

Sources for *The Maccabee Queen – The Wars of the Jews*

The primary sources for the play *The Maccabee Queen* are two works by Josephus, originally written in Greek in the first century of the common era: *The Wars of the Jews* (aka *The Jewish War*) and *Antiquities of the Jews*, which tell somewhat different versions of the same stories.

For more about Josephus, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josephus>.

The following excerpt has been edited to delete extraneous material and some footnotes and to add a few parentheticals. Incidents and people mentioned or portrayed in the play have been highlighted. Footnotes were added by the author of the play.

Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*
William Whiston, A.M., Ed.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0148>

So John [Johannan in the play] lived the rest of his life very happily, and administered the government after a most extraordinary manner, and this for thirty-three entire years together. He died, leaving five sons behind him. He was certainly a very happy man, and afforded no occasion to have any complaint made of fortune on his account. He it was who alone had three of the most desirable things in the world, - the government of his nation, and the high priesthood, and the gift of prophecy. For the Deity conversed with him, and he was not ignorant of any thing that was to come afterward; insomuch that he foresaw and foretold that his two eldest sons would not continue masters of the government; and it will highly deserve our narration to describe their catastrophe, and how far inferior these men were to their father in felicity.

HOW ARISTOBULUS WAS THE FIRST THAT PUT A DIADEM ABOUT HIS HEAD; AND AFTER HE HAD PUT HIS MOTHER AND BROTHER TO DEATH, DIED HIMSELF, WHEN HE HAD REIGNED NO MORE THAN A YEAR.

[70] FOR after the death of their father, the elder of them, Aristobulus, changed the government into a kingdom, and was the first that put a diadem upon his head, four hundred seventy and one years and three months after our people came down into this country, when they were set free from the Babylonian slavery. Now, of his brethren, he appeared to have an affection for Antigonus, who was next to him, and made him his equal; but for the rest, he bound them, and put them in prison. He also put his mother in bonds, for her contesting the government with him; for John had left her to be the governess of public affairs. He also proceeded to that degree of barbarity as to cause her to be pined [starved] to death in prison.

[72] But vengeance circumvented him in the affair of his brother Antigonus, whom he loved, and whom he made his partner in the kingdom; for he slew him by the means of the calumnies which ill men about the palace contrived against him. At first, indeed, Aristobulus would not believe their reports, partly out of the affection he had for his brother, and partly because he thought that a great part of these tales were owing to the envy of their relaters: however, as Antigonus came once in a splendid manner from the army to that festival, wherein our ancient custom is to make tabernacles for God, it happened, in those days, that Aristobulus was sick, and that, at the conclusion of the feast, Antigonus came up to it, with his armed men about him; and this when he was adorned in the finest manner possible; and that, in a great measure, to pray to God on the behalf of his brother. Now at this very time it was that these ill men came to the king, and told him in what a pompous manner the armed men came, and with what insolence Antigonus marched, and that such his insolence was too great for a private person, and that accordingly he was come with a great band of men to kill him; for that he could not endure this bare enjoyment of royal honor, when it was in his power to take the kingdom himself.

[75] Now Aristobulus, by degrees, and unwillingly, gave credit to these accusations; and accordingly he took care not to discover his suspicion openly, though he provided to be secure against any accidents; so he placed the guards of his body in a certain dark subterranean passage; for he lay sick in a place called formerly the Citadel, though afterwards its name was changed to Antonia; and he gave orders that if Antigonus came unarmed, they should let him alone; but if he came to him in his armor, they should kill him. He also sent some to let him know beforehand that he should come unarmed. But, upon this occasion, the queen¹ very cunningly contrived the matter with those that plotted his ruin, for she persuaded those that were sent to conceal the king's message; but to tell Antigonus how his brother had heard he had got a very the suit of armor made with fine martial ornaments, in [Galilee](#); and because his present sickness hindered him from coming and seeing all that finery, he very much desired to see him now in his armor; because, said he, in a little time thou art going away from me.

[77] As soon as Antigonus heard this, the good temper of his brother not allowing him to suspect any harm from him, he came along with his armor on, to show it to his brother; but when he was going along that dark passage which was called Strato's Tower, he was slain by the body guards, and became an eminent instance how calumny destroys all good-will and natural affection, and how none of our good affections are strong enough to resist envy perpetually.

¹ This would be out of character for Alexandra, and contrary to everything else that is known about her. In the play, this action is performed by Eleazar. LD.

[78] And truly any one would be surprised at Judas upon this occasion. He was of the sect of the Essens [Essenes], and had never failed or deceived men in his predictions before. Now this man saw Antigonus as he was passing along by the temple, and cried out to his acquaintance, (they were not a few who attended upon him as his scholars,) "O strange!" said he, "it is good for me to die now, since truth is dead before me, and somewhat that I have foretold hath proved false; for this Antigonus is this day alive, who ought to have died this day; and the place where he ought to be slain, according to that fatal decree, was Strato's Tower, which is at the distance of six hundred furlongs from this place; and yet four hours of this day are over already; which point of time renders the prediction impossible to be fill filled." And when the old man had said this, he was dejected in his mind, and so continued. But in a little time news came that Antigonus was slain in a subterraneous place, which was itself also called Strato's Tower, by the same name with that Cesarea² which lay by the sea-side; and this ambiguity it was which caused the prophet's disorder.

[81] Hereupon Aristobulus repented of the great crime he had been guilty of, and this gave occasion to the increase of his distemper. He also grew worse and worse, and his soul was constantly disturbed at the thoughts of what he had done, till his very bowels being torn to pieces by the intolerable grief he was under, he threw up a great quantity of blood. And as one of those servants that attended him carried out that blood, he, by some supernatural providence, slipped and fell down in the very place where Antigonus had been slain; and so he spilt some of the murderer's blood upon the spots of the blood of him that had been murdered, which still appeared. Hereupon a lamentable cry arose among the spectators, as if the servant had spilled the blood on purpose in that place; and as the king heard that cry, he inquired what was the cause of it; and while nobody durst tell him, he pressed them so much the more to let him know what was the matter; so at length, when he had threatened them, and forced them to speak out, they told; whereupon he burst into tears, and groaned, and said, "So I perceive I am not like to escape the all-seeing eye of God, as to the great crimes I have committed; but the vengeance of the blood of my kinsman pursues me hastily. O thou most impudent body! how long wilt thou retain a soul that ought to die on account of that punishment it ought to suffer for a mother and a brother slain! How long shall I myself spend my blood drop by drop? let them take it all at once; and let their ghosts no longer be disappointed by a few parcels of my bowels offered to them." As soon as he had said these words, he presently died, when he had reigned no longer than a year.

² This was the city later built by Herod the Great. LD.

[85] AND now the king's wife loosed the king's brethren, and made Alexander king, who appeared both elder in age, and more moderate in his temper than the rest; who, when he came to the government, slew one of his brethren³, as affecting to govern himself; but had the other of them in great esteem, as loving a quiet life, without meddling with public affairs.

[86] Now it happened that there was a battle between him and Ptolemy, who was called Lathyrus, who had taken the city Asochis. He indeed slew a great many of his enemies, but the victory rather inclined to Ptolemy. But when this Ptolemy was pursued by his mother Cleopatra, and retired into [Egypt](#), Alexander besieged Gadara, and took it; as also he did [Amathus](#), which was the strongest of all the fortresses that were about [Jordan](#), and therein were the most precious of all the possessions of Theodorus, the son of Zeno. Whereupon Theodorus marched against him, and took what belonged to himself as well as the king's baggage, and slew ten thousand of the Jews. However, Alexander recovered this blow, and turned his force towards the maritime parts, and took [Raphia](#) and [Gaza](#), with [Anthedon](#) also, which was afterwards called Agrippias by king Herod.

[88] But when he had made slaves of the citizens of all these cities, the nation of the Jews made an insurrection against him at a festival; for at those feasts seditions are generally begun; and it looked as if he should not be able to escape the plot they had laid for him, had not his foreign auxiliaries, the Pisidians and Cilicians, assisted him; for as to the Syrians, he never admitted them among his mercenary troops, on account of their innate enmity against the Jewish nation. And when he had slain more than six thousand of the rebels, he made an incursion into [Arabia](#); and when he had taken that country, together with the Gileadites and Moabites, he enjoined them to pay him tribute, and returned to Areathus; and as Theodorus was surprised at his great success, he took the fortress, and demolished it.

[90] However, when he fought with Obodas, king of the Arabians, who had laid an ambush for him near [Golan](#), and a plot against him, he lost his entire army, which was crowded together in a deep valley, and broken to pieces by the multitude of camels. And when he had made his escape to [Jerusalem](#), he provoked the multitude, which hated him before, to make an insurrection against him, and this on account of the greatness of the calamity that he was under. However, he was then too hard for them; and, in the several battles that were fought on both sides, he slew not fewer than fifty thousand of the Jews in the interval of six years. Yet had he no reason to rejoice in these victories, since he did but consume his own kingdom; till at length he left off fighting,

³ Mattathias in the play is the brother slain by Alexander. LD.

and endeavored to come to a composition with them, by talking with his subjects. But this mutability and irregularity of his conduct made them hate him still more. And when he asked them why they so hated him, and what he should do in order to appease them, they said, by killing himself; for that it would be then all they could do to be reconciled to him, who had done such tragical things to them, even when he was dead. At the same time they invited Demetrius, who was called Eucerus, to assist them; and as he readily complied with their requests, in hopes of great advantages, and came with his army, the Jews joined with those their auxiliaries about [Shechem](#).

[93] Yet did Alexander meet both these forces with one thousand horsemen, and eight thousand mercenaries that were on foot. He had also with him that part of the Jews which favored him, to the number of ten thousand; while the adverse party had three thousand horsemen, and fourteen thousand footmen. Now, before they joined battle, the kings made proclamation, and endeavored to draw off each other's soldiers, and make them revolt; while Demetrius hoped to induce Alexander's mercenaries to leave him, and Alexander hoped to induce the Jews that were with Demetrius to leave him. But since neither the Jews would leave off their rage, nor the Greeks prove unfaithful, they came to an engagement, and to a close fight with their weapons. In which battle Demetrius was the conqueror, although Alexander's mercenaries showed the greatest exploits, both in soul and body. Yet did the upshot of this battle prove different from what was expected, as to both of them; for neither did those that invited Demetrius to come to them continue firm to him, though he was conqueror; and six thousand Jews, out of pity to the change of Alexander's condition, when he was fled to the mountains, came over to him. Yet could not Demetrius bear this turn of affairs; but supposing that Alexander was already become a match for him again, and that all the nation would [at length] run to him, he left the country, and went his way.

[96] However, the rest of the [Jewish] multitude did not lay aside their quarrels with him, when the [foreign] auxiliaries were gone; but they had a perpetual war with Alexander, until he had slain the greatest part of them, and driven the rest into the city Berneselis; and when he had demolished that city, he carried the captives to [Jerusalem](#). Nay, his rage was grown so extravagant, that his barbarity proceeded to the degree of impiety; for when he had ordered eight hundred to be hung upon crosses in the midst of the city, he had the throats of their wives and children cut before their eyes; and these executions he saw as he was drinking and lying down with his concubines. Upon which so deep a surprise seized on the people, that eight thousand of his opposers fled away the very next night, out of all [Judea](#), whose flight was only terminated by Alexander's death; so at last, though not till late, and with great difficulty, he, by such actions, procured quiet to his kingdom, and left off fighting any more.

[99] Yet did that Antiochus, who was also called Dionysius, become an origin of troubles again. This man was the brother of Demetrius, and the last of the race of the Seleucidse. Alexander was afraid of him, when he was marching against the Arabians; so he cut a deep trench between [Antipatris](#), which was near the mountains, and the shores of [Joppa](#); he also erected a high wall before the trench, and built wooden towers, in order to hinder any sudden approaches. But still he was not able to exclude Antiochus, for he burnt the towers, and filled up the trenches, and marched on with his army. And as he looked upon taking his revenge on Alexander, for endeavoring to stop him, as a thing of less consequence, he marched directly against the Arabians, whose king retired into such parts of the country as were fittest for engaging the enemy, and then on the sudden made his horse turn back, which were in number ten thousand, and fell upon Antiochus's army while they were in disorder, and a terrible battle ensued. Antiochus's troops, so long as he was alive, fought it out, although a mighty slaughter was made among them by the Arabians; but when he fell, for he was in the forefront, in the utmost danger, in rallying his troops, they all gave ground, and the greatest part of his army were destroyed, either in the action or the flight; and for the rest, who fled to the village of [Cana](#), it happened that they were all consumed by want of necessaries, a few only excepted.

[103] About this time it was that the people of [Damascus](#), out of their hatred to Ptolemy, the son of Menhens, invited Aretas [to take the government], and made him king of Celesyria. This man also made an expedition against [Judea](#), and beat Alexander in battle; but afterwards retired by mutual agreement. But Alexander, when he had taken [Pella](#), marched to [Gerasa](#) again, out of the covetous desire he had of Theodorus's possessions; and when he had built a triple wall about the garrison, he took the place by force. He also demolished [Golan](#), and [Seleucia](#), and what was called the Valley of Antiochus; besides which, he took the strong fortress of Gamala, and stripped Demetrius, who was governor therein, of what he had, on account of the many crimes laid to his charge, and then returned into [Judea](#), after he had been three whole years in this expedition. And now he was kindly received of the nation, because of the good success he had. So when he was at rest from war, he fell into a distemper; for he was afflicted with a quartan ague, and supposed that, by exercising himself again in martial affairs, he should get rid of this distemper; but by making such expeditions at unseasonable times, and forcing his body to undergo greater hardships than it was able to bear, he brought himself to his end. He died, therefore, in the midst of his troubles, after he had reigned seven and twenty years.

ALEXANDRA REIGNS NINE YEARS, DURING WHICH TIME THE PHARISEES WERE THE REAL RULERS OF THE NATION.

[107] NOW Alexander left the kingdom to [Alexandra](#) his wife, and depended upon it that the Jews would now very readily submit to her, because she had been very averse to such cruelty as he had treated them with, and had opposed his violation of their laws,

and had thereby got the good-will of the people. Nor was he mistaken as to his expectations; for this woman kept the dominion, by the opinion that the people had of her piety; for she chiefly studied the ancient customs of her country, and cast those men out of the government that offended against their holy laws. And as she had two sons by Alexander, she made Hyrcanus the elder high priest, on account of his age, as also, besides that, on account of his inactive temper, no way disposing him to disturb the public. But she retained the younger, Aristobulus, with her as a private person, by reason of the warmth of his temper.

[110] And now the Pharisees joined themselves to her, to assist her in the government. These are a certain sect of the Jews that appear more religious than others, and seem to interpret the laws more accurately. [Alexandra](#) hearkened to them to an extraordinary degree, as being herself a woman of great piety towards God. But these Pharisees artfully insinuated themselves into her favor by little and little, and became themselves the real administrators of the public affairs: they banished and reduced whom they pleased; they bound and loosed [men] at their pleasure; and, to say all at once, they had the enjoyment of the royal authority, whilst the expenses and the difficulties of it belonged to [Alexandra](#). She was a sagacious woman in the management of great affairs, and intent always upon gathering soldiers together; so that she increased the army the one half, and procured a great body of foreign troops, till her own nation became not only very powerful at home, but terrible also to foreign potentates, while she governed other people, and the Pharisees governed her.

[113] Accordingly, they themselves slew Diogenes⁴, a person of figure, and one that had been a friend to Alexander; and accused him as having assisted the king with his advice, for crucifying the eight hundred men [before mentioned.] They also prevailed with Alexandra to put to death the rest of those who had irritated him against them. Now she was so superstitious as to comply with their desires, and accordingly they slew whom they pleased themselves. But the principal of those that were in danger fled to Aristobulus, who persuaded his mother to spare the men on account of their dignity, but to expel them out of the city, unless she took them to be innocent; so they were suffered to go unpunished, and were dispersed all over the country. But when Alexandra sent out her army to [Damascus](#), under pretense that Ptolemy was always oppressing that city, she got possession of it; nor did it make any considerable resistance. She also prevailed with Tigranes, king of Armenia, who lay with his troops about [Ptolemais](#), and besieged Cleopatra, by agreements and presents, to go away.

⁴ Diogenes is represented by Eleazar in the play. LD.

Accordingly, Tigranes soon arose from the siege, by reason of those domestic tumults which happened upon Lucullus's expedition into [Armenia](#).

[117] In the mean time, Alexandra fell sick, and Aristobulus, her younger son, took hold of this opportunity, with his domestics, of which he had a great many, who were all of them his friends, on account of the warmth of their youth, and got possession of all the fortresses.⁵ He also used the sums of money he found in them to get together a number of mercenary soldiers, and made himself king; and besides this, upon Hyrcanus's complaint to his mother, she compassionated his case, and put Aristobulus's wife and sons under restraint in Antonia, which was a fortress that joined to the north part of the temple. It was, as I have already said, of old called the Citadel; but afterwards got the name of Antonia, when Antony was [lord of the East], just as the other cities, [Sebaste](#) and Agrippias, had their names changed, and these given them from Sebastus and Agrippa. But Alexandra died before she could punish Aristobulus for his disinheriting his brother, after she had reigned nine years.

⁵ This event is represented in the attached scene from the screenplay *Herod*. LD.