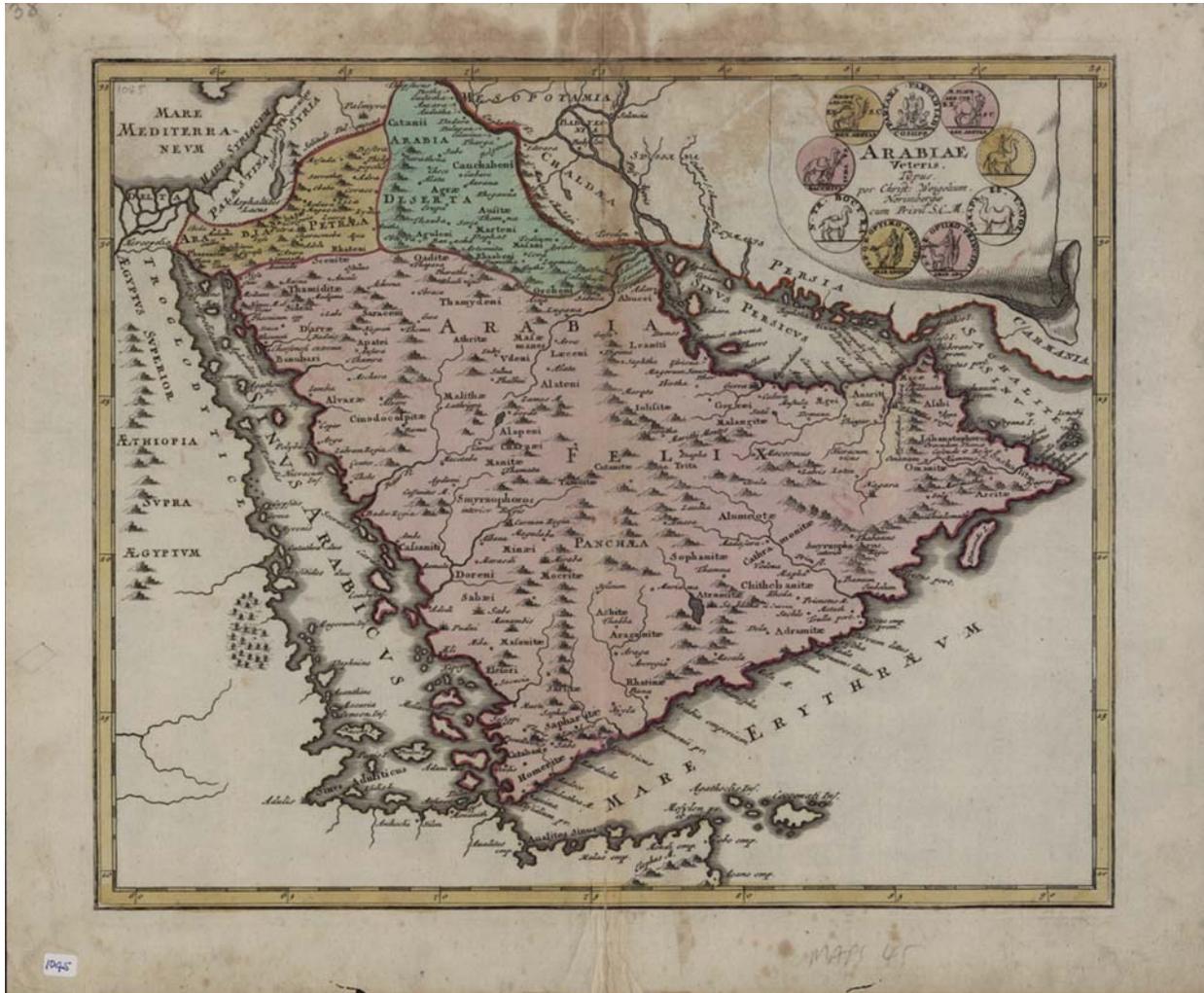
We start with a look at the recapture of Jerusalem/Judea by the Maccabees—a Jewish dynasty, of sorts—in the second millennium BCE. The Jewish homeland at that time had been part of the Seleucid Empire, a Hellenistic state that included Anatolia, Persia, Mesopotamia, and the Levant. Eventually, though, Judea would be taken over by foreigner powers again—this time, by the Romans in the first century CE. We include here a document describing the siege of Jerusalem by Roman forces in 70 CE and the Roman’s destruction of the Jewish temple there.

Christianity, still a new religion at this point, was beginning to spread in parts of the region. Successive Roman leaders had different responses to it, some harsh, some more lenient. A document included in this section describes questions that a Roman governor in the province of Bithynia (modern Turkey) presents to the Emperor Trajan regarding the treatment of Christians. Should one persecute and punish them, or let them be? Trajan responds that Christians need

not be “hunted out” but that in cases of demonstrable guilt they must be dealt with. Other documents here concern relations between Jews and Christians (see “Novella 146,” from 553 CE) and between Christians and Muslims (“The Pact of Umar,” from the seventh century).

Islam, founded by the Prophet Mohammed between 610 and 632 CE, spread rapidly through the Arabian Peninsula. From there it began to spread to other parts of the Middle East and even to parts of Andalusia, or present-day Spain and Portugal, through Arab conquests. Within a generation of Mohammed’s death, however, Islam was threatened by a schism. One group of followers, the Sunni (Sunnī), believed that the leadership of the faithful belonged to a caliph elected by key figures in the community. Another group of followers, the Shia (Shī’ī), believed that leadership belonged to the descendants of Ali (601–661), the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet. Today, the majority of Muslims in the Middle East are Sunni; yet Shiism is the state religion of Iran, and a majority of the populations in Iraq and Lebanon, as well as sizeable minorities in other countries, are Shias.

In this section we include a variety of documents concerning the first few centuries of Islamic history and the Muslim world. They range from descriptions of conquest and legal decrees to travel accounts and ethnographies of foreign (i.e., Western) cultures.



Map of Ancient Arabia.

■ The Revolt of the Maccabees and Judean Independence

Date: 141 BCE (event); c. 100 BCE (written account)

Author: Unknown

Geographic region: Judea

Genre: Testimony; religious text

Summary Overview

After being ruled by several of its other powerful neighbors, the region of Judea found itself under the rule of the Seleucid Empire, one of the Hellenistic successor states of Alexander's Empire in the fourth through second centuries BCE. The empire long allowed the inhabitants of Judea to follow their own religious practices. However, in the first half of the second century, the Seleucid King Antiochus IV Epiphanes issued decrees outlawing Jewish religious rituals, and he attempted to convert the Temple of Jerusalem into a temple of the Greek god Zeus. Mattathias, a Jewish priest, refused to go along with the changes and incited a revolt. Although Mattathias died in the following year, his sons took up his cause and expanded the revolt. First, Judah took up the banner and earned the nickname Maccabee which stems from the Aramaic for "Hammer." He was succeeded by his brother Jonathan and, then, his other brother Simon. The revolt, which had begun in order to reinstate the rights of the Jewish people to practice Judaism unhindered, expanded to seek the independence of Judea after it obtained its original goal. This second goal was achieved by Simon in the opening years of his rule, and around this time the Jewish people erected bronze tablets commemorating the accomplishments of Simon. A copy of this inscription makes up the vast majority of this document, which is excerpted from 1 Maccabees. It is primarily from the narratives within the various books of Maccabees, such as this one, that we are able to reconstruct the events of Judea in the second and first centuries BCE with any detail. The perspective of the author is biased, but the document remains invaluable in understanding this era.

Defining Moment

This document depicts the beginning of a stint of autonomous rule in Judea. The region had long been subject to its larger eastern rivals. The Neo-Assyrian, the Neo-Babylonian, and the Achaemenid Persian Empires exerted varying degrees of control over the region in

turn. Alexander and his armies twice passed through the region en route to their defeat of the Persians. In doing so, they assumed control over Judea. After Alexander's death and the breakup of the lands he conquered, Judea fell to the Hellenistic Seleucid Empire.

In 175 BCE, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Seleucid ruler, outlawed Jewish religious practices. Much of what we know about the ensuing Maccabees revolt we get from the books of Maccabees, including 1 Maccabees, the book from which this document is excerpted. Nine years after Antiochus IV's decrees which forbade Jewish practices, a Jewish priest named Mattathias sparked a revolt. Antiochus IV had ordered that the temple of Jerusalem be converted into a temple of Zeus. Mattathias refused to honor the Greek gods and killed a Hellenistic Jew about to make a sacrifice to Zeus. He fled with his family and died the following year, 166 BCE. His son Judah (also spelled Judas) took up his father's cause, leading and expanding the revolt.

Judah acquired the name Maccabee, from the Aramaic term for "Hammer," as he and his followers attacked Hellenistic Jews and destroyed temples to non-Jewish gods. The Maccabees did this while avoiding a confrontation with the Seleucid forces head on. Even when the armies met, the Maccabees engaged in ways that maximized their advantage in speed and minimized the Seleucid advantage in resources. After several Maccabee victories, Judah and his forces defeated the Seleucids at the Battle of Beth Zur in 164 BCE, by sticking to their standard guerrilla tactics and not confronting their enemy head on. The victory allowed the Maccabees to take Jerusalem. Upon claiming Jerusalem for the Maccabee cause, Judah had the temple cleansed. It was at this point that the event that is still celebrated during Hanukkah occurred. The story goes that the menorah in the temple could only be lit with a special type of unadulterated oil and was also required to stay lit every night. Although the priests only had enough oil for one night, the menorah stayed lit for eight nights at which point more oil was ready for use.



The Punishment of Antiochus (2 Macc. 9:1-9), engraving by Gustave Doré.

The capture of Jerusalem did not end the Maccabees combined war against the Seleucids and the Hellenistic Jews. A large Seleucid army was en route to Judea to avenge the string of defeats the Seleucids had previously suffered at the hands of the Maccabees. However, the death of Antiochus IV led to a scuffle for power, and the army doubled back towards the heart of the Seleucid Empire. Judah made an agreement with Rome, the growing power to the west. Amidst internal conflicts, the Seleucids regranted religious freedom to the people of Judea. The participants of the revolt, having achieved their primary motive, pressed on, striving for full autonomy for Judea. The Seleucids persisted in seeking taxes from what was recently their undisputed territory. Judah died and was succeeded by his brother Jonathan as leader of the Maccabees in 160 BCE.

Jonathan continued the revolt on behalf of the Maccabees, as the budding kingdom found itself enmeshed in intercontinental conflicts between the relatively larger kingdoms of Alexander's successors. Jonathan deftly steered himself and the Maccabees through these troubled waters for a decade and a half, but he was eventually captured and killed by Diodotus Tryphon. Simon, the last remaining son of Mattathias, was elected leader of the Maccabees after the capture of

his brother, a position which was confirmed upon the death of his brother in captivity. Simon finally captured the fortress on Acra, a local Seleucid stronghold. He appealed to a rival Seleucid king, Demetrius II, for a cessation of taxes. Happy to have an ally against his rival king, Demetrius II agreed, and Judea became officially independent. This event is acknowledged as the beginning of the Hasmonean Dynasty, in 141 BCE, with Simon as its first autonomous king. This document records the Hebrew commemoration of the event.

The Roman senate recognized Judea's autonomy shortly thereafter. The Hasmonean dynasty, Simon and his successors, ruled Judea for more than a century. In 37 BCE, with aid from the Roman general Marc Anthony, Herod captured Jerusalem and set himself up as King of Judea, thereby ending the Hasmonean dynasty. Their rule is remembered today through the annual celebration of Hanukkah and the wide circulation of 1 Maccabees and 2 Maccabees.

Author Biography

The author of this document is unknown. We do know, however, that he was Jewish man with intimate knowledge of the location and events. It was written approximately four decades after the event detailed in this excerpt.

HISTORICAL DOCUMENT

1 Maccabees 27–49

So they made a record on bronze tablets and put it upon pillars on Mount Zion. This is a copy of what they wrote: "On the eighteenth day of Elul, in the one hundred and seventy-second year [13 September 140], which is the third year of Simon the great high priest, in Asaramel, in the great assembly of the priests and the people and the rulers of the nation and the elders of the country, the following was proclaimed to us: "Since wars often occurred in the country, Simon the son of Mattathias, a priest of the sons of Joarib, and his brothers, exposed themselves to danger and resisted the enemies of their nation, in order that their sanctuary and the law might be preserved; and they brought great glory to their nation. Jonathan rallied the nation, and

became their high priest, and was gathered to his people. And when their enemies decided to invade their country and lay hands on their sanctuary, then Simon rose up and fought for his nation. He spent great sums of his own money; he armed the men of his nation's forces and paid them wages. He fortified the cities of Judah, and Beth-Zur on the borders of Judah, where formerly the arms of the enemy had been stored, and he placed there a garrison of Jews. He also fortified Joppa, which is by the sea, and Gazara, which is on the borders of Azotus, where the enemy formerly dwelt. He settled Jews there, and provided in those cities whatever was necessary for their restoration. The people saw Simon's faithfulness and the glory which he had resolved to win for his nation, and they made him

their leader and high priest, because he had done all these things and because of the justice and loyalty which he had maintained toward his nation. He sought in every way to exalt his people. And in his days things prospered in his hands, so that the Gentiles were put out of the country, as were also the men in the city of David in Jerusalem, who had built themselves a citadel from which they used to sally forth and defile the environs of the sanctuary and do great damage to its purity. He settled Jews in it, and fortified it for the safety of the country and of the city, and built the walls of Jerusalem higher. In view of these things King Demetrius confirmed him in the high priesthood, and he made him one of the king's friends and paid him high honors. For he had heard that the Jews were addressed by the Romans as friends and allies and brethren, and that the Romans had received the envoys of Simon with honor. And the Jews and their priests decided that Simon should be their leader and high priest forever, until a trustworthy prophet should arise, and that he should be governor over them and that he should take charge of the sanctuary and appoint

men over its tasks and over the country and the weapons and the strongholds, and that he should take charge of the sanctuary, and that he should be obeyed by all, and that all contracts in the country should be written in his name, and that he should be clothed in purple and wear gold. And none of the people or priests shall be permitted to nullify any of these decisions or to oppose what he says, or to convene an assembly in the country without his permission, or to be clothed in purple or put on a gold buckle. Whoever acts contrary to these decisions or nullifies any of them shall be liable to punishment."

And all the people agreed to grant Simon the right to act in accord with these decisions. So Simon accepted and agreed to be high priest, to be commander and ethnarch of the Jews and priests, and to be protector of them all. And they gave orders to inscribe this decree upon bronze tablets, to put them up in a conspicuous place in the precincts of the sanctuary, and to deposit copies of them in the treasury, so that Simon and his sons might have them.

Document Analysis

This document is an excerpt, chapters 27 through 49, of 1 Maccabees. The text was written in Hebrew; however, no version of the original Hebrew has survived. Our knowledge of the text comes from surviving Greek translations. The version included here is the Revised Standard English edition. 1 Maccabees is a deuterocanonical Old Testament text. Protestant denominations and Orthodox Tewahedo exclude the book from their respective canons; however, Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodox denominations, and most Oriental Orthodox denominations do include the book within their canons. In this excerpt, the unknown author narrates the event in a manner that paints Simon as a benevolent and effective ruler, detailing events and revealing his own perspective.

The text was written in Hebrew several decades after the event described here. The author lived under the rule of the Hasmonean dynasty, whose official beginning is depicted in this text. The text is meant to confirm and glorify the inception of this dynasty. In the passage that

precedes this excerpt, the Jewish people ponder ways to thank Simon for his service. They resolve to inscribe bronze tablets in his honor, and the description of this act and a copy of the inscription comprise the passage excerpted as this document. The inscription mirrors others from across the ancient world, in which monarchs catalog their accomplishments and thereby declare their legitimacy. The inscription begins, "Since wars often occurred in the country, Simon the son of Mattathias, a priest of the sons of Joarib, and his brothers, exposed themselves to danger and resisted the enemies of their nation, in order that their sanctuary and the law might be preserved; and they brought great glory to their nation." The opening points to a violent backstory of wars, which justifies Mattathias's and his sons' revolt. This sentence describes Simon among his other family members, and the following sentence discusses his brother and predecessor Jonathan. The remainder of the inscription focuses on Simon and his own accomplishments. Just as with the opening sentence cited above, Simon's achievements are all framed in the most positive light.

According to the author, the Jewish people set up the bronze tablet with this inscription to honor Simon, and the inscription itself examines the relationship between the king and his people. It singles out his faithfulness and glory as attributes respected by the people: “The people saw Simon’s faithfulness and the glory which he had resolved to win for his nation, and they made him their leader and high priest, because he had done all these things and because of the justice and loyalty which he had maintained toward his nation.” After listing more of his accomplishments, the inscription returns to the agency of the people, who are described as granting Simon his kingship:

And the Jews and their priests decided that Simon should be their leader and high priest forever, until a trustworthy prophet should arise, and that he should be governor over them and that he should take charge of the sanctuary and appoint men over its tasks and over the country and the weapons and the strongholds, and that he should take charge of the sanctuary, and that he should be obeyed by all, and that all contracts in the country should be written in his name, and that he should be clothed in purple and wear gold.

The majesty depicted in the passage, such as purple and gold cloths, compliments the listing of Simon’s achievements in legitimating his rule. This document as a whole quotes text that it says was inscribed onto bronze tablets which were set upon pillars atop Mount Zion. The stated material, display, and location of the tablets add to the majesty described within the inscription itself. The inscribed words are meant to project out into the world so that anyone who can read Hebrew can have access to them. The inscription’s recitation in 1 Maccabees extends this access to those not necessarily present at Mount Zion. The durability of the bronze inscription is meant to parallel the durability of Simon’s and his successors’ rule. The framing of the inscription,

therefore, combines with its content to depict Simon in a laudatory way.

Essential Themes

This passage develops the theme of purity as it glorifies the founder of the Hasmonean dynasty, Simon. The passage replicates a bronze inscription verbatim that details various achievements of the leader of the Maccabees. Among those achievements, the writer records that “And in his [Simon’s] days things prospered in his hands, so that the Gentiles were put out of the country, as were also the men in the city of David in Jerusalem, who had built themselves a citadel from which they used to sally forth and defile the environs of the sanctuary and do great damage to its purity.” Prosperity is depicted as the expulsion of Gentiles, or individuals who are not Jewish, from Judea. The enemies are described as doing damage not to the lives and livelihoods of the local people but to the purity of the religious sanctuary. The inscription continues, “He settled Jews in it, and fortified it for the safety of the country and of the city, and built the walls of Jerusalem higher.” Although this document and its focus on purity were constructed over two millennia ago, they continue to exert strong an influence over politics today. Factions within Israeli politics cite ancient Hebrew passages that develop the theme of purity such as this one as justification for controversial actions, such as the construction of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and elsewhere.

—Anthony Vivian, MA

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