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**THE DATE AND CIRCUMSTANCES
OF THE HELIODOROS AFFAIR**

**CONSIDERATIONS ON THE SELEUCUS IV DOSSIER
FROM MARESHA**

BY TIBOR GRÜLL

Abstract: In 2005 and 2006 in the Hellenistic city of Marise (Marisha/Bet Guvrin, Israel) five adjoining fragments of a Greek inscription has been found. The stele contains three letters: an order from Seleucus IV (187-175 B.C.) to his chancellor Heliodoros about a certain Olympiodoros, who was put in charge of the sanctuaries of Koilē Syria and Phoinikē; a letter from Heliodoros to Dorymenes (who was in all probability the *strategos* of Koilē Syria and Phoinikē at that time); and a letter from Dorymenes to a certain Diophanes (probably the *hyparchos* of the district of Marise). The letters are dated to the month Gorpaios of the year 134 S.E. (summer of 178 B.C.). There is no doubt that Heliodoros in the dossier of Marise, and Heliodoros in the Second Book of Maccabees (ch. 3–4) is the same person who attempted to plunder the Temple of Jerusalem, but according to the 2Macc 3:25–27 he has suffered a divine punishment. In this paper I am arguing that the “Heliodoros-affair” happened in the earlier years of Seleucus IV’s reign, probably nine or eight years before Olympiodoros was put in charge of religious affairs in Koilē Syria and Phoinikē. If we accept this chronological order, the known list of four *strategoi* of Koilē Syria and Phoinikē can be easily put together.

Keywords: Greek epigraphy; Old Testament pseudepigrapha; Seleucid administration; inter-testamental era; Jewish history in the Hellenistic age.

“Then shall stand up in his estate a raiser of taxes in the glory of the kingdom:
but within few days he shall be destroyed, neither in anger, nor in battle.”
(Dan 11:20 KJV)

The story of Heliodoros is told by the *Second book of Maccabees* (ch. 3–4). Under the high priesthood of Onias III (ca. 198–174 B.C.), “the holy city [i. e. Jerusalem] was inhabited in unbroken peace and the laws were very well observed because of the piety of the high priest Onias and his hatred of wickedness” (2Macc 3:1 SRV). Even the Seleucid ruler, Seleucus IV Philopator (187–175 B.C.) paid his respect to the most holy place of the Jews, the Jerusalem Temple, and “glorified the temple with the finest presents” (2Macc 3:2). The

setback came in the person of a man named Simon, of the tribe of Benjamin or of the priestly family of Bilgah¹ “who had been made *prostatēs* of the temple,² who had a disagreement with the high priest about the administration of the city market”³ (2Macc 3:4). After he could not prevail over Onias he went to Apollonius son of Thraseas, who at that time was governor (*stratēgos*) of Koilē Syria and Phoinikē. Simon reported to him that the treasury of the Temple of Jerusalem was so full of money that the amount could not be reckoned. Part of this money did not belong to the account of the sacrifices, so it was possible for them to fall under the control of the king Seleucus.⁴ When Apollonius told the information to the king, Seleucus IV sent Heliodorus, who was in charge of his affairs, to Jerusalem. “Heliodorus at once set out on his journey, ostensibly to make a tour of inspection of the cities of Coelesyria and Phoenicia, but in fact

¹ The Greek word *phyle* means not only ‘tribe’ but also ‘(priestly) clan’. All Greek texts contain ‘Benjamin’, but in the Latin and Armenian versions of the 2Macc we find ‘Balcea, Balgei, Balgeus’, which refers to the well-known priestly family of Balga or Bilgah, mentioned at Neh 12:5, 18, and 1Chron 24:14. In later times Jews held the clan of Bilgah in ignominy for impious acts of its members during the reign of Antiochus IV; see *M. Sukkah* 8:8, *T. Sukkah* 4:28, and *S. Lieberman*, *Tosefta Ki-fshuta*, Part IV (Mo’ed). New York 1962, 908-10.

² The Greek noun *prostatēs* (‘chief, guardian’) and the related verbs (*prostatain*, *proistasthai*) are vague terms with many uses, civil, military, and religious. In translations from the Hebrew Bible the noun *kar* (‘officer’, 1Chron 27:31, 29:6; 2Chron 8:10) is a general term. In the context dealing with the temple at 2Chron 24:11 the noun renders the king’s ‘supervisory bureaucracy’ (*pequddah*) as well as the ‘supervisor’ (*paqid*) appointed by the high priest. On these derivatives of the root *pqd* see S. Yeivin, s. v. *pqydw*, *Enc. Bib.* VI (1971) 551-2 (in Hebrew). In Josephus and in the New Testament the only high-ranking priest whose title contains the words ‘of the temple’ is the *stratēgos* (‘commander’) of the temple. *Stratēgos*, too, is a vague term covering many civil, military, and even religious functions; see *Bengtson 1937-52*. The competence of the *stratēgos* of the temple, like that of Phineas and Eleazar, included both the command of the temple police (*BJ* VI. 5.3. [294]; Acts 4:1, 5:24, 26) and influence over the priests who offered the daily sacrifices (*BJ* II. 17.2. [409]).

³ In Greek cities an *agoranomos* supervised and policed the market; he inspected merchandise for quality, controlled the licensing of merchants to sell their goods in the city marketplace (*agora*), saw to the legal validity of transactions and to the documents recording them, and might also have had religious duties. See *A. Mannzmann*, s. v. *agoranomoi*. In: *Der kleine Pauly* I (1964) 142; *A. H. M. Jones*, *The Greek City*. Oxford 1940, 215-7, 230, 240. In Ptolemaic Egypt an *agoranomos* was a registrar of documents; see *H. I. Bell*, *The agoranomeion to kai mnemeion*. *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 6 (1920) 104-7.

⁴ To take temple property was the crime of sacrilege (*hierosylia*). Nowhere in the 2Macc 3-4 does the Greek root occur, though the author used it to condemn the depredations of Lysimachus and Menelaus (4:39, 42; 13:6) and Antiochus IV (9:2). Indeed, the point in the story of the miracle (vss. 10-12, 15, 22) is God’s protection of *private deposits* in His temple, not His protection of sacred funds or His exclusion of pagans from holy soil (cf. *Bickerman 1947*). Although a Greek could consecrate money to a god for safekeeping in his temple and still treat the money as an ordinary deposit that procedure was not open to a Jew: if a Jew consecrated his money, he gave it irrevocably to the temple (*Goldstein 1964*, 205).

to carry out the king's purpose" (2Macc 3:8). Today, this story is well-known because of its artistic representations: among Raffaello's (1512) and Delacroix's (1861) picture I know of nine paintings of the story by European artists. When the greedy and sacrilegious Heliodorus intruded into the Jewish Temple to control personally the counting of money (400 talents of silver, 200 talents of gold), he was attacked by a "magnificently caparisoned horse, with a rider of frightening mien in armor and weapons of gold", as well as two youth "remarkably strong, gloriously beautiful and splendidly dressed" who beat him badly (2Macc 3:25–27). The half dead Seleucid minister convalesced only after the high priest Onias III offered a sacrifice for his recovery (2Macc 3:32).

Seleucus IV's dossier on the inscription from Maresha

The city of Maresha, which has been twice mentioned in the Bible (2Chron 14:9; 20:37), became known as *Marisē* in Greek inscriptions and papyri of the Hellenistic period.⁵ Maresha is located in Israel's Shephelah, some 40 kms to the SW of Jerusalem. Another nearby site is the Late Roman and Byzantine city of Eleutheropolis (Beth Guvrin), found 1.5 kms to the N. Maresha was first extensively excavated by F. J. Bliss and R. A. S. Macalister, during the years 1898-1900. The site has three main features: the upper city (*akropolis*), the lower city, and the *nekropoleis*. The early Hellenistic Maresha was planned by the Hippodamian system; the lower city, built around the mound, was encircled by a defensive wall. The main finds of Maresha were the subterranean complexes with painted tombs of Sidonian style. The site was under Ptolemaic control during the 3rd century B.C., but after the Fifth Syrian War (202/1-198 B.C.) the whole territory was annexed by the Seleucid dynasty.

During the excavations of the so-called Subterranean Complex 57, located some 100 metres to the SE of Maresha's *akropolis*, were carried out under the direction of *Bernie Alpert* and *Ian Stern*.⁶ The complex has four rooms and it was Room 1 which delivered the richest finds. According to the excavators all datable material (petroglyphs, bowls and ostraca) belongs to the 3rd-2nd centuries B.C. In addition, the excavators found in Room 1 three inscribed stone fragments in Greek (fragment **D** in 2005; fragment **C** and **E** in 2006), belonging to the lower part of the stele published by *Hannah M. Cotton* (Hebrew University of Jerusalem) and *Michael Wörrle* (Commission for Ancient History and Epigraphy at the German Archaeological Institute in

⁵ *L. Robert*, *Hellenica* 2 (1946) 73; PCZ I 59006, l. 64.

⁶ Excavations and Surveys in Israel (ESI) 119 (2007), at <http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il>

Munich) in ZPE 159 (2007), which itself consisted of two fragments (**A** and **B**). It was Dov Gera (Ben-Gurion University) who published all the five fragments in ZPE 169 (2009).⁷ The complete text of the survived fragments is as follows:

[**A+B+C+D**] Dorymenes to Diophanes greetings. The copy of the letter handed over to us by Heliodoros who is in charge of the affairs is enclosed. You will do well therefore if you take care that everything is carried out according to the instructions. Year 134 [i. e. 178 B.C.], 22 of the month Gorpiaios.

Heliodoros to Dorymenes his brother greetings. The copy of the order by the king concerning Olympiodoros handed over to us is placed below. You will do well therefore if you follow the instructions. Year 134, 20 (?) of the month of Gorpiaios.⁸

King Seleucus to Heliodoros, his brother, greetings. We, taking the greatest care concerning the security of our subjects, and thinking it to be of the greatest good for our affairs when those who live throughout the kingdom lead their own lives without fear, and observing at the same time that nothing can partake of due good fortune without the favour of the gods, have prescribed from the start that the established sanctuaries throughout the other satrapies be provided with the ancestral honours with the proper service. However, as the affairs in Koilē Syria and Phoinikē lack someone in charge for the care of these things, we thought that Olympiodoros will preside prudently over the orderly conduct of associations (?), [he, who] has demonstrated his loyalty to us because of his attitude, from times gone by, as he had been raised <with> us and had gained for himself the best disposition in all things, he was, on the one hand, appointed chamberlain with reason, because he has proven himself worthy due to his long-standing loyalty, while on the other, he was justifiably introduced into the (ranks of the) First Friends because of his love for us, having made the most assiduous demonstrations (of loyalty) while in such a [rank], and following the way that we are inclined to [increase] the honour of the gods in accordance with the [attitude] of our ancestors and the care of the temples in which we believed from [times gone by...]

⁷ The stele, which was purchased on the antiquities market, was obviously looted, quite probably from an active archaeological site licensed by the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA). The question arises how and why did this important piece make its way into the hands of a private collector? According to media reports, the stele was purchased in early 2007 by Michael Steinhardt, a founding co-chairman of Birthright Israel. Notwithstanding, it was not Steinhardt whom the item was purchased from, but Gil and Lisa Chaya, who are registered antiquities dealers in Jerusalem. Gil Chaya is reportedly a nephew of Shlomo Moussaieff, owner of perhaps the largest collection of Biblical antiquities in the world. Despite the fact that it is without a known context and was bought on the antiquities market, the Heliodoros stele was officially published in ZPE 159 (2007), with a separate article in the same journal confirming its authenticity by Yuval Goren of Tel Aviv University. The stele made the news again this year because, upon its publication in the ZPE, Dov Gera realized that three pieces of an inscription found by “Dig For A Day” volunteers excavating in 2005 and 2006 within Cave 57 at Tell Maresha in Beit Guvrin National Park are apparently from the missing base of the Heliodoros stele. This matches exactly with Y. Goren’s conclusion, reached independently more than a year earlier, that the stele was most likely found at the site of Tell Maresha in a closed cave where ritual burning activities took place.

⁸ Translated by *H. M. Cotton* and *M. Wörrle*, ZPE 159 (2007) 193.

[E] ...you will do well [taking care to enter him in] the contracts, as is fitting, and that a copy [of the letter] be engraved on a stele [to be set up in the most cons]picuous of [temples] in these [places...]⁹

We have relatively little information about the reign of Seleucus IV (187-175 B.C.), therefore his reign had been neglected in modern research (Gera 1997: 101–108; 2009: 131). From the inscription of Maresha it can be learned that the king had issued an order, in the form of a letter, to Heliodoros, his chancellor (*ho epi tōn pragmatōn*). This *prostagma* is preceded by two letters: the top one is written by Dorymenes and is addressed to a certain Diophanes. Dorymenes informs the recipient that a copy of a letter sent by Heliodoros “who is in charge of the affairs” is enclosed. The letter is dated to the month Gorpaios of the year 134 SE (summer of 178 B.C.). The second epistle, of the same month and year, was sent by Heliodoros to Dorymenes. The chancellor of the kingdom greets Dorymenes as “brother” and informs him that a copy of the king’s order concerning Olympiodoros is appended. The king’s order, naturally the most important document of this dossier, stood lowermost.

Let us recapitulate the contents of Seleucus IV’s instructions to Heliodoros. The letter opens with greetings from the king to Heliodoros. The king then claims to possess the greatest foresight with regard to the safety of his subjects, whose quiet lifestyle will contribute immensely to the affairs of the realm. Seleucus is aware, however, that the achievement of such good fortune is dependent upon the favour of the gods. As a result, he had dedicated himself to ensuring that the temples in all the other satrapies shall receive the honours due to them from ancient times. The monarch then informs Heliodoros of his intention to appoint a certain Olympiodoros to supervise the proper management of associations, obviously in connection with their cultic practices. Then the king delineates the most important stations of Olympiodoros’ career (*syn-trophos*, chamberlain [*ho epi tou koitōnos*], First Friend, and *stratēgos*).

The Seleucid officials

The Maresha inscription, with its objective of appointing Olympiodoros as high priest of Koilē Syria and Phoinikē, is similar in both aims and structure to two earlier dossiers, both of which revolve around an identical letter of Antiochus III (albeit with minor variations) concerning the selection of Nikanor to the post of high priest in cis-Tauric Asia Minor. The inscription found at Pamukçu in Mysia (*SEG XXXVII 1010*) contains a *prostagma* of Antiochus III to Zeuxis,

⁹ Translated by D. Gera, *ZPE* 169 (2007) 131, 138.

the king's vizier in Asia Minor. Above the royal epistle there is a missive from Zeuxis to Philotas, and on the top of the inscription a letter from Philotas to Bithys. Scholars suggest that Philotas was the governor of Mysia, while Bithys is probably a *hyparchos* of the locality in which the inscription was found.¹⁰ Part of another copy of Antiochus III's letter to Zeuxis has been found at Akşehir, in Phrygia.¹¹ As in the inscription from Mysia, the royal *prostagma* occupies the bottom part of the monument, and it is preceded with a letter of Zeuxis to a certain Philomelos, and a short note from Philomelos to Aineas on the top. H. Malay suggests to identify Philomelos as the *stratēgos* of Phrygia, and Aineas as a *hyparchos* serving under him. The parallel to be drawn from these dossiers is clear. Dorymenes, who received a letter from the chief minister Heliodoros, was in all likelihood the *stratēgos* of Koilē Syria and Phoinikē in 178 B.C. while Diophanes must have been the official responsible for Marisē and the surrounding area.¹²

Accepting Dov Gera's arguments concerning the ranks of the above-mentioned Seleucid officials we focus our main topic: the sequence of the *strategoī* of Koilē Syria and Phoinikē. (1) We shall begin with Apollonios son of Menestheus, mentioned in 2Macc 4:4.7 as *ton Koilēs Syrias kai Phoinikēs stratēgon*, just prior to death of Seleucus IV. This Apollonios seems to reappear soon after Seleucus Philopator's brother, Antiochus IV, ascended to the throne. In 173, a Seleucid diplomatic delegation headed by Apollonios arrived to Rome (Livy XLII. 6.6–12). Another mission of Apollonios son of Menestheus took him to the court of Ptolemy VI Philometor on the occasion of the king's *πρωτοκλησία* (2Macc 4:21). The date of this mission is uncertain, and it is to be placed either in 174 B.C., before Apollonios' embassy to Rome, or in 173/2 B.C., after his return from Italy.¹³ The information concerning Apollonios son of Menestheus indicates that he must have left his post as *stratēgos* of Koilē Syria and Phoinikē in 175/4 B.C. (2) Describing the Heliodoros-affair 2Macc 3:5 mentions another governor called Apollonios son of Thraseas. He

¹⁰ J. Ma, *Antiochos III and the Cities of Western Asia Minor*. Oxford 2000, 123; L. Capdetrey, *Le pouvoir séleucide: territoire, administration, finances d'un royaume hellénistique*, 312-129 avant J.-C. Rennes 2007, 259; J. D. Grainger, *A Seleukid Prosopography and Gazetteer*. Leiden 1997, 113; Gera 2007, 139.

¹¹ H. Malay, *A Copy of the Letter of Antiochos III to Zeuxis (209. B.C.)*. In: H. Hefner, K. Tomaschitz (eds.): *Ad fontes! Festschrift für G. Dobesch*. Wien 2004, 407-413.

¹² Gera 2007, 140.

¹³ Gera 2007, 140. Apollonios is also mentioned by Polybios, but in different context (XXXI. 13.3). According to the Greek historian Apollonios had enjoyed much favour with Seleucus IV, but departed to Miletus (his hometown, see P. Herrmann, *Chiron* 17 (1987) 175-190) upon the succession of Antiochus IV to the throne. O. Mørkholm (1966, 47–49) sought to harmonize Polybios' statement with the evidence of Apollonios' service to Antiochus IV.

was the *strategos* to whom Simon, the *prostates* of the Temple of Jerusalem reported about its treasures. According to Cotton and Wörrle there may have been a time gap between the two Apollonioses.¹⁴ On the contrary of this, Dov Gera claims that Apollonios son of Thraseas was “direct predecessor” of the above mentioned Apollonios son of Menestheus in the governorship of the satrapy.¹⁵ Nothing, however, is known concerning this latter Apollonios. Dov Gera argues that this name in 2Macc 3:5 is a doublet of the verse 4:4 (mentioning Apollonios son of Menestheus).¹⁶ But we also know of a certain Ptolemaios son of Thraseas, who was the last Ptolemaic governor of Koilē Syria and Phoinikē, who defected to the Seleucids on the eve of the Fifth Syrian War, and became Antichus III’s *stratēgos* there.¹⁷ Thus, there is no reason to doubt the historicity of Apollonios son of Thraseas, presumably a brother of Ptolemaios son of Thraseas.¹⁸ Apollonios must have become a *strategos* of Koilē Syria and Phoinikē in the wake of his brother. As the last attested date for Ptolemaios’ governorship is 195 B.C.,¹⁹ Apollonios would have held this post in the late 190’s or in the early 180’s.²⁰ (3) We have seen above that Dorymenes mentioned in the dossier from Maresha was in all likelihood the *strategos* of Koilē Syria and Phoinikē in 178 B.C. It is also worth mentioning that a certain Ptolemaios son of Dorymenes appears as a member of the court of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. A person of the same name is mentioned in 1Macc (and other sources) in connection with the events of 165, where he is listed as the first of three Seleucid generals beside Nicanor and Gorgias, who were entrusted to annihilate the rebellious Hasmoneans. Ptolemaios son of Dorymenes suggested the anti-Jewish decrees of Antiochus IV (2Macc 6:8). Ptolemaios son of Dorymenes was governor of Koilē Syria and Phoinikē approximately ten years after his father held this post under Seleucus IV.

In sum, we have four names of *stratēgoi* of Koilē Syria and Phoinikē in the early Seleucid era:

(a) Ptolemaios son of Thraseas, on the eve of the Fifth Syrian War (202/1–198 B.C.);

(b) his brother, Apollonios son of Thraseas, mentioned in connection with the Heliodoros-affair, “probably in the late 190’s or in the early 180’s” (Dov Gera), but according the 2Macc under Seleucus IV Philopator (187–175 B.C.);

¹⁴ Cotton–Wörrle 2007, 198. n. 45.

¹⁵ Gera 2007, 141.

¹⁶ Gera 2007 142.

¹⁷ Bengston 1944 II. 161–163; Gera 1987.

¹⁸ Holleaux 1942, 161. n. 6.

¹⁹ SEG XXIX, 1613. l. 37. The date refers to the letters of II. 28–37.

²⁰ Gera 2007, 142.

(c) Dorymenes, mentioned in the Maresha stele (178 B.C.), under Seleucus IV Philopator;

(d) Apollonios son of Menestheus, mentioned also in 2Macc, just prior to death of Seleucus IV (175 B.C.).

The date of the Heliodoros affair

Hellenistic kings were pleased to increase their popularity by showing generosity to temples both Greek and non-Greek whenever their resources permitted,²¹ Antiochus III was, however, killed attempting to rob a temple in 187 B.C. (Diodorus XXVIII. 3, XXIX. 15; Justin XXXII. 2.1-2). Many scholars do not reject the tale of the attempt by Heliodoros to despoil the Temple, and explain the miraculous outcome as a fanciful version of a more mundane solution of the crisis reached by the Jews and the Seleucid government.²² Now, Seleucus IV's letter to Heliodoros clearly attests to the king's desire to involve himself in the affairs of the temples of Koilē Syria and Phoinikē through the appointment of Olympiodoros as high priest of the satrapy.

Jerusalem was conquered by Antiochus III Megas in 200 B.C. in the course of the Fifth Syrian War. During the campaign, the king had received some help from the Jews (2Macc 3:5),²³ and in recognition of this support, Antiochus III issued a *prostagma*, preserved in Josephus' *Antiquitates* (*AJ* XII. 3.3. [138–144]),²⁴ which recognized the holiness of the city.²⁵ Things did not change much after the time of Antiochus III, for we are told that the kings of the period honoured the holy place and that they further added to the temple's prestige with the most excellent gifts. It is said of Antiochos III's son and heir, Seleucus IV, that he furnished all ongoing expenses for the performance of sacrifices out of his own income (2Macc 3:2-3). Notwithstanding, king Seleucus IV also inherited the harsh terms of the Apamea treaty. The Seleucids had to pay Rome's war expenses, the sum of 15,000 talents. Five hundred talents were to be handed over immediately, an additional 2,500 talents paid after the agreement was ratified in Rome, and the remainder transferred to Rome in 12 yearly installments.²⁶ Thus, the final payment to Rome was due in 177 B.C. According to Dov Gera "the appointment of Olympiodoros seems to have been part of an

²¹ Bickerman 1938, 123–4.

²² Fischer 1991; Gera 1997, 107; Schwartz 2003; Kennell 2005; Ego 2007.

²³ Gera 1997, 25–34.

²⁴ Elias Bickerman proved the authenticity of this royal decree (Bickerman 1935).

²⁵ Gera 2007, 147.

²⁶ McDonald 1967; Paltiel 1979; Burstein 1981; Gera 1997, 90.

effort by Seleucus IV to fulfill his financial obligations to Rome.”²⁷ This nomination would have posed a threat to all the sanctuaries in the satrapy, and not only to the Jerusalem Temple. At this point, however, Dov Gera makes a mistake, applying the Seleucus IV’s dossier from Maresha to the story of Heliodoros in 2Macc 3–4.²⁸

We should, however, emphasize that the exact date of the Heliodoros affair was not precisely defined in 2Macc. If we accept its basic historicity, it could have happened at any time during the twelve-year-long reign of Seleucus IV (187–175 B.C.).

Let us now turn back to the *Second Book of the Maccabees* which refers to the aftermath of the Heliodorus affair as well. According to Jason of Cyrene – supposedly the author of the 2Macc – Heliodorus was grateful to Onias III, the high priest, because of his miraculous healing, and marched back with his army to the king (2Macc 4:34–35). But Seleucus IV (and Heliodorus himself) did not abandon his project to take over the treasures of the Jerusalem Temple. They could not, because they had to pay the yearly installments to Rome. The story continues as follows: “when the king asked Heliodoros what now was the right sort of man to send to Jerusalem, he replied, if you have an enemy or a plotter against your kingdom, send him there. He will come back to you scourged, if he survives at all, because a divine power truly surrounds the place” (2Macc 3:37–38). Here the story continues with the wickedness of Simon, the *prostatēs* of the Temple (2Macc 4:1–3), which was supported by Apollonios son of Menestheus, the *stratēgos* of Koilē Syria and Phoinikē. We do not know how many time passed since the Heliodoros affair. Could it be possible that Olympiodoros, the *syntrophos*, chamberlain and one of the First Friends of Seleucus IV was the secret enemy of the sovereign, who was sent instead of Heliodoros to Jerusalem? It is not an unlikely hypothesis, if we assume that the Heliodoros affair happened between 187–178 B.C., or more likely in the first half of the reign of Seleucus IV. In consequence of this, we do not need to assume – as Dove Gera does – that “the Seleucid official who confronted the Jerusalem authorities was in fact Olympiodoros and not Heliodoros”.²⁹ According to the Israeli scholar,

Olympiodoros was appointed as high priest of the satrapy ... this office was unacceptable to the Jews ... in addition Olympiodoros was in essence a Seleucid official of middling importance, and not a powerful king or minister whose authority was paramount ... thus, it would have been natural for him to suppress the figure of Olympiodoros and replace him with the more powerful

²⁷ Gera 2007, 148.

²⁸ Gera 2007, 148.

²⁹ Gera 2007, 148–149. n. 121. Suggesting that *J. Ma* is of the same opinion.

chief minister of the kingdom... Furthermore, the chief minister became notorious later on, upon the assassination of Seleucus IV in 175. For it was Heliodoros who was blamed for the king's ultimately death, as can be learned from a later source (Appian. *Syr.* 45). The author of 2Maccabees seems to be aware of this... Thus, in both rank and character, Heliodoros would have been a more suitable choice for the role of Seleucid official who overrules the objections of the righteous Onias III, but suffers the consequences at the hands of God's emissaries.³⁰

Let us examine only Dov Gera's latter argument. Conspicuously, the author of 2Macc does not present Seleucus IV as an evil king. When Simon the *prostatēs* did not give up mocking and denigrating Onias III, the high priest journeyed to Seleucus Philopator, because "he saw that without provident intervention by the king the commonwealth could never more have peace and Simon would never desist from his madness" (2Macc 4:6). This journey have taken place in the final days of the king, because Jason of Cyrene does not tell a single word about the decision of Seleucus IV, but suddenly refers to the king's death and succession of the throne ("when Seleucus passed away and Antiochus, called Epiphanes, succeeded to the throne...", 2Macc 4:7). There is no mention of Heliodoros' coup d'état, murder or theodicy. We possess only one historical source which refers to the king's murder: Appianos' *Syriaka* (45. [233]).³¹ Not only the *Second Book of the Maccabees*, but the historically more reliable Babylonian king-list, which reports this event, does not comment on the circumstances of the king's death,³² and the *Book of Daniel* tell us expressly that the king "shall be destroyed, neither in anger, nor in battle" (*w'elō' b'e'appayim w'elō' b'e'milchāmāh*, 11:20 KJV).

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³⁰ Gera 2007, 149.

³¹ Bartlett 1973, 241 suggests that 2Macc 3:38 hints in an ironical way at the murder of the king by his minister.

³² BM 35.603 Rev. ll. 8–9, ed. Sachs–Wiseman 1954, 208.

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