Judaica: Neue digitale Folge 7 (2026)
https://doi.org/10.36950/jndf.2026.4

Between Paradoxography and Aretalogy: The Jewish *Scroll of Fasts*

Maureen Attali
Université de Nanterre
mattali@parisnanterre.fr

Abstract: *Building on previous research that has identified the* Scroll of Fasts *as a pre-rabbinic work, this article suggests that it is an anthology whose selection criteria are comparable to those of texts commonly referred to as paradoxographies. Indeed, most of the clearly identifiable events to which the document alludes are reported in 1 and 2 Maccabees, Philo, and Josephus, who interpret them as miracles resulting from divine intervention. It is therefore an anthology, originally pro-Hasmonean in nature, for it excluded contemporary miracles that happened to the Jews of Egypt under Ptolemaic rule. The* Scroll *was supplemented during the Herodian period and later reinterpreted by the rabbinic movement as an instrument of legitimization based on its miraculous logic.*

1 Introduction

The name of the *Scroll of Fasts*, in Aramaic *Megillat Taanit*, is misleading, for it designates a Jewish Aramaic calendar of 35 auspicious days or periods during which mourning rituals—mainly fasting and, in some cases, praising the dead—are prohibited. Its title was first mentioned in the Mishnah, one of the earliest rabbinic compilations of laws, written down at the beginning of the third century CE, which deemed the *Scroll* authoritative.[1] The text itself had to be reconstructed, primarily from two late medieval and early modern manuscripts and Talmudic quotations, an endeavor undertaken twenty years ago by Vered Noam.[2] The manuscripts contain extensive commentaries (or *scholia*) about each of the days, but the third century text mentioned in the Mishnah was a short composition of thirty-eight lines. The first two and the last lines bracket the list with instructions, while the remaining thirty-five form a calendrical list:

> (1) I shall begin *Megillat Ta'anit* with Heaven's help.
> (2) These are the days on which one is not to fast and on some of which one is not to eulogize.

This article is part of the Special Thematic Section *Nature Miracles and Paradoxography in Biblical Reception of the First Centuries CE* (2026); for the conceptual framework and an overview of the other contributions, see the introduction (https://doi.org/10.36950/jndf.2026.3).

[1] m. *Ta'anit* 2:8.

[2] All quotations from the *Scroll,* in both Aramaic and English, are taken from Noam, "Megillat Ta'anit – The Scroll of Fasting," 339–362.

(3) From the beginning of the month of Nisan until the eighth of it the daily sacrifice was settled – one is not to eulogize.

(4) From the eighth of it [Nisan] until the conclusion of the festival the holiday was fixed – one is not to eulogize.

[follow thirty-three more such days]

(38) Except for a person who has [previously] taken a fast-vow.[3]

All the entries follow the same pattern. They begin with a date given according to the Jewish ritual calendar that began in the spring, in the order of the months: Nisan, Iyyar, Sivan, Tammuz, Av, Elul, Tishri, Marheshvan, Kislev, Tevet, Shevat, and Adar. A short description is given for each date. Sometimes, only the word "festival" (*yom tov*, literally "auspicious day") appears. In most cases, an event is briefly recounted, often in a cryptic manner. The inclusion of festival names that are known from other Jewish sources of the time is the key that allows us to understand the rationale for the composition of the *Scroll*: most of the dates commemorate auspicious events that occurred for the Jews. A handful are based on biblical episodes, but most are set during the Hellenistic and early Roman periods, which are not covered in the Hebrew Bible. Since the *Scroll* does not explicitly state what it is made of, one must necessarily refer to outside material or prior knowledge to piece together its logic. It is only in the Palestinian Talmud, compiled c. 400, some two centuries after the Mishnah, that the contents of the *Scroll* are defined as "days when miracles (*nissim*) happened for Israel."[4] Talmudic tradition attributes the composition of the *Scroll* to an individual named Hanania ben Hizkia, whose activity is placed in the 60s CE.[5] There are, however, debates about the historical accuracy of this statement. While the text has only survived in a rabbinic redaction, most of the commemorations whose origins can be identified with certainty date back to the Maccabean revolt and the Hasmonean Kingdom[6]. This period ended with the Roman conquest of Judea in 63 BCE, followed by the nomination of Herod as King of Judea by the Triumvirate and the Roman Senate in 40 BCE, more than a century before the *Scroll*'s alleged redaction. Thus, it seems likely that such a list existed in a previous, incomplete version, prior to the 60s.[7] Consequently, scholars such as Sacha Stern have rejected the Talmudic testimony on the *Scroll*'s composition; Meir Bar Ilan has argued for Sadducean origin of the text, later reworked by rabbinic writers.[8] Additionally, there has been some

[3] Translation by Noam, "Megillat Ta'anit – The Scroll of Fasting," 342–343.

[4] y. Ta'an. 2:13 and Meg. 1:8.

[5] b. Sabb.13b.

[6] Noam, "Megillat Ta'anit – The Scroll of Fasting," 345, concluded that "among those identifiable with certainty"—about half of the 35 commemorations—"nine relate to the Hasmonean era […] and another four or five with probability."

[7] Martínez, "Mĕgil·laṯ Ta'anîṯ. Traducción, introducción y notas," 165, considers that it was begun under the Hasmonean king Alexander Janneus c. 92 BCE and constantly updated.

[8] See Sacha Stern's review of Vered Noam's *Megillat Ta'anit: Versions, Interpretation, History*; Bar Ilan, "The character and source of Megillat Taanit."

debate about the genre to which the *Scroll* belongs. Nineteenth and early twentieth-century scholarship ascribed it to the genre of historical writing, with Solomon Zeitlin analyzing it as a chronicle written by the Sicarii.[9] According to Ephraim Urbach, it was originally a Hasmonean historical record; its halakhic content about the prohibition of fasting was added by later pharisaic editors[10]. Vered Noam, who devoted an in-depth study to this text, concluded that:

> *Megillat Taanit* does not belong to the genre of historical writing, but rather to the halakhic genre […]. Nonetheless, the Scroll reflects a paradoxical relationship between an overt halakhic aim and a covert historical goal. Whereas the historical events mentioned in the *Scroll* are adduced only for a halakhic purpose, the prohibition of fasting exists only in order to preserve the memory of those very same historical events![11]

The debate about the genre of the *Scroll* could benefit by considering the growing number of studies that point out similarities between Ancient Jewish, including rabbinic, literature and its Greek and Latin counterparts. Indeed, *Megillat Taanit* presents itself as a list, and the number of lists found in both Qumran and rabbinic literature has been interpreted as evidence of Graeco-Roman influence on their writers. W. S. Towner has argued that rabbinic enumeration of scriptural examples is an exegetical tool similar to those of Alexandrian grammarians and scholars from the Library who, beginning in the mid-third century BCE, were organizing and annotating major works of Greek literature, first and foremost the Homeric corpus.[12] While most recognizable events from the *Scroll* are not taken from the Hebrew Bible, it can be defined as an anthology.[13]

Many of the events it describes and the reasons for their inclusion are elaborated on in earlier Jewish works written in Greek: those usually referred to as the Jewish Apocrypha, as well as the works of two Jewish authors from the first century CE, the philosopher Philo of Alexandria and the historian Flavius Josephus. This anthological quality distinguishes the *Scroll* from some other rabbinical lists of miracles, such as the ten temple miracles from *Pirkei Avot*. Not only is there no evidence that most *Pirkei Avot* temple miracles were recounted in earlier material; they also are continuous miracles—for instance "no woman has ever miscarried from the odor of the sacred flesh"—and not specific ones thought to have happened at an identifiable time.[14] In this article I will argue that the *Scroll*, which is the product of a complex redactional history with additions made at later stages, displays many characteristics of paradoxographical texts. Since the term "paradoxography" was forged by Anton Westermann in 1839, there has been much debate about its definition,

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[9] Zeitlin, *Megillat Taanit,* vii-x.
[10] Urbach, *Halakhah,* 57.
[11] Noam, "Megillat Ta'anit – The Scroll of Fasting," 340.
[12] Towner, *The Rabbinic 'Enumeration of Scriptural Examples'*, 99–100.
[13] Costa, "Le genre du florilège et la littérature des rabbins," 361–392.
[14] *Pirkei Avot* 5:5. See Greenberg, *Pirkei Avot*, 247.

and which ancient texts should be included in it.[15] Scholars who use this category generally agree that paradoxographical texts are geographical anthologies of unexpected, wondrous facts, which first appeared during the early Hellenistic period.[16] Descriptions of the wonders and diversity of the lands conquered by Alexander and its successors became a political tool for the Ptolemaic dynasty, enhancing its prestige.[17] Similarly, the *Scroll* seems to have been served a political goal, and was seemingly originally conceived as a pro-Hasmonean compilation. From a geographical standpoint, excepting two Biblical episodes (the little Passover and Purim), all recognizable events from the *Scroll* took place in either Hasmonean or Herodian territories; they commemorate these two dynasties' accession or return to power and, in some case, their territorial expansion, with the conquest of Strato's tower, Beth-Shean, Samaria, mount Gerizim and Chalcis.[18] The *Scroll*'s anthological rationale is based on an implicit but consistent definition of wonders: they are not surprising *per se*—military victories or rain do occur—but they were unexpected when and where they happened and are thus presented as the result of divine intervention. Although this specific definition of the wonder might lead one to classify this document as an aretalogy—a discourse on the miracles performed by a deity—its pro-Hasmonean stance makes it lean more firmly toward paradoxography, for the compiled non-Biblical wonders do not include all those that were said to have happened on behalf of the Jews during the Hellenistic and early Roman periods, but only those that benefitted the Jews under Hasmonean and later on Herodian rule. While the *Scroll*'s calendrical organization is unique in texts commonly categorized as paradoxographic, the inclusion of commemorations perpetuating the memory of the described wonders is not specific to it. In his *Amazing Stories*, probably compiled during the second-century BCE, Apollonios states that the wonders performed by divine men such as Aristeas of Proconnesus and Hermotimus of Clazomenae were still commemorated in his lifetime by the Sicilians and Clazomenaeans respectively, who founded shrines and offered sacrifices to them.[19] The calendrical framework of the *Scroll* stems from its propagandist, pro-Hasmonean aspect: the use of the Jewish cultic calendar was used as a legitimizing tool by the Judean rulers, who sought to have their religious authority as high-priests recognized by the Jews living under Ptolemaic rule. As for the *Scroll*'s lack of references to its sources, it is mirrored in several paradoxographical texts, such as Isigonus of Nicaea's *Unbelievable things* (*Apista*) (compiled between the first century BCE and the first century CE) and the *Paradoxographus Florentinus* (second century CE).[20]

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15 Westermann, *Paradoxographoi.*

16 Geus, "Paradoxography and geography," 244; Geus and King, "Paradoxography."

17 Caneva, "Paradoxon! Perception de la puissance divine et du pouvoir royal dans l'Alexandrie des Ptolémées."

18 *Megillat Ta'anit* l. 9, 10; 20; 24, and 35.

19 Apollonios, *Amazing Stories,* 2.2 and 3.4.

20 Geus and King, "Paradoxography," 434; if we discount this focus on the references to sources, which is not found in all paradoxographical texts, the *Scroll* meets all the paradoxographical criteria defined Schepens and Delcroix, "Ancient Paradoxography": it is an anthological, systematically arranged list of miracles, almost devoid of narrative and explanation.

It will be shown that it was precisely the paradoxographic dimension of the *Scroll* that gave it a legitimizing function, leading to its reuse by groups claiming authority over Jewish communities and ultimately to its appropriation by the rabbinic movement.

2 The Sources: Wonders as Divine Interventions in Jewish Greek Accounts of Hanukkah and Purim

The type of miracle evoked by the *Scroll* is divine intervention, the "ominous" side of the ancient miracle. Some of the events alluded to in the *Scroll* can be explained by parallel accounts in Jewish Greek literature, where they were also interpreted as the result of divine intervention. This is the case with two festivals mentioned in the *Scroll*: Hanukkah and Purim.[21]

> (25) On the twenty-fifth of it [Kislev] – Hanukkah of eight days, and one is not to eulogize.
>
> […]
>
> (33) On the fourteenth of it [Adar] and the fifteenth of it – these are the days of Purim, and one is not to eulogize.[22]

2 Maccabees contains an epitome of the earliest account of the events commemorated by Hanukkah, literally the "dedication" of the new sacrificial altar in the Jerusalem Temple which took place in 165/4 BCE, after the military conflict between the Hasmoneans and the Seleucids. The Jewish author Jason of Cyrene wrote the original account in six books around 160 BCE, shortly after the events. The second letter to the Jews of Egypt which prefaces the epitome of Jason's work states that it was "God who saved His entire people […] [and] saved [the Jews] from great evils and purified the place."[23]

1 Maccabees, written in Judea between 134 and 104 BCE,[24] also recounts the "dedication of the altar" and the subsequent establishment of an annual eight-day commemoration beginning on 25 Kislev.[25] This religious restoration is described as a consequence of the military victory of Judah Maccabeus at Beth-Zur; the assembled people thus "blessed Heaven, which had made them successful."[26] The Greek-speaking authors' insistence on explaining the victories and salvation of the Jews as the direct result of divine intervention is even more striking when contrasted with the Hebrew accounts of the same

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[21] *Megillat Ta'anit,* l. 25 (Hanukkah) and l. 33 (Purim).

[22] Noam, "Megillat Ta'anit – The Scroll of Fasting," 343 and 344.

[23] 2 Macc. 2:17–18: ὁ δὲ θεὸς ὁ σώσας τὸν πάντα λαὸν αὐτοῦ […] ἐξείλατο γὰρ ἡμᾶς ἐκ μεγάλων κακῶν καὶ τὸν τόπον ἐκαθάρισεν. All quotations from the ancient Greek Bible, traditionally called the Septuagint (1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, 3 Maccabees and LXX Esther) are taken from *Septuaginta id est Vetus Testamentum græce iuxta LXX interpretes,* ed. Rahlfs and Hanhart. On the status and date of the second letter, see Schwartz, *2 Maccabees*, 3–15 and 519–529.

[24] Schwartz, *1 Maccabees*, 7.

[25] 1 Macc. 4:59: τὸν ἐγκαινισμὸν τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου.

[26] 1 Macc. 4:55: πᾶς ὁ λαὸς ἐπὶ πρόσωπον καὶ προσεκύνησαν καὶ εὐλόγησαν εἰς οὐρανὸν τὸν εὐοδώσαντα αὐτοῖς.

events. This comparison can be made for the events commemorated by Purim, since the etiological narrative of the festival, Esther, is extant in both languages. The text included in the Hebrew Bible is notoriously devoid of any reference to God. Conversely, in the Old Greek version, composed around 100 BCE and included in the Septuagint manuscripts, the complex unfolding of events leading to the downfall of Haman, the minister who was conspiring to massacre the Jews, is hailed as "signs (*sēmeia*) and great miracles (*terata megala*) wrought by God."[27] The Jewish Greek claim to divine intervention was not limited to these two multi-day commemorations. The origins of the Day of Nikanor (13 Adar) included in the *Scroll* are also reported in the 2 Maccabees.[28] Before going into battle against the Seleucid general Nikanor in 161 BCE, Judas Maccabeus invokes God:

> Maccabaeus […] raised up his hands toward heaven and called upon the miracle working (*teratopoios*) Lord, for he knew that it was not through weapons, but, rather, according to how He deems, that victory is secured for them who deserve it. And calling upon Him he spoke in the following manner: "You, O Sovereign, sent out Your angel in the days of King Hezekiah of Judah, and he killed about 185,000 men in the camp of Sennacherib. And now, Ruler of the heavens, send a good angel before us (to inspire in our enemies) fear and trembling. Let those who come with blasphemy against Your holy people be terrified by Your great arm."[29]

The author goes on to narrate the victory of the Jews, which he defines as "a manifestation (*epiphaneia*) of God" and the establishment of an annual commemoration.[30] According to this passage, military victory can only be achieved through God's will.

While Judas acknowledges the past mode of God's intervention by requesting the help of an angel, he also emphasizes God's involvement by stating that his power is in his "arm." In the Bible, God's power is often expressed by reference to his "arm," "hand" or "finger," in connection with his sending a "sign" (Hebrew *'ot*, Greek *sēmeion*) and "miracle" (Hebrew *mo̱pet*, Greek *teras*);[31] the author of the 2 Maccabees, who was familiar with Greek literature, may have chosen "arm" because it was also used to convey the idea of power in Greek poetry.[32] Nevertheless, this description of divine intervention

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[27] LXX Esth 10:3f: ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὰ σημεῖα καὶ τὰ τέρατα τὰ μεγάλα.

[28] *Megillat Ta'anit*, l. 32.

[29] 2 Macca 15:21–4: ὁ Μακκαβαῖος […] τὰς χεῖρας εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἐπεκαλέσατο τὸν τερατοποιὸν κύριον γινώσκων ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν δι' ὅπλων, καθὼς δὲ ἐὰν αὐτῷ κριθῇ, τοῖς ἀξίοις περιποιεῖται τὴν νίκην. ἔλεγεν δὲ ἐπικαλούμενος τόνδε τὸν τρόπον Σύ, δέσποτα, ἀπέστειλας τὸν ἄγγελόν σου ἐπὶ Εζεκιου τοῦ βασιλέως τῆς Ιουδαίας, καὶ ἀνεῖλεν ἐκ τῆς παρεμβολῆς Σενναχηριμ εἰς ἑκατὸν ὀγδοήκοντα πέντε χιλιάδας· καὶ νῦν, δυνάστα τῶν οὐρανῶν, ἀπόστειλον ἄγγελον ἀγαθὸν ἔμπροσθεν ἡμῶν εἰς δέος καὶ τρόμον· μεγέθει βραχίονός σου καταπλαγείησαν οἱ μετὰ βλασφημίας παραγινόμενοι ἐπὶ τὸν ἅγιόν σου λαόν. Translation by Schwartz, *2 Maccabees*, 493–494.

[30] 2 Macc. 15:27: τοῦ θεοῦ […] ἐπιφανείᾳ.

[31] See for instance Exod 3:19 and 6:1 (hand); Job 40:9 and Isa 40:10 (arm); Exod 8:15 (finger). For God's "hand" as the one making "signs" and wonders", see Exod 7:3–5.

[32] Euripides, *Suppl.* 478.

is typical of Jewish Hellenistic theology: it is accomplished through the simultaneous presence and action of both God and his agents.

By equating the plight of the Jews with an earlier plight recounted in the Hebrew Bible (the neo-Assyrian king Sennacherib), the author of the 2 Maccabees asserts that God continued to intervene on behalf of the Jews after the Achaemenid period—the most recent period covered in the Hebrew Bible—and continued to do so. This divine involvement not only explains the existence of miracles; it also becomes one of the main characteristics of the Jewish God, as expressed by the epithet "wonder-making" (*teratopoios*). *Teratopoios* is a very rare word. It is first attested in the paradoxographical work *Amazing stories* (*Historiai thaumasiai*) by Apollonios, a second-century author who probably epitomized a third-century work by Bolos of Mende; in it, both Pythagoras and his teacher Pherecydes are described as *teratopoioi*.[33] Aside from Apollonius, this word only appears three times in ancient Greek literature, including twice in Jewish Hellenistic texts.[34] It illustrates a common conception of the interaction between mortals and the divine in the late Hellenistic period, when the respective powers of the deities and divine men were measured by their ability and willingness to produce miracles. This theological shift is evidenced by the semantic evolution of the word *epiphaneia*, which came to convey the lived experience of supernatural apparitions and,[35] around 100 BCE, salvific miracles.[36] This evolution affected Jewish Greek semantics: *epiphaneia* and its cognates, which had never been used in Greek translations of biblical miracle narratives, became ubiquitous in Jewish Greek compositions dealing with divine intervention.[37]

3 Wonders as Miracles: A Widespread Interpretation

Another episode included in the *Scroll* reveals how widespread was the notion that God still intervened in the affairs of contemporary Jews through miracles. The reason for the commemoration on 22 Shevat is described as follows: "The cult that the enemy ordered to be brought into the Temple was cancelled."[38] This description is specific enough to be identified: a wealth of literary testimony, including two from contemporary witnesses—Philo of Alexandria and Flavius Josephus—recount the Roman emperor Caligula's attempt to have his statue installed in the Jerusalem Temple in 40 CE. Remarkably, all the ancient Jewish accounts attribute the emperor's ultimate failure to

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[33] Apollonios, *Amazing Stories,* 6.1; Janet Spittler, who edited the text, writes that here, *teratopoios*, which she translates first by "wonder-working" and then by "miracle-mongering", is "seemingly pejorative." I thank Monika Amsler for this reference.

[34] On the occurrence in 3 Macc. 6:32, see *infra.* The third occurrence appears in a fifth century CE commentary on an astrological treaty by Claudius Ptolemy. In this work, traditionally but probably erroneously attributed to the Neoplatonist philosopher Proclus, *teratopoios* is used to describe human behaviour and given a negative meaning: see Proclus, *Paraphrasis in quatuor Ptolemaei libros de siderum effectionibus*, 225.

[35] Baslez, "Histoire locale et construction identitaire."

[36] Koch Piettre, "La chronique de Lindos."

[37] 2 Macc. 2:21; 3:24; 5:4; 12:22; 14:15; 15:27; 3 Macc. 2:9; 5:8 and 51.

[38] *Megillat Ta'anit*, l. 28: בעשרין ותרין ביה בטילת עבידתא דאמיר סנאה לאיתאה להיכלא ולא למספד.

miraculous events of various kinds. Philo, a member of an envoy sent by the Jews of Alexandrian to Caligula, was already in Italy when he learned that the emperor had ordered Petronius, the governor of Syria, to have the colossal statue made and to escort it to Jerusalem.[39] The Alexandrian author's account is full of divine intervention. According to him, Petronius did not agree with the emperor's orders, but he knew that he would be punished if he did not comply; so, he bought some time by having the statue built far from Jerusalem, in Phoenicia. Philo states that Caligula did not send artisans from Rome, "in [his] opinion by the providence (*pronoia*) of God, who unseen by us stretched out his hand to protect the wronged;"[40] the word *pronoia*, already used by Herodotus to describe divine foresight,[41] was used in Jewish Greek literature from around 100 BCE for divine intervention.[42] Petronius then persuades the artists he commissioned to take their time; according to Philo, the governor did this not only because he was wise, but because "God whispers good decisions to good men."[43] When Caligula reiterates his earlier order and adds that non-Jews should take it upon themselves to erect altars and statues to him in Syria, Philo states that no one has done so "by the providence (*pronoia*) and care (*epimeleia*) of God."[44] However, as Philo well knew, the emperor did not relent: if the installation of his statue in the Jerusalem temple was never carried out, it was only because he was assassinated in January of the year 41; it is his death, or more likely the date when the news of his death reached Jerusalem, that is commemorated on the 22 Shevat. His death would be seen as the reversal of his unfounded accusations and threats against the Jews.[45]

This interpretation may be supported by Josephus's accounts of the same events. In *The Jewish War*, written in the 70s, the historian had simply stated that they unfolded "under God's care."[46] In a more detailed account from the 90s, Josephus elaborates on the forms of God's intervention. First, a meeting set in Tiberias where Petronius told the Jews that he would write to Caligula to try to persuade him to abandon his project, ended with a sign from God:

> God, on His part, showed Petronius that He was (*parousia*) with him and would lend His aid in all matters. For as soon as Petronius had finished delivering this speech before the Jews, God straightway sent a heavy shower that was contrary to general anticipation, for that day, from morning on, had been clear and the sky had given no indication of rain. Indeed, that entire year had been beset by so great a drought that it caused the people to despair of rainfall even if at any time they saw the sky overcast. The result was that, when much rain fell at that moment

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[39] Philo, *Legat.* 203.

[40] Philo, *Legat.* 220: θεοῦ μοι προνοίᾳ δοκῶ τὴν χεῖρα τῶν ἀδικουμένων ἀφανῶς ὑπερέχοντος.

[41] Herodotus, *Hist*. 3.108.

[42] 3 Macc. 4:21 and 5:30; 4 Macc. 9:24.

[43] Philo, *Legat.* 245: τοῖς δὲ ἀγαθοῖς ἀγαθὰς ὑπηχεῖν ἔοικε γνώμας ὁ θεός.

[44] Philo, *Legat.* 336: προνοίᾳ δέ τινι καὶ ἐπιμελείᾳ […] θεοῦ.

[45] Pelletier, *Philon d'Alexandrie. Legatio ad Caium*, 19–21.

[46] Josephus, *B. J.* 2.186.

> exceptionally and unexpectedly, the Jews were hopeful that Petronius would by no means fail in his petition on their behalf. Petronius, on his part, was struck with great amazement when he saw unmistakable evidence that God's providence was over the Jews and that He had shown His presence (*epiphaneia*) so abundantly that not even those who actually proposed to take the opposite view had any heart left to dispute the fact.[47]

For Josephus, Petronius' decision was sanctioned by God, who showed his approval by sending a sign. Rain is a common meteorological occurrence, not a supernatural event *per se*. However, Josephus's description defines this particular rain as God-sent by developing the context that makes it miraculous: a year-long drought. When describing divine manifestations, Josephus used the aforementioned *epiphania* in conjunction with another term, *parousia.* Originally meaning "arrival", this word became closely associated with the appearances of kings and gods during the Hellenistic period.[48] Josephus is the first Jewish author to use it to express the presence of God; in three of the four occurrences, the word indicates a God-sent miracle (rain, lightning bolt, apparition).[49] According to Josephus, the miraculous aspect of the rain was obvious and clearly understood by the assembled Jews as well as by the non-Jewish Petronius:

> He said, moreover, that the Divinity who was in charge of them had shown His power (*dunamis*) to be unimpaired and was quite unambiguous in displaying this power.[50]

Josephus is similarly explicit in his interpretation of Caligula's death:

> Indeed, God could never have been unmindful of the risks that Petronius had taken in showing favor to the Jews and honoring God. No, the removal of Gaius in displeasure at his rashness in promoting his own claim to worship was God's payment of the debt to Petronius.[51]

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[47] Josephus, *A. J.* 18.284–286: ὁ θεὸς δὲ παρουσίαν ἐπεδείκνυτο τὴν αὐτοῦ Πετρωνίῳ καὶ τὴν ἐπὶ τοῖς ὅλοις σύλληψιν· ἅμα τε γὰρ ἐπαύετο τοῦ λόγου, ὃν πρὸς τοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶπεν, καὶ αὐτίκα ὑετὸν ἠφίει μέγαν παρ' ἐλπίδα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις γενόμενον διὰ τὸ ἐκείνην τὴν ἡμέραν αἴθριον ἔωθεν οὖσαν οὐδὲν ὄμβριον ἀποσημαίνειν ἐκ τῶν περὶ τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὸ πᾶν ἔτος αὐχμῷ μεγάλῳ κατεσχημένον ἐπ' ἀπογνώσει ποιεῖν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ὕδατος τοῦ ἄνωθεν, εἰ καὶ σύννεφόν ποτε θεάσαιντο τὸν οὐρανόν. ὥστε δὴ τότε πολλοῦ καὶ παρὰ τὸ εἰωθὸς καὶ παρὰ τὸ ἑτέρῳ δόξαν ἀφιγμένου ὕδατος τοῖς τε Ἰουδαίοις ἐλπὶς ἦν ἐπ' οὐδαμοῖς ἀτυχήσειν Πετρώνιον ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν δεόμενον, ὅ τε Πετρώνιος κατεπέπληκτο μειζόνως ὁρῶν ἐναργῶς τὸν θεὸν τῶν Ἰουδαίων προμηθούμενον καὶ πολλὴν ἀποσημήναντα τὴν ἐπιφάνειαν, ὡς μηδ' ἂν τοῖς ἔργῳ προθεμένοις τἀναντία φρονεῖν ἰσχὺν ἀντιλέξεως καταλελεῖφθαι.

[48] Feuillet, "Parousie," 1331–1419.

[49] In addition to Josephus, *A. J.*18.284, see 3.80 and 9.55.

[50] Josephus, *A. J.* 18.288: κἄλλως θείου τοῦ προεστηκότος αὐτῶν τὴν δύναμιν ὡς ἀκραιφνῆ ἀπέφαινεν καὶ μηδὲν ἐνδοιαστὸν ἐπὶ δυνάμει τῇ αὐτῆς ἐπιδείκνυσθαι καταλείπουσαν.

[51] Josephus, *A.J.* 18.306: θεὸς γὰρ οὐκ ἄρ' ἀμνημονήσειν ἔμελλε Πετρωνίῳ κινδύνων, οὓς ἀνειλήφει ἐπὶ τῇ τῶν Ἰουδαίων χάριτι καὶ τιμῇ τῇ αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ τὸν Γάιον ἀποσκευασάμενος ὀργῆς ὧν ἐπὶ σεβασμῷ τῷ αὐτοῦ πράσσειν ἐτόλμησε, τὸν μισθὸν χρεολυτεῖν.

Despite their narrative differences, Philo and Josephus both describe potentially innocuous events as divine interventions whose purpose was to save the Jews. Thus, at the very least by the time the *Scroll* was compiled, at least some of its events were widely known and understood to be the result of divine intervention in Jewish communities from Alexandria to Jerusalem.

We have seen that at least four of the commemorations included in the *Scroll of Fasts*—Hanukkah, Purim, the Day of Nikanor, the death of Caligula and the subsequent cancelation of the erection of his statue in the Jerusalem temple—were already interpreted as divine intervention in Jewish Greek literature by the first century CE. There are other such cases. For example, according to Josephus, the capture of Samaria, commemorated on 25 Marheshvan, was marked by a "wonder" (*paradoxon*): the high priest Hyrcanus, who was officiating in the temple, heard a voice informing him that his sons had won the battle.[52] Admittedly, most of the *Scroll*'s entries cannot be explained on the basis of Jewish Greek parallels alone; the alleged miracles they commemorate are reported only in the *Scroll*'s Hebrew scholia. Although some of the scholia—which exist in two different and sometime contradictory versions—[53] preserve ancient interpretations, with parallels in Josephus and late antique rabbinic literature, we cannot always distinguish the ancient material from possible later developments. Nevertheless, even if the specific historical context of some of the events in the *Scroll*'s eludes us, Jewish Greek literature often mentions miracles that occurred in analogous circumstances. For example, the *Scroll* commemorates a successful fast for rain on 20 Adar;[54] Josephus states that a pious man named Onias had successfully prayed for rain between 67 and 63 BCE.[55] A commemoration of the removal of a "partition" (*sōreg*) from the Jerusalem Temple courtyard (23 Marheshvan) finds a surprising parallel in the 1 Maccabees, where the impious high priest Alcimus is unable to have the "wall of the outer court" removed because of a stroke and subsequent paralysis.[56] It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the *Scroll of Fasts* is, at least in part, a compilation of events, including military victories, that were already interpreted as divine intervention on behalf of the Jews at the time of its composition.

Other favorable events could later have been added to the list; their inclusion alone would have been sufficient to transform them into miraculous episodes. Such a process would belong to the "fabrication du merveilleux" that, according to Christian Jacob, defines the paradoxographic genre.[57]

There is another clue to the anthological nature of the *Scroll*: the compelling similarities between Josephus' accounts of events included in the *Scroll* (or similar to them) and their later rabbinic counterparts, especially their interpretation as manifestations of God.

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[52] Josephus, *A. J.* 13.281–283 cf. *Megillat Ta'anit*, l. 20. On the word *paradoxon* in Josephus's works, see Vermes, "The Jesus Notice of Josephus Re-Examined."

[53] Noam, "Megillat Ta'anit – The Scroll of Fasting," 351.

[54] *Megillat Ta'anit,* l. 36.

[55] Josephus, *A.J.* 14.22.

[56] 1 Macc. 9:54–5.

[57] Jacob, "De l'art de compiler à la fabrication du merveilleux."

The miracles surrounding the statue and death of Caligula,[58] the voice telling Hyrcanus about the taking of Samaria[59] and the pious man—often named Honi—who could control the rain are also found in rabbinic literature, even in its earliest compilations.[60] Since the rabbis were not familiar with the works of Josephus, these similarities that, as argued by Vered Noam, both drew from a common earlier source;[61] such a document could have been more extensive predecessor of the *Scroll*. Josephus himself may have alluded to such a work. In an episode similar to his account of Petronius' speech, the historian claims that God showed his appreciation for Herod's renovation of the Jerusalem Temple by making it rain only at night for a year and a half so as not to hinder the builders' work. He then concludes:

> And this story, which our fathers have handed down to us, is not at all incredible if, that is, one considers the other manifestations of power given by God.[62]

A century before Josephus wrote, the author of the Greek Sirach, translated from the Hebrew in 132 BCE, expressed his confidence that God would intervene on behalf of the Jews through unmistakable "signs" (*sēmeia*) and "miracles" (*thaumasia*); he added that God would fill "Zion with his aretalogies (*aretalogiai*)."[63] The word *aretalogia*, which translates as "discourse on the virtues" is a quasi-hapax in ancient Greek.[64] Nevertheless, scholars commonly use it to describe a well-attested literary genre that, from the Hellenistic period onward, enumerated the achievements, often miraculous, of a particular deity.[65] Such testimonies confirm that many stories of God's miracles circulated in late Hellenistic and early Roman Judea, and that they were not limited to those recounted in biblical texts and parabiblical literature. However, the fact that the *Scroll* is derived from earlier miracle accounts raises the question of its literary genre. While it meets the criteria for paradoxography, the miraculous aspect of the phenomena it contains is integrally dependent on interpretation. Jewish Greek miracle narratives thus combine the paradoxographic (*teras*, *thauma*, *paradoxon*) with the theological (*epiphaneia*, *parousia*, *pronoia*) vocabulary. There is, however, one particular attribute that argues for defining the *Scroll* as a paradoxographical work: its political aspect.

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58 t. *Sotah* 13:6; y. *Sotah* 9.3; b. *Sotah* 33a.

59 t. *Sotah* 13:5; y. *Sotah* 9:13; b. *Sotah* 32a.

60 m. Ta'an.3:8; t. Ta'an. 2:13; b. Ta'an. 23a. See Simon-Shoshan, S*tories of the Law*, 149–166.

61 See Ilan and Noam, "Remnants of a Pharisaic Apologetic Source in Josephus and in the Babylonian Talmud"; Noam, *Shifting Images of the Hasmoneans*.

62 Josephus*, A.J.*15.425: τὸν λόγον οἱ πατέρες ἡμῖν παρέδωκαν, οὐδ' ἔστιν ἄπιστον, εἰ καὶ πρὸς τὰς ἄλλας ἀπίδοι τις ἐμφανείας τοῦ θεοῦ.

63 Sir 36:5–6 and 19(16). The translation is my own.

64 Only one certain additional occurrence is found in Manetho, *Apotelesmatika* 4.447, where it is given a pejorative meaning; see Haase, "Aretalogien."

65 On aretalogies, see for instance Grandjean, *Une nouvelle arétalogie d'Isis à Maronée*.

4 The Hasmonean Origins of Judean Paradoxography

The emergence of the paradoxographic genre is inextricably linked to its political context. In the wake of the expansion of the geographical horizon after the Macedonian conquests, paradoxography was largely stimulated by the Ptolemies. The earliest paradoxographical work, compiled by Callimachus of Cyrene, was the result of his position as director of the library of Alexandria and his cataloguing activity. As Stefano Caneva has shown, the emergence and development of the paradoxographic genre is linked to the Ptolemies' desire to present themselves as the rulers of an immense, quasi-universal empire full of wonders.[66] Like the library itself, Alexandrian paradoxography served to enhance the prestige of the Ptolemies.

The content of the *Scroll* itself testifies to its political dimension. Most of the events interpreted as miracles commemorate Hasmonean military victories and their direct consequences, often in the form of territorial gains and cultic restorations. In addition to the aforementioned Hasmonean dedication of the Temple, the victory over Nicanor and the conquest of Samaria, the commemorations of deeds attributed to the Hasmoneans include the departure of King Antiochus from Jerusalem (28 Shevat), the capture of the fortress of Jerusalem from its Seleucid garrison (23 Iyyar), the introduction of new dating formula (3 Tishri), the conquest of Beth-Shean (15–16 Sivan), the destruction of the Gerizim Temple (21 Kislev) and the capture of Straton's Tower (14 Sivan).[67] According to Vered Noam, at least one of the three commemorations related to the Jerusalem wall (7 Iyyar, 4 Elul and 16 Adar) and at least one of the tax cancellations (27 Iyyar and 25 Sivan) should also be placed in the Hasmonean period.[68] In fact, 1 Maccabees and 2 Maccabees describe Hasmonean rulers fortifying the city and negotiations between the Hasmoneans and the Seleucids also resulted with several tax exemptions for Judaea;[69] negotiations between the Hasmoneans and the Seleucids also resulted with several tax exemptions for Judaea.[70] Although these identifications remain speculative, a thorough cross-examination of all available source material provides arguments for attributing six additional commemorations contained in the *Scroll* to the Hasmoneans. Following Paulus Cassel, Solomon Zeitlin identified the removal of the *Book of Decrees* (4 Tammuz) as a commemoration of King Demetrius II's letter granting autonomy to Hasmonean Judea as told in 1 Maccabees.[71] The restoration of the law (24 Av) is dated to the Hasmonean dynasty by one version of the scholia;[72] following on a hypothesis first drawn by Gustaf Dalman, Pierre-Maurice Bogaert has identified it with an event recounted in 2 Maccabees: the letter from the Seleucid general Lysias announcing to the

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66 Caneva, "Paradoxon! Perception de la puissance divine et du pouvoir royal dans l'Alexandrie des Ptolémées."

67 *Megillat Ta'anit*, l. 25, 32, 20, 29, 7, 18, 10, 24 and 9 respectively.

68 *Megillat Ta'anit*, l. 5, 15, 34 (city walls) and 8 and 11 (tax cancellations).

69 1 Macc. 10:10–11.45 and 13:10.

70 1 Macc. 10:29, 11:35 and 13:39 cf. Josephus, *A. J.* 13.49.

71 Cassel, *Messianische Stellen des Alten Testaments,* 107, quoted by Zeitlin, *Megillat Taanit*, 83 cf. 1 Maccabees 13:36-42.

72 See Le Moyne, *Les Sadducéens*, 301.

Jews that King Antiochus had abrogated his repressive measures.[73] The killing of the apostates (22 Elul) is dated to the Maccabean revolt by one version of the scholia, and, as noted by Joseph Derenbourg, 1 Maccabees mentions that both Jonathan and Simon the Hasmoneans hunted down apostates.[74] The resumption of the fine flour offering (27 Marheshvan) has been interpreted as the consecration of the priests' sacrifice before the rededication of the Temple by Judas Maccabeus.[75] Moïse Schwab has suggested a Hasmonean context for the Kenishta sitting in judgment (28 Tevet).[76] The arrival of the good tidings (28 Adar) is connected with the abolition of Antiochus IV's decrees against Judaism by many scholars.[77]

Even without accepting this maximalist interpretation, whoever was the original compiler of the *Scroll* gave the Hasmonean dynasty theological and political support by claiming that their actions were sanctioned by God and that he intervened so that they would prevail. Recent historical events were listed alongside biblical festivals that were either directly ordained by God such as the Little Passover (14 Iyyar) or celebrated past salvations of the Jews such as Purim (14 and 15 Adar) in order to give them miraculous status and make them worthy of commemoration.[78] The calendrical list was later expanded to include post-Hasmonean events. The anthological catalogue became a politico-theological framework: episodes could be added to the list without recourse to any prior narrative, in order to memorialize and ritualize them. In addition to the contingency of source preservation, this may explain why some events in the *Scroll* have no parallel in any known document: such is the case of the mysterious "salvation" of "the remnant of the scribes in the city of Chalcis in the house of Zabdi" (17 Adar).[79]

5 Paradoxographic Selection and Political Competition

In addition to its clear pro-Hasmonean tendencies, another clue to the *Scroll*'s compositional milieu and original function can be found in its blatant selection of miracles. Apart from the biblical episodes, all the identified events took place in Judaea or in the neighboring territories conquered by the Hasmoneans. Two documented commemorations of episodes that took place in Ptolemaic territories and benefited local Jews were pointedly not included. This choice is particularly revealing because the Greek accounts of these Egyptian events describe them as divine interventions. The origins of one of these commemorations are recorded in the 3 Maccabees, which tellingly titled for its narrative and theological similarities to 1 Maccabees and 2 Maccabees.[80] According to

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[73] 2 Maccabees 11:16-32. Dalman, *Aramäische Dialektproben*, 42; Bogaert, "Le 'rouleau' de Judith," 169–171.

[74] Derenbourg, *Essai sur l'histoire et la géographie de la Palestine*, 69 cf. 1 Maccabees 9:73 and 14:14.

[75] Zeitlin, *Megillat Taanit*, 77–79.

[76] Schwab, "La Meghillath Taanith," 232–233.

[77] Noam, "Megillat Taanit," 312–315; Horbury, *Herodian Judaism*, 86.

[78] *Megillat Ta'anit*, l. 6 and 33. For the biblical aetiologies of these festivals, see Num 9:10–11 and 2 Chr 29–30 (Little Passover) and Esther 9:20–32 (Purim).

[79] *Megillat Ta'anit*, l. 35; on this entry, see Efron, *Studies in the Hasmonean Period*, 208–210.

[80] Mélèze Modrzejewski, *Troisième livre des Maccabées*, 29–39.

this text, composed around 100 BCE in Jewish circles in Egypt, the Jews of Alexandria and the surrounding area were about to be executed by order of King Ptolemy IV (222–204 BCE) when they were saved by a series of miracles.[81] First, the officials in charge of registering the arrested Jews were forced to stop because they had ran out of papyri and writing reeds.[82] This lack of supplies, while not unusual in itself, is interpreted by the author as "the action (*energeia*) of the invincible providence (*pronoia*) of the one who helped the Jews from Heaven."[83] The imprisoned Jews then pray to be saved by a divine "manifestation" (*epiphaneia*): Ptolemy is put into a deep sleep by God's "action" (*energeia*) and his "mighty hand."[84] A similar vocabulary is then used to explain how the king forgot all about his plans with the help of the "manifest God" (*epiphanēs theos*).[85] The narrative culminates when the Jewish priest Eleazar calls on God to "reveal himself."[86] After he invokes the biblical miracles that struck down Pharaoh and Sennacherib, and those that saved the three Jews thrown into the fiery furnace by Nebuchadnezzar, as well as the prophets Jonas and Daniel, God opens the Gates of Heaven and two angels appear, visible to the king, the court, and the non-Jewish audience. They confuse the perpetrators, paralyze the king, and cause the elephants set to trample the Jews to turn on their handlers. Ptolemy recognizes God's power and rescinds his orders; the saved Jews celebrate the "wonder-making (*teratopoios*) God" and establish an annual commemoration.[87] The narrative, theological, and lexical parallels with the Greek accounts of the events included in the *Scroll* are obvious down to the rarest of vocabulary. While scholars who focus on these similarities usually try to decipher the relationship between the texts, what is important here is that the deliverance of the Jews in Alexandria seems to have had everything it needed to be included in the *Scroll*, except that it did not take place in Hasmonean territory.[88]

The story of the salvation of the Alexandrian Jews circulated in several versions. Flavius Josephus, writing at the end of the first century CE, gives a slightly different account in an apologetic text that has survived only in a Latin translation. The Jewish historian, however, subscribes to the Alexandrian interpretation: he calls a "divine manifestation" the "terrible apparition" which prevented the king—here Ptolemy VIII, who lived in the second century BCE—from harming the Jews. While Josephus may have learned of this episode during his visit to Egypt, he describes the annual commemoration of the

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81 On the date and composition of 3 Maccabees, see Johnson, *Historical Fictions and Hellenistic Jewish Identity*, 129.

82 3 Macc. 4:20–21.

83 A similar intervention is found in the Delian aretalogy of Serapis, written during the third century BCE: the god insured the building of his temple by making a document disappear and thus protected his unjustly incriminated priest. See Bricault, *Recueil des inscriptions concernant les cultes isiaques*, 194–198.

84 3 Macc. 5:8–13.

85 3 Macc. 5:28 and 35.

86 3 Macc. 6:9.

87 3 Macc. 6:32.

88 Alexander, "3 Maccabees, Hanukkah and Purim," 321–339.

deliverance as "well-known" (*noscuntur*), suggesting that this story may have travelled outside of Egypt to Judea.[89]

Another notorious commemoration of a miracle wrought for the Jews of Egypt during the Hellenistic period is conspicuously absent from the *Scroll*. It concerns the circumstances surrounding the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek as described by Philo in his *Life of Moses*. According to him, this endeavor was undertaken at the behest of King Ptolemy II (284–246 BCE), because of his "desire to grasp the legislation." The king turned to the "high priest and king of Judaea," who thought that "divine wisdom" (*theia epiphrosunē*) must have inspired the king.[90] Translators were then sent from Judaea to Alexandria and set to work on the island of Pharos, where a miracle occurred: all of them "interpret as if they were inspired" (*enthousiōntes proephēteuon*), translating each word in the same way, without any variation, "as if someone unseen had prompted" them.[91] Both the verbs "to interpret" (*prophēteuō*) and "to be inspired" (*enthousiazō*) express divine inspiration in Greek, in both Jewish and non-Jewish texts.[92] Philo then describes the annual commemoration of this miraculous translation, with many Jews and "others" (*heteroi*) gathering on Pharos to thank God for his gift.[93] Philo is not the first Jewish author from Egypt to recount the origins of the translation known as the Septuagint and the Ptolemaic dynasty's involvement in it, but he is the earliest witness to its miraculous interpretation.[94]

3 Maccabees and Philo's narratives can be read as apologies for the Jews of the Ptolemaic kingdom. As stated in Eleazar's prayer, the divine intervention and salvation of the Alexandrian Jews, as well as Ptolemy IV's ultimate recognition of the power of the Jewish God, provides religious legitimacy to the Jews who settled in Egypt.[95] Both texts emphasize the social, cultural, and political integration of the Jews into the Ptolemaic kingdom as well as their loyalty to their non-Jewish king. Philo's account is part of a eulogy for Ptolemy II, who "surpassed not only his contemporaries, but all who have arisen in the past, in all the qualities that make a good ruler" and whose actions are sanctioned by the miraculous translation.[96] The similarities between the Jewish Greek accounts of recent and contemporary miracles on behalf of the Jews, whether they occurred in Judea or in Egypt, testify to the rivalry between the Ptolemies and the Hasmoneans. The latter attempted to present themselves as rulers and advocates for all Jews, even those who lived in foreign lands and who were not their subjects, through narratives of divine intervention. This goal is explicitly stated in the second letter preceding the main narrative in the 2 Maccabees. Probably composed in pro-Hasmonean

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[89] Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.55.
[90] Philo, *Mos.* 2.29–32.
[91] Philo, *Mos*. 2.37.
[92] "To interpret" is the original meaning of the verb προφητεύω; see Liddell, Scott, and Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1539–1540.
[93] Philo, *Mos.* 2.42.
[94] See Let. Aris. 307–308.
[95] 3 Macc. 6:15 and 7:6.
[96] Philo, *Mos.* 2.29.

circles in 143/142 BCE, it was supposedly sent in 164 by "the people of Jerusalem and Judaea and the senate and Judas;"[97] Judas Maccabeus, the founder of the Hasmonean dynasty, is thus presented as the legitimate and authoritative representative of the Judean Jews. The apocryphal document is addressed to the "Jews of Egypt" and specifically to an eminent Jewish member of the Ptolemaic court, the philosopher Aristobulus, to persuade them to commemorate the Hasmonean rededication of the Jerusalem Temple, called "Hanukkah" in the *Scroll*. The purported authors of the letter argue for the validity of their invitation by recounting several divine interventions, including the death of the Seleucid king Antiochus IV, against whom Judas Maccabeus fought, and the purification of the Temple.[98]

The Hasmonean insistence that Jews from the Ptolemaic kingdom should celebrate one of the *Scroll*'s commemorations confirms that paradoxography was a tool of contemporary political competition, while the exclusion of the miracles that happened from the Jews of Egypt from the *Scroll*'s suggest that it was a pro-Hasmonean document.

6 Enduring Legitimation: From Herodian Additions to Rabbinic Transformations

While the *Scroll* probably originated in Hasmonean circles, the version that has come down to us is largely post-Hasmonean. As we have already seen, events that undeniably took place in the early Roman period, such as the death of Caligula, have been added. These occurred when Judea and various neighboring territories were ruled by the Herodian dynasty. This Herodian framework appears in some of the Greek accounts. A first candidate for a Herodian addition would be the beginning of a wall construction in Jerusalem (16 Adar).[99] Unlike the other two wall commemorations, the wording of this entry may indicate a construction project that was left unfinished. Josephus mentions several times that Herod's grandson, King Agrippa I, began to fortify a suburban area called Bezetha, but that this wall was not completed.[100] Since Josephus does not mention any miracle associated with this endeavor, its interpretation as a miraculous event comes solely from its inclusion in the *Scroll*, with the goal of portraying the king's actions as divinely sanctioned.

Another Herodian commemoration may be hidden in the mysterious rescue of the remnant of the scribes (17 Adar).[101] The name of the place where the "deliverance" (*purkan*) took place varies, but in the quotations from the *Scroll* in the Palestinian Talmud, it is spelled "Chalcis." This place had been conquered by the Hasmoneans and successively ruled by Herod, his son Philip the Tetrarch, and his grandsons Herod of Chalcis, Agrippa

97 Schwartz, *2 Maccabees*, 3–15 and 519–529.
98 2 Macc. 1:18 and 2:16–17.
99 *Megillat Ta'anit*, l.34.
100 Josephus, *B. J.* 2.218–219 and 5.147–155; *A. J.* 19.326–327.
101 *Megillat Ta'anit*, l.35.

I and Aristobulus of Chalcis.[102] Locating a miracle in Chalcis would have served as propaganda for the local Herodian rulers.

The 7 Kislev is perhaps the strongest candidate for a pro-Herodian commemoration: the scholia affirm that the day remembered Herod's death, although the *Scroll* only marks the day as "On the seventh of it [a festival]."[103] Recent studies of Herod's reign and its reception in Antiquity, however, have pointed to the unlikelihood of such a commemoration in the first and second centuries CE.[104] The interpretation of the 7 Kislev as an anti-Herodian commemoration may thus be the result of a reversal process: the scholiasts knew of its association with Herod, but the rabbinic and Christian reception of the king, which portrayed him as a villain, prevented them from considering – or admitting – that the event may have been celebrated by earlier Jews.[105] Unlike its medieval counterpart, however, late antique rabbinic literature was ambiguous about Herod. The same Talmudic passage that describes him as an adversary of terrifying cruelty also credits him with the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple, stating "One who has not seen Herod's building has never seen a beautiful building in his life."[106] According to Josephus, as noted above, the Herodian rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple was characterized by a miraculous atmosphere.[107] A distinctly paradoxographic view of the Herodian period is not unlikely, given the fact that Nicolaus of Damascus, Herod's court historian and Josephus' main source on his reign, wrote a paradoxographic treatise.[108]

While the existence of a Herodian version of the *Scroll* remains speculative, its present form is undoubtedly rabbinic. This late antique reworking is documented by Talmudic quotations and commentaries that supplement the contents of the *Scroll* with rich narrative extensions. This is in line with the development of the paradoxographic genre, which, from the second century CE onwards, moved towards more elaborate literary developments and bore similarities to contemporary fictional works.[109] Talmudic compilations explain some of the events in the *Scroll* by linking them to legal disputes between Jewish sects of the Hellenistic and early Roman periods.[110] Contemporary sources—primarily the Dead Sea Scrolls and the works of Josephus—attest that several schools of biblical exegesis were active in Judea at the time.[111] Based on their respective interpretations of the biblical texts, they had different traditions that influenced ritual practices as well as legal matters, and they occasionally clashed when they attempted to have their views enshrined in law. The Talmud and scholia attribute six of the *Scroll*'s

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102 y. *Ta'an.* 2:13 and Meg. 1.4.

103 Noam, "Megillat Ta'anit – The Scroll of Fasting," 343.

104 Attali, "Les fêtes nouvelles dans le judaïsme antique."

105 On this potential Herodian commemoration, see E. Parmentier and M. Attali, "Une fête juive à Rome: les 'Jours d'Hérode'," 45–33.

106 y. B. Bat. 4a cf. b. Sukkah 51b: [מֵימָיו] מִי שֶׁלֹּא רָאָה בִּנְיַן הוֹרְדוֹס, לֹא רָאָה בִּנְיָן נָאֶה.

107 See above, n62.

108 Photius, *Bibliotheca*, Codex 189.

109 See for instance Phlegon of Tralles, *Miracula.*

110 Mantel, "The Megillat Ta'anit and the Sects," 51–70.

111 Josephus, *B. J.* 2.162–166; *A. J.* 13.171–173 and 18.12–17; on these Jewish sects, see Mimouni, *Le judaïsme ancien du VI^e siècle avant notre ère au III^e siècle de notre ère*, 226–238.

commemorations to instances when either the "sages" or the Pharisees—two partially overlapping groups that the rabbis sometimes claim as their predecessors—[112] prevailed over the Sadducees or one of their subgroups, called the "Boethusians."[113] There is currently no consensus on the authenticity of these rabbinic etiologies: some scholars accept that rabbinic commemorations may have been included in the *Scroll*; others argue that the rabbis altered the meaning of earlier commemorations without creating any new ones.[114] In some cases, however, there are clear signs of rabbinic reinterpretation.

For instance, the Babylonian Talmud quotes the *Scroll*'s entry "On the 24 [Av] of it we returned to our law"[115] and associates it with a different date: 24 Tevet (one manuscript renders the 28 Av).[116] The commemoration is said to have originated in a dispute over inheritance laws with the Sadducees. According to this Talmudic passage, the Sadducees held that, if a man died and left behind a daughter and a granddaughter of a son who had already died, both the daughter and the granddaughter should inherit. However, they were confronted by Yonatan ben Zakkai, who is said to have been active in the first century CE and to have assumed some of the authority of the former high priest after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE.[117] Ben Zakkai argued that this Sadducean interpretation had no biblical basis and cited a biblical verse to claim that only the granddaughter should inherit, because men, even dead ones, prevail over women.[118] The passage concludes that "they [the sages] were victorious over them [the Sadducees], and they established that day as a festival (*yom tov*)."[119] Regardless of the historical circumstances that could have sparked such a debate, scholars agree that this etiology is a rabbinic invention, designed to appropriate a commemoration that originally had nothing to do with them; it was established to celebrate a legislative restoration under the Hasmoneans, as mentioned in one of the scholia.[120]

The rabbinic reworking of the *Scroll* is even more obvious when the line "On 3 Tishri the mention was cancelled from the documents" is quoted.[121] The Aramaic word used for the "document" (*shetar*) indicates that they were legal in nature, and that the "mention" (*adekārāh*) was part of a dating formula. Scholars agree that this commemoration originally refers to the year 143/142 BCE when Judean deeds and contracts began to be dated according to the Hasmonean rule and ceased to mention the Seleucid kings, an event recounted by both the 2 Maccabees and Josephus.[122] While the Talmudic explanation preserves the Hasmonean involvement in this event, it completely alters its

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112 Rivkin, "Defining the Pharisees," 205–249.

113 On the Boethusians in the Talmud, see Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia*, 168–171 and 248, n70–72.

114 Noam, "Megillat Ta'anit – The Scroll of Fasting," 346–347.

115 Noam, "Megillat Ta'anit – The Scroll of Fasting," 343.

116 b. B. Bat. 115b–116a.

117 See Neusner, *A Life of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai*.

118 Gen. 36:20–24.

119 b. B. Bat. 116a: וְנִצְחוּם, וְאוֹתוֹ הַיּוֹם עֲשָׂאוּהוּ יוֹם טוֹב.

120 Bogaert, "Le 'rouleau' de Judith," 169–171.

121 *Megillat Ta'anit,* l.18: בתלתא בתשרי אתנטלת אדכרתא מן שטרא.

122 1 Macc. 13:41, cf. Flavius Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae* 13.214.

unfolding in order to credit the "sages" with the act deemed worthy of commemoration.[123] Based on the semantic evolution of the word *adekārāh,* which in Late Antiquity implied the use of the divine name, the rabbinic story states that when the Hasmoneans conquered "the Greek kingdom"—the Seleucid dynasty—they introduced a new dating formula that read: "In such and such a year of Yohanan the high priest of the most high God."[124] The "sages" disapproved of this, for when the documents bearing the word "God" became obsolete, they were thrown in the trash. They abolished the dating formula and made the day into a "festival." Richard Kalmin has demonstrated the anomalous nature of this etiology, the only one now associated with the *Scroll*, which supposedly commemorates the overthrow of a consequence of the Hasmonean victory over the Seleucids.[125] The Talmudic redaction modified the etiology to fit rabbinic theology.

These two examples show how and why the Talmudic editors appropriated earlier Jewish paradoxographic works. They altered some of the etiologies of the commemorations by inserting themselves—either as a group or through prominent rabbinic figures—to support their claim to religious and social authority over Jewish communities. However, when they defined a commemoration as celebration of their own victory over religious rivals, they did not feel the need to specify that a miracle had occurred, in contrast to earlier Greek accounts that elaborated on such miracles with explicit theological statements and innovative vocabulary. By Late Antiquity, the paradoxographic framework of the *Scroll* had become so imbued with legitimizing power that it could function without the inclusion of an account of an actual miracle. The miraculous dimension of Talmudic etiological narratives is in many cases implicit and residual. In the story of Ben Zakkai's dispute with the Sadducees, it is based on the rabbinic hero's biblical knowledge and his alleged rhetorical skills. There is no miracle involved in the rabbinic story of the dating formula, an incongruity noted by Rashi, who struggled to explain it.[126] For the Talmudic editors, then, the content of paradoxography had become much less important than its form. This evolution is also evidenced by the fact that the Talmudic additions to the *Scroll* supplemented the one paradoxographic criterion that was absent from earlier Jewish works: a focus on documentation through explicit citation of sources. The inclusion of earlier paradoxographic fragments in rabbinic compilations was adapted to fit the Talmudic structure, in which the legitimacy of rulings rests on attributing them to chronological series of authoritative figures, going from the most recent to the earliest possible, depending on the importance of the issue and the flimsiness of the biblical basis.

123 b. Rosh Hash. 18b.

124 b. Rosh Hash. 18b: בִּשְׁנַת כָּךְ וְכָךְ לְיוֹחָנָן כֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל לְאֵל עֶלְיוֹן.

125 Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia*, 67–72.

126 Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia*, 69–70.

7 Conclusion

Despite its peculiarities, the Jewish *Scroll of Fasts* is representative of the definition and development of the paradoxographic genre in Antiquity. It is a largely non-narrative anthology of mostly geographically located wonders. Many of the events included had previously been described in much more detailed accounts that argued for their miraculous quality and interpreted them as the result of divine intervention. Such interpretations were widespread in Hellenistic and early Roman literature, as evidenced by the emergence of the aretalogical genre. The fact that the same potentially innocuous events were simultaneously interpreted as miracles by several Jewish authors who were unfamiliar with each other's works suggests that the *Scroll* was not the only available Jewish work of this kind. In fact, it represents an intermediate stage in the development of ancient Jewish paradoxography, which evolved in Late Antiquity through elaborate narrative extensions, in line with its non-Jewish counterparts. The *Scroll* was consistently used as a legitimizing tool by groups claiming authority over Jewish communities, illustrating how paradoxography was a means of competition.

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