

# Queen Alexandra was *not* the widow of Judah Aristobulus I

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## Abstract

This article assesses the state of the question on the identity of Alexandra, Queen of Judea, in the period before her regency. Currently, outside of a few select publications, the field identifies Alexandra with the widow of Judah Aristobulus I. The following argument demonstrates that Queen Alexandra cannot have been married to Aristobulus, having had a child with her husband Alexander Jannaeus before the death of Aristobulus. This argument has been previously presented in scholarship but has not received much attention, likely due to the focus of previous arguments being on the plausibility of a Levirate marriage between Alexandra and Jannaeus. This article seeks to redress this imbalance and clearly state the case against an ongoing misidentification.

## Keywords

Alexander Jannaeus, Alexandra Salome, Hasmoneans, Josephus, Levirate marriage, queens

Queen (Salome) Alexandra ruled over the Hasmonean kingdom after the death of her husband, Alexander Jannaeus, in 76 B.C.E.<sup>1</sup> Alexandra and Jannaeus were both members of the Hasmonean dynasty, a family that had risen to prominence in the 160s B.C.E. After a period of conflict with Seleucid authorities, the family grew in power, installing the eldest living male as the high priest of the Jerusalem Temple and eventually taking on the title of “king.” We can begin Alexandra’s story with the end of her father-in-law’s long supremacy. When John Hyrcanus I died in c. 104 B.C.E., the eldest of his five sons,

1. Josephus writes about this period of history in both his *Jewish War* and his *Antiquities of the Jews*, thereby providing historians with a brief overview of key moments in Alexandra’s life.

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Aristobulus I, seized power and, according to Josephus, ruled violently. Aristobulus imprisoned his mother (to whom his father had left the throne) and three of his brothers, including Jannaeus. Convinced by “the Queen” that his beloved brother, Antigonus, was planning to usurp his throne, Aristobulus had him killed. Shortly thereafter, only a year after taking power, Aristobulus also died. Josephus reports that his widow, Salina, freed the imprisoned brother Jannaeus and helped him to the throne. After the ascension of Jannaeus, however, we never hear of her again. Unlike Aristobulus, whose reign was short and tumultuous, Jannaeus ruled for twenty-seven years. On his deathbed, he left instructions for his wife, Alexandra, to take the throne, rather than their eldest son, Hyrcanus II. Alexandra would go on to rule in her own right for another nine years, dying in 67 B.C.E. Unfortunately, she left the kingdom divided, torn between the rivalry of her two sons, Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II. This conflict would eventually contribute to the downfall of the Hasmonean family from prominence in Judean political life.

Tracing the plain lines of this history as Josephus records it, we find two prominent women: Aristobulus’ widow, Salina, who plotted against Antigonus (*Ant.* 13.308) and made Jannaeus king (*Ant.* 13.320); and Jannaeus’ widow, Alexandra, who reigned after his death (*Ant.* 13.407). In reception and related scholarship, however, these two women have long been identified as one and the same. Such an identification would naturally suggest that Salina married Jannaeus after Aristobulus died, thereby maintaining her queenship across both brothers’ reigns. But how much support is there for this identification? And how would this conflation impact our reading of Josephus?

In this article, we provide a critical overview and reappraisal of scholarship that discusses Alexandra’s identity and activity before regency. The state of the field outside of a select few scholars has been to identify Salina with Alexandra. The widespread impact of this is apparent not just in scholarly literature but also in almost any summary of Alexandra. We will argue that this is a problem, and a pervasive one. If Salina (the widow of Aristobulus I) and Alexandra (the widow of Jannaeus) were, in fact, the same person (hereafter “Salina/Alexandra”), contradictions are introduced into Josephus’ record, which must then be explained. When read as two separate people, there are no such contradictions. Therefore, we contend that the simpler explanation is the most likely: that these women were two individuals. This conclusion has been previously presented in a handful of published articles and books, most notably by Tal Ilan in her 1993 article, “Queen Salamzion Alexandra and Judas Aristobulus I’s Widow: Did Jannaeus Alexander Contract a Levirate Marriage?” (which we will discuss). Still, such arguments have not made an impact in broader scholarship (especially in English-language scholarship).<sup>2</sup>

2. Tal Ilan (“Queen Salamzion Alexandra and Judas Aristobulus I’s Widow: Did Jannaeus Alexander Contract a Levirate Marriage?” *JSJ* 24 [1993]: 181–90) makes the case explicit. This article was revised and reprinted in Tal Ilan, *Silencing the Queen: The Literary Histories of Shelamzion and Other Jewish Women*, TSAJ 115 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 47–60, and especially 50–58. Ilan later reiterates this position but without drawing attention to it; Tal Ilan, “Josephus on Women,” in *A Companion to Josephus*, ed. Honora Howell Chapman and Zuleika Rodgers (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 210–21, 214. Julia Wilker (“Hasmonean Women,” in *The Routledge Companion to Women and the Monarchy in the Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Elizabeth D. Carney and Sabine Müller [London: Routledge, 2021], 226) makes a succinct and excellent case that Salina and Alexandra cannot be the same person. Joseph Scales and Cat Quine (“Athaliah and Alexandra: Gender and

We suggest that Ilan's centering of the second-order question of Levirate marriage is a distraction, likely pulling focus away from the crux of the argument. Most engagement with Ilan's contribution had sidelined the central issue of identification. Consequently, those who engage with Ilan's argument (and many do not), reject it—a position we will argue is often unconvincing. We offer that the case for the separation of Alexandra and Salina must be reiterated; the argument, while published and plain since at least the nineteenth century, has not been won. The consistently reiterated conflation of these two women as the same person has resulted in misconceptions about Alexandra, women and marriage practices in antiquity, and Judean queenship.

Some preliminary statements are in order at this point. First, the chronology of Josephus has been subject to some critique and debate. This issue is largely irrelevant to the ongoing discussion but is worth signposting here. That Josephus' dates may need to be revised by a single year does not really change the general argument below. Second, the references to Alexandra in other documents of the Dead Sea Scrolls and early rabbinic literature offer nothing of substance to this argument; they do not provide any details that would confirm or discount any of the argument below. The fact that we may be able to reconstruct Alexandra as having the same name as Salina via the references to her reign in documents of the Dead Sea Scrolls does not affect this argument in any substantive way. Third, while it is well-established that Josephus does not necessarily provide a suitable window into this period of history, given his complicated relationship with his sources, and the changing image of Alexandra between his *War* and *Antiquities*, this does not mean that we can uncritically alter dates or contextual information he provides in order to suit an identification of Alexandra with Salina.

## **Evidence in favor of Alexandra and Salina as two separate individuals**

From the outset, it should be acknowledged that while, historically, we are dealing with two individuals, from Josephus' accounts, we have, in fact, four characters. There are

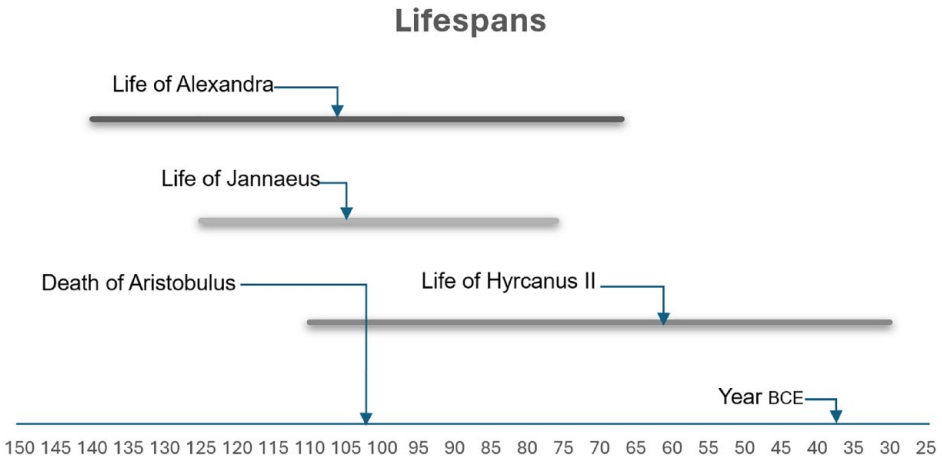
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Queenship in Josephus," *JAJ* 11 [2020]: 236, n.12) draw attention to the distinction between Salina and Alexandra, linking the tendency to consider queens only in isolation as a marginalizing strategy around female power in ancient Judea (246–48). A tendency to overlook the case made against the identification of Salina with Alexandra has been also briefly noted by Maureen Attali, "Jewish Female Military Leadership Erased: The Evolution of Shelamzion Alexandra and Judith's Representations from Antiquity until Today," *Lectio Difficilior*, August 2023, <https://www.lectio.unibe.ch/en/archive/strong-ausgabe-01-2023-strong-strong-maureen-attali-strong-jewish-female-military-leadership-erased-the-evolution-of-shelamzion-alexandra-and-judith-s-representations-from-antiquity-until-today.html>. Examples of the same tendency to conflate these two women can be seen in non-English-language scholarship: Ernst Baltrusch, "Königin Salome Alexandra (76-67 v. Chr.) und die Verfassung des hasmonäischen Staates," *Historia* 50 (2001): 172; Christiane Saulnier, "L'ainé et le porphyrogénète: Recherche Chronologique Sur Hyrkan II et Aristobule II," *RB* 97 (1990): 54–62; Rolf Strootman, "Strijd om Jeruzalem: De tijd van de Hasmoneeën, ca. 170-37 v.Chr.," in *Jeruzalem, Jeroesjalajiem, Al-Quds: De heilige stad door de eeuwen heen*, ed. Josephine van den Bent and Thomas Hart, Zenobia 7 (Hilversum: Verloren, 2020), 79–95, 89.

important distinctions to be made between the presentations of both Alexandra and Salina in *War* and *Antiquities*. Rather than seeing *Antiquities* as an expansion on two historical figures introduced in *War*, it is better to view the appearances of Alexandra and Salina in *Antiquities* as the introduction of two new characters. Even though *Antiquities* and *War* have the same author, in the interval between writing these two texts, and in his larger purposes in writing such works, Josephus came to portray some historical figures differently, especially Alexandra.<sup>3</sup> This is understandable, given his larger purposes: in *War*, Josephus contrived to show the outbreak of the first Jewish war (c. 66–70 C.E.) as a result of *stasis* (among other things), whereas in *Antiquities*, Josephus' aims are much more difficult to pin to a pithy summation. We can note, however, that particularly in *Antiquities*, Josephus has been shown to use characters as exemplars for the moral development of his audience.<sup>4</sup>

This focus on character may readily explain why Alexandra is given more space in *Antiquities* than in *War*. We also find that events are adapted to the changed narrative purpose. For example, in *Antiquities* 13.398–404, Jannaeus advises Alexandra on how she should begin her reign, including that she should side with Pharisees. In *War*, there is no such death-bed advice scene or any indication that Alexandra undertook advice from the Pharisees at the behest of Alexander. Moreover, a powerful woman would provide ready opportunity for Josephus to instruct his readers with moral lessons from her choices. Etko Liebowitz suggests that in *War*, Alexandra is a much more positive character (for example, *War* 1.108, 112, 116, although a negative comment is made in *War* 1.111), whereas by the time he wrote *Antiquities*, Josephus adapted her portrayal to cohere with what Liebowitz frames as negative Roman perspectives of women in power (for example, *Ant.* 13.409, 430–432).<sup>5</sup> That Alexandra comes off less-well in *Antiquities* is a reasonable framing of these differences in portrayal, although in some instances, Josephus did enhance her role in what could be viewed as a positive portrayal.<sup>6</sup>

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3. On the differences in presentation of Alexandra between *War* and *Antiquities*, see Scales and Quine, "Athaliah and Alexandra," 236–38, 241–43, 244–46. See also the introductory comments about Josephus' narratives about Alexandra in Kenneth Atkinson, *Queen Salome: Jerusalem's Warrior Monarch of the First Century B.C.E.* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012), 11–15. Atkinson is overly critical of Josephus' capabilities as an author here, but his cautions with regard to reading Josephus uncritically should be noted. Regarding notable differences in approach between *War* and *Antiquities*, see David R. Edwards, *In the Court of the Gentiles: Narrative, Exemplarity, and Scriptural Adaptation in the Court-Tales of Flavius Josephus*, JSJSup 209 (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 15; Ari Finkelstein, "Fitting a Square Peg into a Round Hole: Categorizing Works of Jewish Historiography of the Second Temple Period," *JSJ* 49 (2018): 320–21.
  4. See discussions of Josephus' authorial purposes in Edwards, *Court of the Gentiles*, 17; Steve Mason, "Of Despots, Diadems and *Diadochoi*: Josephus and Flavian Politics," in *Writing Politics in Imperial Rome*, ed. W. J. Dominik, J. Garthwaite, and P. A. Roche, Brill's Companions to Classical Studies (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 323–49.
  5. Etko Liebowitz, "Josephus's Ambivalent Attitude towards Women and Power: The Case of Queen Alexandra," *JAJ* 6 (2015): 187–88.
  6. See further, Scales and Quine, "Athaliah and Alexandra," 246–47.



**Figure 1.**  
Lifespans of Alexandra, Jannaeus, and Hyrcanus II.

The image of the widow of Aristobulus (not named here as “Salina” or anything else) is far more consistent, though quite a thin character in both texts. Aristobulus’ queen is first mentioned (*War* 1.76) in connection with a pre-existing plot against his brother, Antigonus (courtiers already conspiring in *War* 1.72). This unnamed queen only appears again once more in *War* 1.85 where she releases Jannaeus to place him on the throne. This is not significantly different from *Antiquities*, where Aristobulus’ queen first appears (in *Ant.* 13.308) only after the initial plot has begun (*Ant.* 13.305), but the emphasis has changed. Whereas in *War*, it is the queen who joins with the conspirators (“the queen concerted with the conspirators a very crafty plot”), here in *Antiquities*, they join her (“the queen and the men who were plotting with her”).<sup>7</sup> She is once again mentioned upon Aristobulus’ death as releasing and elevating Jannaeus, and here, only in *Antiquities* 13.320, she is named as Salina, with some variations in the manuscript tradition (discussed further below), but also with the Greek name Alexandra.

To make the case that Alexandra (Jannaeus’ wife) was not the widow of Aristobulus, one only needs to consult Josephus’ *Antiquities*. The above timeline of lifespans (Figure 1) relevant to this proposal is drawn from *Antiquities*.<sup>8</sup> The dates of birth are calculated roughly (to within one year) from the age at death recorded by Josephus. The method of calculation is included in Table 1.

7. Translations from Josephus, *The Jewish War, Volume I: Books 1–2*, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray, LCL 203 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), 36–37 and Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities, Volume V: Books 12–13*, trans. Ralph Marcus, LCL 365 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1943), 382–83.

8. It should be noted that the LCL editions of *Jewish War* are dated to one year earlier. There is some discussion about this, but for the purposes of this article, they are unnecessary to go into.

**Table 1.** Estimations of lifespan.

Person	Birthdate	Information required to determine lifespan estimations
Alexandra [Salome]	c. 140 B.C.E.	Reported to have died aged 73 in 67 B.C.E. <sup>9</sup>
Alexander Jannaeus	c. 125 B.C.E.	Reported to have died aged 49 in 76 B.C.E. <sup>10</sup>
Hyrchanus II	c. 110 B.C.E.	Executed aged 81 in 30 B.C.E. <sup>11</sup>

As can be seen, Josephus provides enough information to estimate birthdates for Alexandra, Jannaeus, and their eldest child, Hyrcanus II. Following this, we can determine that Jannaeus would have been approximately fourteen years old and Alexandra twenty-nine when they had Hyrcanus.<sup>12</sup> Regardless of Jannaeus' young fatherhood, Hyrcanus' parentage is not in doubt. Josephus makes it clear on a few occasions: when recording Alexandra's final conversation with Jannaeus (*Ant.* 13.399–400); when outlining the events immediately following Jannaeus' death, wherein Hyrcanus II and his younger brother, Aristobulus II, are both named as sons of [Alexander] Jannaeus (*Ant.* 13.407; cf. *War* 1.109); and in a later summary of Hyrcanus' life, where he is identified as son of Alexandra (*Ant.* 15.179). All that being said, it is the birth year of Hyrcanus that is of key importance, for this is where the primary issue of a conflated identification emerges: Aristobulus dies in 103 B.C.E., roughly seven years *after* Hyrcanus is born (c. 110 B.C.E.). Hyrcanus' birth establishes, beyond reasonable doubt, that Alexandra and Jannaeus were intimate partners and likely married around 110 B.C.E. Thus, Alexandra could not have been married to Aristobulus at the time of his death. If one wishes to

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9. *Ant.* 13.430 (Marcus, LCL 365) reads: "She died, having reigned nine years and having lived seventy-three years in all." Her death is noted in *War* 1.119, but her age is not given.
10. *Ant.* 13.404: "He died, after reigning twenty-seven years, at the age of forty-nine" (Marcus, LCL 365). Here, note that the Greek reads βιώσας δ'ένδς δέοντα πενήχοντα although Codex Palatinus includes ἐν καὶ before "fifty" to suggest that Alexander was 51 rather than 49. His death is noted in *War* 1.106, but his age is not given. Benedikt Niese's critical text (*Antiquitatum Iudaicarum Libri XI–XV*, vol. 3 of *Flavii Iosephi Opera* [Berlin: Weidmann, 1892], 227) differs here, preferring the minority reading βιώσας δ'ἐν καὶ πενήχοντα.
11. *Ant.* 15.178 (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities, Volume VI: Books 14–15*, trans. Ralph Marcus and Allen Wikgren, LCL 489 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1943], 340–41): "He was at this time eighty-one years old." His death does not appear to be reported in *War*. Jan Willem van Henten translates this passage as "somewhat more than eighty," drawing attention to possible corruptions in the manuscript tradition and suggesting that perhaps Josephus thought Hyrcanus had died a few years into his eighties; Jan Willem van Henten, *Judean Antiquities 15*, vol. 7b of *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*, ed. Steve Mason (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 118 n.1046.
12. This age difference is not a problem. There are notable examples from antiquity through to modernity. Cleopatra VII Thea Philopator was eight years older than her brother/husband Ptolemy XIII Theos Philopator, and then around ten years older than her second brother/husband, Ptolemy XIV Philopator. Sir John Woodville (b. c. 1445) married Katherine Neville, Duchess of Norfolk (b. 1397), 48 years his senior. Edward IV (b. 1442) was married to Elizabeth Woodville, who was 5 years older than him. Benjamin Disraeli (b. 1804) was 12 years younger than his wife, Mary Anne Evans (b. 1792).



reconstruct this history in any other fashion, then one has to discount key information provided by Josephus and reiterated here.

There is no inherent reason why any element of Josephus' narrative should be rejected over any other. Yet, the manuscript tradition itself demonstrates some confusion and surely contributes to the conflation of Salina and Alexandra. In Josephus' work, he nowhere refers to Alexandra, wife of Jannaeus, as Salome (or Salina), a name she carries in other texts. As mentioned above, Aristobulus' wife is referred to simply as "the queen" ("βασιλίσσα," *War* 1.76; *Ant.* 13.308), save for one passage: The wife (γυνή) of Aristobulus is given a name in *Antiquities* 13.320.<sup>13</sup> There, Josephus writes that her name was Salina, and she was called by the Greeks "Alexandra." Without this passage, there would be no clear grounds to associate the wife of Aristobulus with Alexandra. Benedikt Niese's critical edition uses Σαλίνα in *Antiquities* 13.320, favoring the reading of the earliest major manuscripts, such as Codex Vaticanus Palatinus (dated to the tenth century).<sup>14</sup> Critically, in the commonly available English language translation by William Whiston, Salome rather than Salina is used, stemming from a divergent manuscript tradition.<sup>15</sup> Whichever name one chooses in this passage, it clearly applies to Aristobulus' widow. We have chosen to follow Niese in using Salina.

It is perhaps notable that Josephus only uses βασιλίσσα (referring to "queen") to describe the wife of Aristobulus, whereas for Alexandra, he also uses βασιλείας (referring to "sovereign" or "sovereign power") on occasion. Alexandra is called a βασιλείας in *Antiquities* 13.409 (cf. references to Alexandra's royal power and ruling in *Ant.* 13.407, 414, 417, 430), as well as in Palatinus' *Antiquities* 13.410 (a minority reading followed by Niese, but not the Loeb Classical Library edition). Alexandra is also called "the wife of the king" in *Antiquities* 13.409 (ἡ γυνή τῆς βασιλείας). She is a βασιλίσσα before Jannaeus' death (*Ant.* 13.399), and again in the majority of major codices in *Antiquities* 13.410, 419, 422, 425 (omitted in Codex Laurentianus), 428, 430 and in 14.1. In addition, Codex Vaticanus Graecus 147 uses βασιλίσσα for Alexandra in *Antiquities* 13.414. Josephus' changing terminology does seem to indicate that he is following a change in Alexandra's official status in the Hasmonean household over the course of her life—though this may be an over-reading. Still, we get no such deviation in roles or titles for the widow of Aristobulus (Salina).

Returning to the question of Alexandra's name, in rabbinic texts about the wife of Jannaeus, the Hebrew name אַחַזְרָבֶּלֶט or אַחַזְרָבֶּלֶשׁ is used rather than "Alexandra." As Ilan details, this Hebrew name likely relates to Salome (and perhaps also Salina). Some later

13. In the parallel passage in *War*, Josephus writes only that the wife of the king released Jannaeus (λύσασσας δ' ἡ γυνή τοὺς ἀδελφούς αὐτοῦ βασιλέα, *War* 1.85).

14. Niese, *Antiquitatum Iudaicarum*, 210 n.25. For the manuscript itself, see Pal.gr.14 fol.123r, col. 1, line 18, [https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Pal.gr.14](https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Pal.gr.14).

15. William Whiston, *The Genuine Works of Flavius Josephus*, vol. 3 (Bridgeport, CT: M. Sherman, 1828), 109. Atkinson considers the divergent manuscript tradition as a result of an intentional "scribal change to the text." Kenneth Atkinson, *A History of the Hasmonean State: Josephus and Beyond*, Jewish and Christian Texts (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 85 n.29. See also footnote 19 below.

Christian texts also apply the name “Salome” to the wife of Jannaeus.<sup>16</sup> The combination of these names from different source traditions has led to a common use of “Salome Alexandra” as the full name of Jannaeus’ wife. When that name is read with a preference for those divergent manuscripts of Josephus which use Salome rather than Salina when naming the widow of Aristobulus (*Ant.* 13.320; as favored by Whiston), it further contributes to conflation. Even as the conflation may easily be made on first sight, however, or even if they did actually both carry the same name, it does not mean they were the same woman.

Already, by 1864, Frederic Madden presented a similar case, determining that Salina and Alexandra must have been different women.<sup>17</sup> While his observation was noted, not least by the editors and translators of the Josephus Loeb Classical Library (LCL) editions, it was not accepted. The field largely ignored his observation, and only in 1993 did Ilan re-visit the argument. As introduced above, Ilan first explains that these two women could feasibly have similar, if not the same, name: Salome and Salina are Greek names that likely both derive from the same Hebrew name, Shelamzion.<sup>18</sup> Salome as the name for Alexandra derives not from Josephus himself (unless the argument that Salina was Alexandra is accepted and the manuscripts which record her name as Salome are also prioritized).<sup>19</sup> Ilan prefaces this with a discussion on Levirate marriage, which was, and

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16. Liebowitz (“Josephus’s Ambivalent Attitude,” 184–85 n.14) suggests that the source of the confusion between the two Alexandras was Eusebius, in his chronicle (2.135). However, this is only preserved in the much later Armenian tradition, and so, it may not be the earliest source of this conflation. In any case, it is understandable that the similarity of the two names created the impression that these women were the same. As it appears in the Armenian-Latin-Greek edition, itself principally created from Armenian texts, the Latin employs “Mesalina” while the Greek is *Σααλίνα* as an alternative name for the Alexandra who succeeded Jannaeus; Jean-Baptiste Aucher, ed., *Eusebii Pamphili Caesariensis Episcopi: Chronicon bipartitum. Pars I, Historico-Chronographica* (Ancyra: Venetiis, 1818), 193. Cf. the comments in Attali, “Jewish Female Military Leadership,” 16. Ilan (*Silencing the Queen*, 53–54) provides a table of the names for both Alexandra and Salina found in Greek and Hebrew sources, showing the general lack of attestation to Aristobulus’ widow.
17. Frederic W. Madden, *History of Jewish Coinage and of Money in the Old and New Testament* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1864), 71 n.9. Madden is cited in LCL 365 as “one of the few scholars who distinguish between the two queens” (Marcus, LCL 365, 388–89 n.a). Yet Madden’s argument is not dealt with here. Only in LCL 489 is the fact of Hyrcanus’ likely birth around 110 B.C.E. raised, only for it to be dismissed on the basis of the identification of Salina with Alexandra (Marcus and Wikgren, LCL 489, 341 n.c).
18. Ilan, “Queen Salamzion,” 183–86. In later work, Ilan refined the likely Hebrew name from “Salamzion” to “Shelamzion” and also distinguished between the two names Salome and Shelamzion; Ilan, *Silencing the Queen*, 35, 55–56.
19. Atkinson, *Hasmonean State*, 134. For the history of Alexandra’s given Hebrew name, see Ilan (“Salamzion,” 185; cf. Ilan, *Silencing the Queen*, 52–53), who suggests that the change from Salina to Salome in such manuscripts can be attributed to scribal unfamiliarity with the uncommon name Salina, who then made the change to the much more common Salome. See also Marcus Jastrow, “שֶׁלְמִזְיוֹן, שֶׁלְמִצָּה,” *A Dictionary of the Targumin, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (London: Luzac, 1903), 2:1587; Atkinson, *Hasmonean State*, 85; Jodi Magness, *Masada: From Jewish Revolt to Modern Myth* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 215 n.65.



remains, the core topic of argument around Alexandra's succession.<sup>20</sup> Should Jannaeus have married his elder brother's widow, he would have entered into a Levirate marriage, whereby the younger brother of a deceased elder brother takes the elder brother's widow as his own wife. Ilan discusses the mechanics of how this could have happened (as do several others), but we maintain that the "how" of a non-event is unnecessary.

Finally, Ilan identifies three historical possibilities: (1) Hyrcanus was not the son of Alexandra and Jannaeus, rather only one of them was his parent; (2) Josephus is incorrect about Hyrcanus' age, and consequently, he was born later than 110 B.C.E.; or (3) Alexandra cannot be Salina.<sup>21</sup> Regarding possibility (1), there is no evidence in favor of this suggestion, although, as will be discussed below, some scholars have advocated for this position. For possibility (2), Ilan is surely correct in stating that "it is methodologically unsound to discard one piece of information found in the sources because it does not fit a theory."<sup>22</sup> Still, this unsound method appears in the bulk of assessments before Ilan published her argument, and it has continued in further contributions since (which shall also be discussed below). In discounting possibilities (1) and (2), as Ilan is right to do, we are left with possibility (3). Unfortunately, Ilan seems to have buried the lead, placing the strongest evidence—the issue of Hyrcanus' birth years prior to Aristobulus' death—beneath weaker arguments (on naming and Levirate marriage).<sup>23</sup> Perhaps this is why it has not prevented continued creative reimagining of Hasmonean history.

In his 2016 book, *A History of the Hasmonean State*, Kenneth Atkinson focusses specifically on the Levirate marriage debate to build the case that Alexandra and Salina were not the same person. In so doing, he lists four reasons why Alexandra and Jannaeus "could not have engaged in a Levirate marriage." These reasons are: (1) that there is no textual attestation to such a marriage; (2) Philo suggests that a high priest had to marry a virgin; if he had married a widow, then he could not have then ascended to the high priesthood (*Spec. Laws* 1.110–111); (3) difficulties with Hyrcanus' parentage, which will be fully discussed below; and (4) Josephus writes that Salina was married to Aristobulus, but never claims she was married to Jannaeus, as could be expected.<sup>24</sup> As we have made the argument, reason (3) is perhaps the most compelling one. Atkinson writes that "Josephus always refers to Hyrcanus II as the son of Alexandra and Alexander Jannaeus. If she had entered a Levirate marriage, Hyrcanus II would have been the legal son of Aristobulus and Alexandra."<sup>25</sup> Atkinson's assessment of the issues with the Levirate marriage debate is correct. For those arguing for Levirate marriage, they must contend with the fact that Josephus never names Aristobulus as Hyrcanus' father. Still,

20. Ilan, "Queen Salamzion," 182.

21. Ilan, "Queen Salamzion," 187. Ilan draws attention to scholars who have held that Hyrcanus' age is incorrect. These scholars (namely I. M. Jost in particular) tend to also suggest that Alexandra was also younger than presented, given that she would have given birth to Hyrcanus, and her other children, aged 37 and older, should she have been born around 140 B.C.E. Ilan explicitly leaves the question of why Jannaeus, aged fourteen, married Alexandra in her late twenties aside. The age gap might strike us as unusual, but does not necessarily require an explanation.

22. Ilan, "Queen Salamzion," 188.

23. This order of argument is reversed in Ilan, *Silencing the Queen*, 50–54.

24. Atkinson, *Hasmonean State*, 86.

25. Atkinson, *Hasmonean State*, 86.

as we assert throughout, Levirate marriage is a side issue, and Atkinson fails to note the central issue of Hyrcanus' birth year.

## The prevailing assumption Salina was Alexandra [Salome]

As we have established above, these two women cannot have been the same person, but many scholars have continued to identify Salina/Alexandra. In doing so, they must account for the birthdate of Hyrcanus. As we will discuss, there are those who do not account for this. For those who do, they generally amend the ages Josephus records. Hyrcanus and/or Alexandra are aged down, thus moving the beginning of intimate relations between Alexandra and Jannaeus to a time after the death of Aristobulus. These arguments typically presuppose Alexandra's marriage to Aristobulus and, from there, suspect elements of Josephus' testimony, adding weight to an argument that has no textual support. Our contention is not that a case cannot be made in favor of an identification of these two women as one, but that no scholar we have come across does so by clearly discounting sufficient evidence or clearly demonstrating why only certain details in Josephus are incorrect, while others remain reliable. We will first discuss arguments against Josephus' recorded ages, presenting the case that none of these is satisfactory. We will then discuss additional scholarship that presents Alexandra as having been the widow of Aristobulus, which does not then explain how Hyrcanus II could be born to Alexandra and Jannaeus around 110 B.C.E.

## Arguments against Hyrcanus' estimated birthdate

Ilan's "possibility (2)"—that Josephus is incorrect about Hyrcanus' age—has a long history of advocates. Before discussing arguments in favor of revising Hyrcanus' age, we should first note that Niese's work offers no text-critical basis for such revision. The only element to note is that some manuscripts use ἐνδς in the place of ἐντῶ, indicating some disagreement over whether Hyrcanus was in the region of eighty (most likely older) or, more precisely, eighty-one when he died.<sup>26</sup> Further work on additional Josephus manuscripts may provide evidence against this, but as the critical edition and principal manuscript evidence stands, there is no text-critical reason to radically alter such an age, and consequently, Hyrcanus' rough birthdate. Recognizing that the birth of Hyrcanus may have taken place as early as 111 B.C.E. causes an irreconcilable problem for those who wish to identify Alexandra with Salina.

Beginning in the early nineteenth century at least, a number of scholars have attempted to resolve the problems introduced into the text when identifying Salina/Alexandra by arguing that Hyrcanus could not have been born before Aristobulus' death in 103 B.C.E.<sup>27</sup>

26. Niese, *Antiquitatum Iudaicarum*, 363 n.23–24. See also van Henten's comments above in footnote 11.

27. Ilan documents as far back as Isaak Markus Jost's *Geschichte der Israeliten seit den Zeit der Maccabaer*, vol. 1 (Schlesinger: Berlin, 1820), wherein this argument is made; Ilan "Queen Salamzion," 187 n.20. Subsequently, Ilan (*Silencing the Queen*, 49) refers to Johann Müller, *De Alexandra Judæorum regina tamquam specimine sapientis ex hac gente fœminæ ad illustrandam historiam factiouum judaicarumi* (Altdorf: Kohles, 1711) as an example of early

In his landmark work *History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ* (1890), Emil Schürer wrote that Hyrcanus II was executed in 30 B.C.E., only noting that “some of the manuscripts of Josephus have 81.”<sup>28</sup> Here, Schürer does not comment on the problem this causes for those who would argue that Alexandra only married Jannaeus after the death of Aristobulus. Rather, he writes as if Hyrcanus’ death age is obviously incorrect. In 1973, Schürer’s work was revised and updated by Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Matthew Black, and here, the note about Hyrcanus’ death had been expanded. The revisers wrote that “Hyrcanus, however, cannot have been so old [81 at time of death] for his mother Alexandra Salome did not marry his father Alexander [Jannaeus] until after the death of her first husband Aristobulus I in 104 B.C.”<sup>29</sup> This makes the same argument found in the LCL’s edition of *Antiquities* 15, which asserts that Hyrcanus must have been a decade younger when he died:

According to this reckoning Hyrcanus II would have been born c. 110 B.C. But his parents, Alexander Jannaeus and Salome Alexandra, had been married sometime after 103 B.C., when Salome’s first husband died. Hyrcanus therefore was in his early seventies when he was executed.<sup>30</sup>

The LCL editions of Josephus’ works promulgate this identification of Salina/Alexandra to resolve a problem not inherent to the text itself.<sup>31</sup> In offering a resolution, the LCL translators introduce an unsupported assumption into the text. Due to the prominence of the LCL editions, this assertion has become the basis for how many scholars continue to interpret the identities of Salina and Alexandra. This is reiterated in the *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary Series*. In his remarks on the death of Hyrcanus, Jan Willem van Henten simply states, “whether more than 80 or 81, the number does not fit with Hyrcanus’ parents’ marriage, which must have been after ca. 103 BCE.”<sup>32</sup> Van Henten cites in support of possibly revising Hyrcanus’ age down to 71 to account for this later birthdate but without coming to a judgment. However, not every scholar has opted to

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scholarship which identified Salina with Alexandra. While this text is freely available online, we are unable to locate any reference to the birth date of Hyrcanus herein. Cf. Atkinson, *Hasmonean State*, 86 n.32; Attali, “Jewish Female Military Leadership,” 16.

28. Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ: First Division – Political History of Palestine, from B.C. 175 to A.D. 135*, trans. John Macpherson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1890; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012), 1:404 n.7.
29. Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, rev. and ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Matthew Black (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1973), 1:289 n.7.
30. LCL 489, 341 n.c. Here Marcus and Wikgren point out that this was the case made by Julius Wellhausen (*Israelitische und Jüdische Geschichte*, 8th ed. [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1921], 307 n.2). Wellhausen himself only notes that Salome is a corrupted form of Salina, as found in the Talmud without further specifying exactly where (267 n.1).
31. For example, Marcus (LCL 365, 389 n.a), writes that “that Josephus considered Aristobulus’ widow to be identical with Alexander Jannaeus’ wife Alexandra is clear from the context and chronology, although he does not make this explicit by saying that Salina married Jannaeus.” Cf. Thackeray (LCL 203, 43 n.a.), who notes upon introducing Salome, “though Josephus never expressly says so, it appears certain that, besides the throne, she gave Alexander Jannaeus her hand in marriage.”
32. Van Henten, *Judean Antiquities*, 118 n.1045.

simply redate Hyrcanus' birth. For example, while Christiane Saulnier admits that redating his birth would resolve a proposed contradiction of dates, she also acknowledges that doing so introduces other problems.<sup>33</sup> She suggests instead that none of Josephus' dates can be accurately relied on, and she reasonably notes that Josephus was often unreliable with figures, particularly in numbers he gives for groups of people, but also perhaps with regards to other kinds of figures. As an example, Saulnier points to Josephus describing forty years of Hyrcanus' high priesthood, counted between 63 and 40 B.C.E.<sup>34</sup> She therefore proposes that one could lower Hyrcanus' age by a decade, putting his birth year around 101 or 100 B.C.E. Whether Saulnier's reasoning is considered sufficient is open to judgment, but it is notable that among those who adopt this explanation (Ilan's possibility [2]) to resolve textual contradictions, few support their case as expansively as Saulnier. Saulnier ultimately decides that Josephus' ages are correct, but Hyrcanus' parentage is not: arguing there is a stronger case for Hyrcanus being born around 110 B.C.E., as the son of Aristobulus, rather than Jannaeus. She suggests that if Alexandra and Jannaeus had their first child together *after* Aristobulus' death in 103 B.C.E., this would mean that Alexandra had her first of (at least) two children at thirty-seven years of age. Saulnier finds this too old to be plausible and goes on to question why Alexandra would be childless at this age despite having been married to Aristobulus.<sup>35</sup> This proposition appears to overlook a straight-forward explanation wherein Aristobulus may have been infertile, but it is also an unnecessary proposition in the first place. As Edward Dąbrowa observes, and we have iterated above (with reference to Atkinson's work), Josephus is unambiguous when he wrote that both Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II were the children of Jannaeus and Alexandra. Even though one could explain Alexandra's succession ahead of her two adult sons, and the ongoing antagonism between these sons, by introducing a clear cause of dynastic contention, there is no evidence for this.<sup>36</sup>

Joseph Geiger explores this possibility further to resolve the supposed "problem" of Hyrcanus' estimated birthdate.<sup>37</sup> He goes on to illustrate a number of explanations for "puzzling" descriptions in Josephus' works arising from this reconstruction, but in so doing, he creates more problems than necessary. He suggests that when it is assumed that

33. Saulnier, "L'aîné et le porphyrogénète," 54–55.

34. Saulnier, "L'aîné et le porphyrogénète," 55 n.6, notes that Josephus goes on to write that Hyrcanus had held power for forty years after Pompey's 63 B.C.E. before being replaced by Antigonus in 40 B.C.E., thus proving his unreliability. However, one could arrive at the "forty years" count if considering his nine years of the priesthood under Alexandra, three months before being deposed by his brother, twenty-three years between Pompey and Antigonus, and then a further six years upon his return from Babylonia in 36 B.C.E. until his death in 30. This would total at least thirty-eight years and three months, with any further months from year ranges uncounted here. While not really satisfactory enough to explain why Josephus or the manuscript tradition seem to make this odd error, there at least is perhaps some method of judging this forty-year period to reflect reality, and in any case, is a time frame rather than a specific age.

35. Saulnier, "L'aîné et le porphyrogénète," 57. We reject this argument according to "plausibility" as entirely unfounded.

36. Edward Dąbrowa, *The Hasmoneans and Their State: A Study in History, Ideology, and the Institutions*, Electrum 16 (Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press, 2010), 120–21.

37. Joseph Geiger, "The Hasmoneans and Hellenistic Succession," *JJS* 53 (2002): 5–6.

Hyrchanus I and Aristobulus I each had multiple wives, then intra-Hasmonean conflicts can be attributed to “amphimetric” strife, that is, disputes between sons of different mothers by the same father.<sup>38</sup> Geiger admits that this argument is speculative, offering the positive explanatory factors this theory provides alongside the negative.<sup>39</sup> The factors would add background information to the ongoing dispute between Aristobulus II and Hyrchanus II but remain purely speculative, and indeed contrary to Josephus’ statements of parentage.

Like Saulnier, Doris Lambers-Petry points out the unreliability of Josephus’ dating, using this to counter Ilan’s argument following Josephus (as ours does).<sup>40</sup> As evidence, Lambers-Petry cites the advanced ages of Josephus’ ancestors as reported in his *Life* (3–5). Both his grandfather and great grandfather are said to have fathered children aged sixty-five or older. Lambers-Petry finds this to be unreliable. She also points to Herod’s age given in *Antiquities* 14.158, which is ten years younger than the age he should have been, if we rely on his age of death recorded in *Antiquities* 17.148. Noting the conflicting ages of Herod is obviously more relevant for our purposes, as it presents a potential reason to be wary of Josephus’ dating. However, if one is to accept the identification of Salina/Alexandra, one must still read information into the text of Josephus that is not there (the marriage of Salina and Jannaeus) and reject information which is present (the estimated birthdate of Hyrchanus). Lambers-Petry goes on to highlight the age difference between Alexandra and Jannaeus,<sup>41</sup> but if one is happy to adapt Hyrchanus’ age on this basis, then equally the ages of Alexandra or Jannaeus could also be adapted.

In his history of the Hasmonean state, Dąbrowa considers and rejects the case for Salina and Alexandra being two individuals.<sup>42</sup> He questions why the widow of Aristobulus would place Jannaeus on the throne and then vanish from politics:

This seems unlikely, a difficult proposition to accept, if just months previously the same Alexandra had persuaded Aristobulus I to claim his mother’s power, and soon afterward she had contributed to his brother Antigonus’ death in order to prevent him ascending to power should her husband die. If it was her decision in which of John Hyrchanus’ sons to vest power, she did not have to choose the already married Alexander Jannaeus, for his younger brothers were available. One of them, later murdered by Alexander Jannaeus for his excessive political ambition (*Jos. AJ* 13.323), was probably a little younger than he. In this situation, marrying him would have been more advantageous for her as it would have guaranteed her a share in government. It is difficult to picture this ambitious woman giving up all she had achieved if she could help it.<sup>43</sup>

38. Geiger, “Hasmoneans,” 16.

39. Geiger, “Hasmoneans,” 16–17.

40. Doris Lambers-Petry, “Shelomzion ha-malka: The Hasmonean Queen and her Enigmatic Portrayal by Josephus,” in *Internationales Josephus-Kolloquium Dortmund 2002: Arbeiten aus dem Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum*, ed. Jürgen U. Kalms and Folker Siegert (Münster: LIT, 2003), 63–77, 69.

41. See comments above in footnote 12.

42. Dąbrowa, *Hasmoneans*, 86. Cf. *ibid.*, 119.

43. Dąbrowa, *Hasmoneans*, 120 n. 38.

In order to make this case, Dąbrowa must characterize Salina in such a fashion that she becomes a woman who would not abandon power. One must also accept that Aristobulus' widow had the ultimate say over the succession, which was likely still based on the high priesthood rather than royal primogeniture.<sup>44</sup> As such, one should clearly identify what power Salina may have been giving up (if indeed she had full control over the situation), and exactly how this succession could have been managed by Salina.<sup>45</sup> Dąbrowa suggests that any of the three living brothers of Aristobulus may have been available for her to marry, but we do not see any evidence for this in Josephus. On what basis can one know that either of the two other brothers of Jannaeus were unmarried or without prior betrothals? Dąbrowa offers a situation wherein it was possible for Salina to engage in a Levirate marriage. However, as discussed above, there are also problems with this proposition, which he does not reckon with. One should instead consider that those women of the Hasmonean household had other motivations than becoming the wife of the high priest.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Hasmonean women were reported to have been involved in questions of succession, very much in keeping with royal Hellenistic succession practices—a fact known in scholarship.<sup>47</sup> Adding this conjecture distorts how we understand these women and the place of women in Judean royal households. What Dąbrowa describes as “difficult to picture” is actually easily explained: Jannaeus was the eldest of the remaining brothers, and so according to convention, the most likely candidate for the high priest. In addition, as presented above, he was already married. Moreover, we should acknowledge that women (other than queens) possessed power in royal courts.<sup>48</sup> Importantly, Dąbrowa

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44. While Josephus claims that Aristobulus was the first to claim the title of king (*Ant.* 13.301), this is not borne out on any of his known coin issues; David Hendin, “Numismatic Expressions of Hasmonean Sovereignty,” *INJ* 16 (2007–2008): 87–88. Indeed, one of Josephus' sources, Strabo's *Geographica*, reports that it was Jannaeus who first claimed the title of king (*Geogr.* 16.2.40). While it may be the case, one can be much more certain that the office passed from Aristobulus to Jannaeus was that of high priest, and perhaps also the kingship, if Aristobulus ever claimed this for himself.
  45. Ilan (*Silencing the Queen*, 48) suggests that Salina may have voluntarily stepped down, but this is quite speculative. Ilan suggests that this was a standard principle, whereby the queen normally assumed power, following the example of Hyrcanus I's widow being left power. The problem here is that at least Hyrcanus' wife, and perhaps also Salina, may not have been queens, but rather were principally the wives of high priests.
  46. Norman Gelb (*Kings of the Jews: The Origins of the Jewish Nation* [Philadelphia, PA: JPS, 2010], 175) writes that Salina had conspired to remove Antigonus precisely to preserve her own life. Surely this could also account for her release of Jannaeus; although in any case, there is no evidence to back up this characterization.
  47. Etka Liebowitz (“Female Monarchal Succession in Hellenistic and Jewish Society in Antiquity: Parallels and Contrasts,” *JSJ* 49 [2018]: 30–48) explores the dynamics of this and places the succession of Alexandra after Jannaeus into the context of Hyrcanus I's widow fighting for control with Aristobulus, and the long history of Hellenistic royal women who took power after the death of their husbands or fathers. Cf. Geiger (“Hasmoneans,” 2–4), who questions how the story of Hyrcanus I's widow makes sense in the context of succession to the high priesthood, arguing that the story is likely due to Josephus' error in creating a similar succession story of Hyrcanus as he knew for Jannaeus.
  48. For instance, see the extensive discussion of different women in Assyrian royal households in Saana Svård, *Women and Power in Neo-Assyrian Palaces*, Publications of the Foundation



himself acknowledges this, writing that Salina had some role in Aristobulus' seizure of power before she could even have been queen, even though this is nowhere suggested by Josephus.

As can be seen, arguments that take issue with Hyrcanus' estimated birthdate before the death of Aristobulus either reject Josephus' statement that Hyrcanus died aged eighty-one thus shifting when he was born, or they introduce speculative and unsupported arguments that Aristobulus was actually Hyrcanus' father.

## Arguments that do not consider Hyrcanus' estimated birthdate

Many accounts of Jannaeus' rise to power simply state that his wife Alexandra was previously married to Aristobulus until his death, without addressing Hyrcanus' birthdate. This creates four interrelated problems: (1) the misidentification of Alexandra as the widow of Aristobulus is perpetuated; (2) the (hypothetical) process by which Jannaeus could have married his brother's widow via Levirate marriage law becomes a key debate;<sup>49</sup> (3) the answers to this debate impact how the Hasmonean dynasty, and particularly how they observed biblical requirements, is understood, and; (4) a portrait of Alexandra's character is drawn using characteristics from another woman. These four problems are apparent across four examples of scholarship that pre- and post-date Ilan's 1993 article. Such examples represent the scope of arguments that do not consider Hyrcanus' estimated birthdate when considering the identity of Alexandra. They do not need to be treated at length here but consist of (1) an article about Alexandra before Ilan's 1993 article;<sup>50</sup> (2) an article about Jannaeus' rise to power published after Ilan's 1993 article;<sup>51</sup> (3) a recent volume on the Hasmonean period;<sup>52</sup> and (4) a recent volume on Masada.<sup>53</sup> None of these representative contributions discuss the problem Hyrcanus' estimated birthdate causes in identifying Salina/Alexandra, and as such, we suggest that they have not considered all the available evidence.

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for Finnish Assyriological Research 11, SAAS 23 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 87–143.

49. For example, see Marvin A. Sweeney, "A Reassessment of the Masoretic and Septuagint Versions of the Jeroboam Narratives in 1 Kings/3 Kingdoms 11-14," *JSJ* 38 (2007): 194. Ilan cites Deut 25:5–10, m. *Sanh.* 2:1–2, and m. *Yebam.* 6:4 as offering arguments for either possibility regarding the permissibility of such a marriage and notes that the theory appears at least by the early eighteenth century; Ilan, "Queen Salamzion," 182–83 n.3.
50. Solomon Zeitlin, "Queen Salome and King Jannaeus Alexander: A Chapter in the History of the Second Jewish Commonwealth," *JQR* 51 (1960): 1–33. See also Joseph Sievers, "The Role of Women in the Hasmonean Dynasty," in *Josephus, the Bible, and History*, ed. Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 132–46.
51. Vasile Babota, "Alexander Jannaeus as High Priest and King: Struggling between Jewish and Hellenistic Concepts of Rule," *Religions* 11 (2020): 1–16.
52. Lester L. Grabbe, *The Maccabean Revolt, Hasmonean Rule, and Herod the Great (175–4 B.C.E.)*, vol. 3 of *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period*, LSTS 95 (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 419–20, 428.
53. Magness, *Masada*, 110, 215 n.65.

The question that scholars should focus on is whether Jannaeus married his brother's widow. Some, who do rightly focus on this question, do so with reference to Levirate marriage, noting that the high priest (which Jannaeus became upon his brother's death) cannot marry his brother's widow.<sup>54</sup> Others skip over the question of whether Jannaeus married his brother's widow and jump straight to asking, "how did he marry his brother's widow?" Again, they appeal to applications of Levirate marriage to answer this question.

Across these examples, we see a tendency to locate any argument around a Salina/Alexandra identification within a discussion of whether Levirate marriage was acceptable for a high priest, whether Jannaeus was a high priest when he "remarried" his brother's widow, and whether one should think that Jannaeus was likely to abide by any such ruling. Despite Solomon Zeitlin's (likely correct) assertion that the question is irrelevant, we must also acknowledge that there is no evidence one way or the other to determine whether the force of any such ruling would have been felt by Jannaeus.<sup>55</sup> As we noted regarding Atkinson, the question of Levirate marriage law is unnecessary without first establishing, convincingly, that Alexandra was married to Aristobulus, something that is unachievable when considering Hyrcanus' birth. To reiterate, a second-order question has become the key question.

## Conclusions

If Jannaeus was married to Alexandra before or even allowing for a time shortly after the birth of Hyrcanus, this would have been roughly seven years before Salina was widowed by the death of Aristobulus. These women cannot be the same person, without introducing speculative and creative changes to Josephus' record. If one cannot reject a specific age at the time of death or relationship offered by Josephus in his *Antiquities*, without due cause, then it should be accepted that Alexandra cannot have been married to Aristobulus. This matter should have been long settled since the 1864 contribution of Madden, and certainly by Ilan's 1993 article.

This article has largely reasserted the contributions of Tal Ilan and encourages the reader to give more attention to her work. Still, it has been contended that the problem goes deeper than previously identified. We have referenced one recent example of an introductory history on the period which glosses over or obscures the key details (Lester Grabbe's *Maccabaeian Revolt*, 2020).<sup>56</sup> In many other works aimed at students, or scholars at the beginning of their exploration of the Hasmoneans and of Alexandra herself,

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54. Such as Atkinson, *Hasmonean State*, 85–86.

55. Zeitlin ("Queen Salome," 5–6 n.9) writes that "the question has been raised by some writers that since Aristobolus died childless, his widow was required to contract a Levirate marriage with his brother. Alexander [Jannaeus] as a high priest could not contract a Levirate marriage. This question has no substance. Alexander married her while he was still an ordinary priest, and then assumed the high priesthood."

56. Importantly, the death notice of Hyrcanus II, aged 81 (*Ant.* 15.178), is not listed anywhere in Grabbe's index, and he does not seem to consider how Hyrcanus could have been born to Alexandra and Jannaeus several years prior to a remarriage. Hyrcanus' execution is noted, but not his age and the subsequent implications. See Grabbe, *Maccabaeian Revolt*, 458.

even less is said on the matter.<sup>57</sup> Instead, there is a certain reflexivity toward a standard position of identifying Alexandra with Salina. Generally, these works can be divided into those that simply repeat the claim without any discussion (including dictionary and encyclopedia entries, and online resources)<sup>58</sup> and those that provide a small argument aimed solely toward the conflated identification of Salina/Alexandra.<sup>59</sup> We have documented examples of the second category above and found such arguments wanting. None present a case as outlined in the introduction: on the basis of Hyrcanus' parentage and birthdate. In other words, key evidence that should be used to address the question of identification is left aside. The process by which readers are introduced to the problem is treated as a settled matter, failing to cover the introductory details themselves, such as birth and death dates.

Some of this may be that Ilan foregrounded the case for distinguishing Alexandra and Salina on the basis of Levirate marriage. The question of Levirate marriage has certainly gone back and forth in much subsequent scholarship, and in our view, it has detracted from the more definitive argument based on the ages of the principal figures involved. This emphasis has created the impression that there is a debate to be had regarding the identification of Alexandra, and that this debate can be settled if the scholarly consensus can arrive at a position on whether a Levirate marriage could have taken place between Alexandra and Jannaeus. However, this argument could continue indefinitely as it depends on one asserting many assumptions about the relationship of different Hasmonean authorities toward biblical guidance. Centering an argument on debatable propositions has created a discursive space that pervades around a historical reconstruction. In many cases, a scholar may be in a position to offer further insight, comparative material, or methodological perspective to the question. Yet these contributions are essentially thought experiments and cannot address the question at the heart of this article.

Moving beyond this specific case of Alexandra, we encourage scholars to consider the limited information we have on historical women in relation to men. Moreover, there are many examples we can point to where men and their contributions are conceived of as the default experience of humanity. To quote Simone de Beauvoir, "she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is

57. Commendably, Grabbe does highlight that there is a debate in the identification of Salina/Alexandra but focuses this dispute entirely on the question of Levirate marriage, demonstrating the problem reiterated throughout this article. See Grabbe, *Maccabean Revolt*, 420, 428.

58. Examples include Norman Gelb, *Herod the Great: Statesman, Visionary, Tyrant* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 3; Sara Parks, Shayna Sheinfeld and Meredith J. C. Warren, *Jewish and Christian Women in the Ancient Mediterranean* (London: Routledge, 2021), 126.

59. James C. VanderKam (*From Joshua to Caiaphas: High Priests after the Exile* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2004], 318 n.210) notes that there is no proof, but that Alexandra can be identified as Aristobulus' widow. When he comes to the discussion of Hyrcanus II's high priesthood, VanderKam firms up this identification and cites Geiger's notion that Hyrcanus II may have been the son of Aristobulus I, along with his own reservations about this theory (337 n.252). In his later introductory work (James C. VanderKam, *An Introduction to Early Judaism*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2022], 28), VanderKam simply identifies the two women as one.

the Other.”<sup>60</sup> As such, women’s lived experiences and impact on society and culture are frequently marginalized or erased entirely.<sup>61</sup> This marginalization or erasure can take place through conflation. Most famously, when Pope Gregory the Great (b. c. 540 C.E.) formally identified the unnamed sinful women who anoints Jesus (Luke 7:37) and Mary of Bethany (John 11:1–45; 12:1–8) as Mary Magdelene (Mark 16:9), the number of women in the gospel narratives (already in the minority) was reduced by two.<sup>62</sup> The number of women mentioned by Josephus married to this particular set of brothers is reduced by half if we accept the identification of Salina/Alexandra. We should be cautious in doing so, given this historic tendency toward women’s erasure, and bear in mind any ramifications for our broader understanding of history.

Of course, challenges to Josephus’ account may be made, but they must be defended, and they must take into account all available evidence. It is reasonable to argue that Josephus may be incorrect about any one person’s age at the time of death, or that there is evidence for a corruption in the manuscript tradition. However, the arguments for any of these positions must be outlined and offered for consideration. Rather than starting with a plain record as Josephus provides and then proffering any concerns with its validity, most scholars seem to start with the position that Salina and Alexandra were the same person, working backwards from there. As we have demonstrated, this identification inserts problems into the text that must then be resolved. Thus, the debate going forward, if it is to be had, should focus on text critical questions about Josephus, and

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60. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 6.

61. There are many examples we can point to from various fields of inquiry (often rooted in a culturally determined and binary reading of gender). In ancient Jewish texts: Ilan (*Silencing the Queen*, 4–42) provides many examples. In archaeology: cf. the notable recent re-identification of a Viking warrior burial, assumed male since excavation in 1878, and determined to have been actually that of a woman in 2017; Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson, A. Kjellström, T. Zachrisson, et al., “A Female Viking Warrior Confirmed by Genomics,” *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 164 (2017): 853–60; Neil Price, Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson, Torun Zachrisson, et al., “Viking Warrior Women? Reassessing Birka Chamber Grave Bj.581,” *Antiquity* 93 (2019): 181–98. Cf. Alexis Jordan, “I Am No Man: A Study of Warrior Women in the Archaeological Record,” *FN* 1 (2009): 94–111. In art history, the Catalogues Raisonnés of any number of female artists demonstrates the long history of misattributing their work to men (often a father or husband). This is discussed at length in Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990) particularly 22. See also: Frima Fox Hofrichter, *Judith Leyster: A Woman Painter in Holland’s Golden Age* (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1989) particularly 29–31. In medieval studies: evidence for women’s artistic illustrations in medieval manuscripts is only just being uncovered, presented as part of a project at the University of York: <https://www.york.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2019/research/ultramarine-pigment-reveal-forgotten-female-scribe/>.

62. *Ev. hom.* 33 (Gregory the Great, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. Dom David Hurst, Monastic Studies Series 6 [Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2009], 268). Hippolytus of Rome (170–235 C.E.) had already linked Mary Magdelene and Mary of Bethany in his commentary on the Song of Songs, reprinted and discussion in Robin Griffith-Jones, *Mary Magdelene: The Woman Whom Jesus Loved* (London: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2008), 173–76.

the manuscript witnesses to his works. Currently, no resolution offered has been entirely satisfactory. Therefore, the identification of Alexandra as Salina should be abandoned.

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