

In this post I'm thinking out loud rather than making a definitive statement. A question occurred to me a week or so ago that, since I am on the road and rather unsettled just now, I have not had a chance to look into. Maybe someone on the blog knows the answer. Prior to the persecution of Jews by Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 BCE, do we have a record of *any* group of people in the entire Mediterranean world being violently opposed precisely for their religious practices?

I can't think of any, with the (partial) exception of the Roman suppression of the Bacchanals in 186 BCE (it was a partial exception because they were suppressed for their illegal and dangerous social activities that allegedly involved ritual sexual violence and murder).

There was, of course, lots and lots and lots of violence in the ancient world. Most (all?) of the "world empires" - Assyria, Babylonia, (Persia?), Greece, Rome - thrived on violence. Powerful dominance was the accepted, promoted, and assumed ideology; it was not (as for most of us) an offensive aberration to the social order of things. But violence was directed against others - either as social groups (cities, nations) or individuals - for what we ourselves would call "social," "political" or "military" reasons. When was a group of people ever attacked because of their specific religious practices?

One could argue that ...

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