

Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus

Volume 2

The Study of Jesus

Edited by

Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter



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THE WRITINGS OF JOSEPHUS:
THEIR SIGNIFICANCE FOR NEW TESTAMENT STUDY

STEVE MASON

It can no longer be necessary to make the case *that* Josephus is relevant for the study of the New Testament. Even lay readers of the Christian canon know that when specialists look outside it for illumination—concerning Herod the Great and his descendants, the Roman governors of Judea, the temple in Jerusalem, the Pharisees and Sadducees, the geography of Judea-Galilee, and much else—they rely heavily on Josephus’ *Judean War*, *Antiquities-Life*, and *Against Apion*. Readers are accustomed to seeing “Josephus reports that...” before statements in New Testament Introductions and reference works. That scholars often turn to Josephus not so much from choice as from bitter necessity, as he might have put it (*Life* 27), in view of his presumed moral deficiencies,¹ does not weaken the dependence itself.

To be sure, a substantial library of other Jewish writings from the same period (say, 200 BCE to 200 CE) has survived, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, Philo, apocalyptic and wisdom literature, and the earliest rabbinic texts. But that material was composed almost entirely for Jews,² who did not need to be educated about the conditions in which they lived. Because Josephus, by contrast, undertook to write self-consciously historical narratives for non-Jews, his work is plainly of the first importance for historians as for New Testament readers. The archaeology of first-century Judea and Galilee constitutes an increasingly valuable resource for understanding the general environment.³ But for specific human actions and intentions, which are the

¹ E.g. G. A. Williamson, *The World of Josephus* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1964), 307: “Josephus the writer deserves our warmest thanks; Josephus the man—not lovable, not estimable, barely tolerable—remains an enigma, but a fascinating one.”

² V. Tcherikover, “Jewish Apologetic Literature Reconsidered,” *Eos* 48 (1956): 169–193.

³ Accessible archaeological surveys include E. Meyers, *Galilee through the Centuries: Confluence of Cultures* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), A. Berlin & A. Overman, *The First Jewish Revolt: Archaeology, History, and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 2002), and M. Aviam, *Jews, Pagans and Christians in the Galilee. 25 Years of Archaeological Excavations and Surveys: Hellenistic to Byzantine Periods* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2004). Galilean archaeology in particular has recently been

stuff of history, Josephus remains indispensable to New Testament readers. Chronology reinforces the bond, for he composed his thirty volumes in the very period to which the canonical gospels and Acts are usually dated (70–100 CE).

Since another appeal concerning Josephus' importance would be superfluous, my purpose here lies elsewhere. Namely, *given* that the works of Josephus are important, how should the New Testament student regard and use them? The shorter of his histories, the seven-volume *War*, is nearly as long as the entire New Testament, and wading through his twenty-volume *Antiquities* (about the length of the Old Testament) is a formidable task. Curious readers often purchase Josephus' collected works—for Anglophones, often the 1737 translation by W. Whiston—only to find them impenetrable. Arcane details prove impossible to remember; Eleazars, Menachems, Aristobuluses, and Agrippas appear with disconcerting frequency in unrelated places; long speeches and details of geography, even botany, can be as boring as the moralizing is tedious. How does one find what one needs in this mass? And once one finds it, how should one understand it? Perhaps most important: What may the New Testament reader fairly expect from Josephus?

In what follows I describe three approaches to exploiting Josephus' works for New Testament study. The first is the route most commonly taken: using Josephus as a historical reference manual. In this model, to which I devote about half of the essay, reading Josephus and doing history are assumed to be parts of a single operation. Even if one does not believe everything he reports, he is expected to transmit recoverable facts. Recently, however, some scholars have been working to separate the interpretation of Josephus' compositions from reconstruction of the historical phenomena they describe. These critics draw attention to the artistry of the narratives and insist that historical deductions reckon fully with the nature of the evidence they seek to explain, which is a richly woven tapestry. While generally supporting that second approach against the first, I propose here a further step.

applied to the study of the historical Jesus by M. A. Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), S. Freyne, *Jesus, a Jewish Galilean: A New Reading of the Jesus Story* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), M. Sawicki, *Crossing Galilee: Architectures of Contact in the Occupied Land of Jesus* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000) and J. D. Crossan and J. Reed, *Excavating Jesus: Beneath the Stones, Behind the Texts* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001).

Namely: the greatest benefit for New Testament readers in studying Josephus may come not from areas of overlap in what the two corpora *refer to*, but from the access Josephus affords to values and assumptions that shaped the conceptual world of the New Testament writers.

1. *Josephus as Historical Manual for New Testament Readers*

The use of Josephus as a reference work on matters Judean has ancient roots, among his immediate audiences in Rome and later in the church fathers. In some respects this use fulfills the author's dream that "the whole Greek-speaking world" would learn about his culture from him (*Ant.* 1.5; cf. *War* 1.6). Yet the Christian readers who preserved Josephus into modern times were not interested in his expositions of Judean culture as such: they were concerned only with the background of the early Christian story.⁴ (Jewish scholars of the ancient and medieval periods preferred to forego his portraits of Judaism for other reasons.) Because the use of Josephus for New Testament interpretation is not a new issue, but has been with us for nearly two millennia, we ought to ponder the changing methodological bases for such use. That survey will tell us something about Josephus' historiographical assumptions and about those of his ancient and modern users.

1.1. *Authority and Truth in Ancient Historiography*

In the Roman world, knowledge of most things, including the past, was mediated by trusted authorities. Notwithstanding occasional impulses toward empirical investigation (e.g., with Thucydides and Aristotle centuries earlier), the deeply ingrained Roman social system, in which members of the elite dominated all discourse, affected every branch of knowledge. Although Roman authors had potential sources of reliable information about foreign peoples and lands, for example, their geographical and ethnographical traditions display a tenacious resistance to change, precisely because they instinctively preferred

⁴ E.g. H. Schreckenberg, *Die Flavius-Josephus-Tradition in Antike und Mittelalter* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), and the essays on Christian use of Josephus in *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity*, ed. G. Hata and L. H. Feldman (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987).

established and trusted authorities.⁵ The physician Galen in the second century was still deploring the fideism of his peers, as he called for empirically grounded reasoning. Tellingly, he compared this widespread trust in authorities to the “undemonstrated laws” of the Jews and Christians—i.e., “the school of Moses and Christ” (*Puls. diff.* 2.4).

In history, above all, it mattered a great deal *who* was telling the story, and who the historian’s friends and patrons were. Historians were not professionals. They were rhetorically trained members of the elite or their retainers. These men, who had typically held military, political, civic, and religious posts, felt able to write and speak in any genre they pleased: political treatise, philosophical dialogue, tragedy, poetry, oratory, literary correspondence, ethnography, geography, biography, or history.⁶ The same friends would gather to hear each other recite in any of these modes. And when they chose one genre, they typically laced their compositions with elements of the others: so their histories contain philosophical, geographical, oratorical, and moralizing asides. In such an elite literary environment, acceptance and trustworthiness flowed in large measure from the writer’s evident stature, influence, and circle of friends—his *auctoritas*.⁷

Ancient techniques for getting books into the public sphere (“publication”) reinforced the importance of the author’s status. New compositions normally found their intended audiences locally, in the author’s immediate environs.⁸ For modern writers, our audiences must

⁵ J. S. Romm, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought: Geography, Exploration, and Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 41–44, 93–109; S. P. Mattern, *Rome and the Enemy: Imperial Strategy in the Principate* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 24–80.

⁶ Cf. J. Marincola, *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 19. Aelius Theon, in the first century, points out that graduates of his rhetorical programme will be expected to write in a variety of genres (*Prog.* 60, 70). Tacitus’ *Dialogue on Oratory*, set in the reign of Vespasian, shows the result: groups of friends who freely compose across different fields. The deliberations by Pliny the Younger, famous senator, orator, and letter-writer, as to whether he should embark on writing history, are revealing (*Ep.* 3.5): the issue of qualification does not arise. So too Cicero, *Leg.* 1.9.

⁷ E.g., C. Salles, *Lire à Rome* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1992), 43–89; E. Fantham, *Roman Literary Culture: From Cicero to Apuleius* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 183–185.

⁸ P. White, “The Friends of Martial, Statius, and Pliny, and the Dispersal of Patronage,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 79 (1975): 265–300; idem, “*Amicitia* and the Profession of Poetry in Early Imperial Rome,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 68 (1978): 74–92; T. P. Wiseman, *Roman Studies: Literary and Historical* (Liverpool: F. Cairns, 1987), 252–56; R. J. Starr, “The Circulation of Texts in the Ancient World,” *Mnemosyne*

be abstractly envisaged in our minds. Whether a few associates read or hear preliminary drafts is an entirely discretionary matter, and in any case not part of our main effort to reach the audience. Our books begin to reach their audiences and elicit responses (e.g., through reviews) only when they are printed, bound, and marketed by the publisher. In the first century, conditions were more or less reversed, since neither printing nor publishing houses existed. Composition was a much more social affair, conducted among elite groups who knew what their peers were writing.⁹ Authors met their audiences—auditors in the proper sense—at dinner parties or readings. They recited their work in progress or shared drafts with friends, who would have their slaves read them aloud.¹⁰ Catherine Salles observes: “The success of a literary work depended equally on the activity of the coterie, the public readings, and the representations of the author to his associates; but in all this, dissemination remained in a ‘closed circuit’.”¹¹ This process of presentation and review, in ever widening circles, was the crucial part of “publication,” a process so different from ours that we should perhaps avoid the word when speaking of ancient conditions.¹²

Because each new copy required a human hand, the concept of *finishing* a work could not be as definitive then as it is for us. Every new copy was in principle a new version, even if the changes were only scribal accidents.¹³ When an author stopped making deliberate changes and presented copies of his work to a few friends, this “handing over” (ἔκδοσις) marked the beginning of *the end* of his ability to interact with a clearly envisaged audience.¹⁴ Even if they aspired to create a literary monument for posterity, ancient authors thus wrote necessarily for real local groups, whose knowledge, values, and prejudices they knew and could manipulate. They also wrote with a view to oral

4.40 (1987): 213–223; W. V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); C. Salles, *Lire à Rome* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1992); Marincola, *Authority*, 19–33; D. S. Potter, *Literary Texts and the Roman Historian* (London: Routledge, 1999), 23–44.

⁹ Tcherikover, “Jewish Apologetic,” 173.

¹⁰ C. W. Fornara, *The Nature of History in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 31; E. Fantham, *Roman Literary Culture: from Cicero to Apuleius* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 202–203, 214–216; Potter, *Literary Texts*, 106–110.

¹¹ Salles, *Lire à Rome*, 156, my translation.

¹² Starr, “Circulation of Texts,” 215 n. 18.

¹³ Potter, *Literary Texts*, 29–37.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

performance, whether in their own recital of the work or in the subsequent reading aloud by someone's slave, and therefore with attention to the sound of phrases. Like every other genre, historiography was governed by the general rules of rhetoric (see section 3 below).

In the status-conscious city of Rome, therefore, factual accuracy (which could not usually be checked) was not among the main criteria for literary acceptance, unless such accuracy happened to coincide with the interests of the audience. In the absence of universities or research funded for its own sake, this was not an atmosphere in which anonymous researchers could survive. There was no culture of disseminating new discoveries; the scope for true novelty, especially in history, was severely constrained.¹⁵ New facts came to light incidentally, as they were assembled and interpreted in conventional ways by trusted authorities.

Early Christians may not have recognized the same status criteria as the larger society, for spiritual authority was not a strict correlative of social standing,¹⁶ but they shared the general assumption that truth was validated by its source rather than by a free enquiry scientifically tested: "good trees produce good fruit." Only outsiders, such as Celsus and Porphyry, marginal pedants, Jews, or those deemed "heretics" undertook something approaching historical investigations into Christian origins. The bulk of surviving Christian literature reveals instead a preoccupation with identifying trustworthy authorities and their texts, and a parallel urgency to exclude those perceived as threatening. This long march toward an approved "canon" was well on the way by Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch, if not already by Paul's time (1 Cor 4:15–21; 2 Cor 10–13; Gal 4:11–19).

It is true that ancient historians use the language of "truth" (ἀλήθεια), "accuracy" (ἀκρίβεια), and "reliability" (ἀσφάλεια) in ways that sound as though they imply rigorous research and testing. Yet the contexts of such language indicate a different meaning. What historians are really speaking about in these cases is not objectivity or neutrality of perception, recording, and analysis, but *impartiality of reporting*. The opposite of truth here is not falsity—bare facts have no determinative

¹⁵ Marincola, *Authority and Tradition*, 14: the goal of composition was "to be incrementally innovative within a tradition."

¹⁶ Note, however, that the wealthier members among Paul's followers, those who owned houses (for meeting) and slaves (as emissaries) tended to assume prominent roles: Philemon, Chloe, Stephanas, Phoebe.

value in the rhetoricized mentality of antiquity—but *bias*.¹⁷ This claim to impartiality, ubiquitous in Roman historiography, made perfect sense in a world in which scholarship came to light through the exercise of personal patronage and social networks. It was assumed that historians would seek to flatter their powerful friends and further belittle the friends' enemies, especially if they had been conquered.¹⁸ Since contemporary values put a premium on the virtue of fearless freedom in speech (παρρησία), however, historians constantly reassured their audiences that they were writing without fear of, or favour toward, those who might help or hurt them. To do this—to avoid mere encomium or invective—was to speak the truth.

There was a potential overlap here with factual truth, on the underlying logic that the historian was motivated not by audience gratification but by compelling events that cried out for a reporter (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 1.1–4). Yet ancient historians did not put their facts to a public test by disclosing the basis of their knowledge (i.e., who observed, at what proximity, and with what interests?). The standard proof of impartiality was simply that any praise and blame, which remained the heart and soul of history-writing, was *justified* by reported behaviour and not gratuitously inserted. Thus *balance*, *non-partisanship*, and *even-handedness* were deemed necessary qualities by the better historians, but a positivist concept of facts that impose their meaning on neutral observers or classifiers, that “speak for themselves,” was entirely different—and a long way off.

As he composed his histories in Rome, Josephus was very much part of this world of social status, rhetoric, and moral lessons (see also the language of Luke 1:1–4). When he speaks about writing the truth (ἀλήθεια) with precision or accuracy (ἀκρίβεια) (*War* 1.6, 9, 17, 30; 7.454; *Ant.* 1.4; *Life* 360–361, 364–367; *Apion* 1.6, 50), his meaning becomes clear from the context. Whereas other writers have taken the predictable course of flattering those now in power (the Flavians) in their fawning accounts of the Judean war (*War* 1.2, 6–8), he will set the record straight—that is: he will not overcompensate by exorbitantly

¹⁷ See A.J. Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography: Four Studies* (London: Croom Helm, 1988), ch. 2 on Cicero, and Marincola, *Authority and Tradition*, 158–174.

¹⁸ Lucian's mid-second-century essay on writing history is largely occupied with ridiculing such partiality (in recent accounts of the recent Parthian war), both the flattery and the invective.

praising his own compatriots, but will give due credit and blame to both sides (1.9). He is in a unique position to write this way because he, a Jerusalem priest who knew the Judean side intimately, was after his capture compelled to observe from the Roman side (*War* 1.3).

Admittedly, eyewitness knowledge is a crucial component of Josephus' proffered credentials in the *War*. But his claim is vaguely conceived and undocumented in that work; it relies more upon the audience's willingness to trust this captured foreign nobleman (1.2–3; cf. Suetonius, *Vesp.* 5.6) than upon rigorous demonstration. He does not certify his detailed knowledge of X because he has meticulously investigated sources A through J according to method Z. He must in fact have used many sources, for he could not personally have known events before he reached maturity or those that occurred where he was not present (thus, at least half of the *War*). Yet he does not name even one source, much less describe his method in using them. Instead, he declares his aim to provide a comprehensive theory of the war supported by appropriate moral evaluations (1.8–10). A uniquely cultivated Judean, he asserts his prerogative to render an authoritative interpretation of the catastrophe that befell his great city, with unasailable verdicts (1.3, 9). His language precludes any modern notion of detachment. He will not (cannot?), for example, sympathetically explore the minds of the "tyrants" or "bandit-chiefs" who brought catastrophe on Jerusalem. "Accuracy" means for him refraining from unjustified praise or blame, and especially from joining the chorus of Rome's flatterers.

1.2. *Josephus' Prestige as Basis of his Later Authority*

Josephus' assumptions about the relationship between authority and status were shared by readers of the following generations. For a variety of reasons, his work became part of the Christian canon in its broader sense: the approved guide to first-century Judea. Since he was not a Christian, this acceptance could not issue from spiritual authority; it had other bases.

Initially, Josephus' work found its audiences through the agency of his powerful friends in Rome. Various descendants of Herod the Great who were residing in the capital, especially King Agrippa II (d. 92–93 CE?), facilitated dissemination of the work; Josephus adduces a flurry of correspondence with the king concerning his *War* (*Life* 364–367). We see vividly here the assumption that the status of one's friends is

a guarantee of truth. Once Josephus had completed his work, sponsorship by the imperial family of Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian (*Life* 361–363; *Apion* 1.50) ensured its availability for generations in Rome’s libraries and perhaps a few private collections or the occasional bookseller.

After that initial boost, a curious thing happened, though it is also understandable in light of the values described above. On the one hand, Josephus’ own Jewish-Judean community declined utterly to show an interest in their famous son. This neglect apparently resulted from his lack of standing in that community after the war. No matter how good his information might have been, he was perceived as a coward, traitor, quisling, or worse, and therefore as an untrustworthy guide (see already *War* 3.438–442; *Life* 416, 425). Christian authors, by contrast, took up his work with enthusiasm. They found him as morally congenial as his compatriots found him objectionable: here was a Jerusalemite of impeccable qualifications who had severely castigated the Judean rebels, describing in lurid detail the horrifying consequences of their actions—thereby demonstrating the fulfillment of Jesus’ predictions (e.g., Origen, *C. Cels.* 2.13.68–85).

Josephus, of course, made no connection between the fall of Jerusalem and Christian claims, but it seemed easy enough for Christians to find in him a kindred spirit, to insinuate that he shared their view of 70 CE as divine punishment for the Jews’ rejection of Jesus and their execution of James. His stomach-churning account of a mother’s cannibalism during the siege of Jerusalem (*War* 6.201–213) received great play in Christian literature and theatre, and he won high praise for his truthful witness.¹⁹

Josephus’ ongoing defence and celebration of Judean culture presented a paradox for his Christian users. On the one hand, it was plainly beneficial that an outsider, a notable Judean free of Christian bias, should (allegedly) testify to Christian truth.²⁰ On the other hand, it was a potential problem that this clarity of vision did not actually

¹⁹ Schreckenberg, *Flavius-Josephus-Tradition*, 186–203.

²⁰ E.g., Ps-Hegesippus, *De excidio* 2.12: “If the Jews do not believe us, let them at least believe their own writers. Josephus, whom they esteem a very great man, said this [the testimony to Jesus, *Ant.* 18.63–64]...However, it was no detriment to the truth that he was not a believer; but this adds more weight to his testimony, that while he was an unbeliever, and unwilling that this should be true, he has not denied it to be so.”

extend to recognizing the truth of Christianity.²¹ Origen lamented the latter; still, he credited Josephus with recognizing the righteousness of James and with being “not far from the truth” (*C. Cels.* 1.47; *Comm. Matt.* 10.17). In the late fourth century, an unknown Christian felt strongly enough about the authority of Josephus’ witness (“an outstanding historian”) yet also about his being too Jewish (if only “he had been as attentive to religion and *truth* as to tracking down *events*”; he shared in “the treachery of the Jews”), that he recast the *War* in a proper Christian version.²² It would take another 1,350 years for the Cambridge mathematician and heterodox theologian William Whiston to make room for Josephus within the Christian fold—as an Ebionite bishop.²³

It was no doubt important to Christian commentators that Josephus was a Judean with putative inside knowledge. But just as he had made no effort to justify his claims, they were not concerned to critically assess or verify them. At least a dozen Christian authors of the second and third centuries, from Theophilus of Antioch to Tertullian and Origen, cite Josephus as a self-evident authority,²⁴ but they do not explain *why* they credit his works above others. Eusebius (early fourth century CE) is important because he not only makes extensive use of Josephus,²⁵ but also deals explicitly with the question of his credentials.

Eusebius first mentions Josephus as “the most distinguished of historians (ἐπισημώτατος ἱστορικῶν) among the Hebrews”²⁶ (*Hist. Eccl.*

²¹ In the same passage from Ps-Hegesippus as in the previous note: “he was no believer because of the hardness of his heart and his perfidious intention.”

²² Passages cited here are from the opening paragraph of the work. A concise introduction to “Pseudo-Hegesippus” is A. J. Bell, “Josephus and Pseudo-Hegesippus”, in *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity*, ed. G. Hata and L. H. Feldman (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 349–61.

²³ So Dissertation 1 attached to Whiston’s translation of Josephus.

²⁴ M. E. Hardwick, *Josephus as an Historical Source in Patristic Literature through Eusebius* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 10, 31, 34, 49, 60.

²⁵ H. W. Attridge and G. Hata, eds., *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1992); S. Inowlocki, “The Citations of Jewish Greek Authors in Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Praeparatio Evangelica* and *Demonstratio Evangelica*” (Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford, 2001); G. Hata, “Eusebius and Josephus: The Way Eusebius Misused and Abused Josephus,” *Patristica: Proceedings of the Colloquia of the Japanese Society for Patristic Studies*, supp. 1 (2001), 49–66. Eusebius’ extensive use of Josephus does not appear to be only the result of the small number of extant texts. The tenth-century *Suda Lexicon* (entry, “Jesus [Ἰησοῦς], Christ and our God,” item 229, line 164) identifies Josephus as the historian to whom Eusebius often referred.

²⁶ For the positive valuation of “Hebrew” in Eusebius, see Inowlocki, “Citations of Jewish Greek Authors,” 52–64, 112–121.

1.5.3; cf. 1.6.9). Later, after uncritically endorsing Josephus' claims to comprehensive eyewitness knowledge (*War* 1.3), he explains that the historian was:

the most renowned (ἐπιδοξότατος) man of the Judeans at that time, not only with his compatriots but also among the Romans, such that he himself was honoured by the erection of a statue in the city of the Romans, and the works composed by him were thought worthy of [deposit in] the library. (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.9.1–2)

Eusebius reinforces Josephus' credibility (πιστεύεσθαι) by endorsing Josephus' claims against his rival Justus of Tiberias (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.9.3), accepting his source's assurance that King Agrippa and his family as well as the *imperator* Titus all vouched for the *War's* accuracy (3.9.10–11; cf. *Life* 361–363). This is obviously not a disinterested investigation of Josephus' accuracy, but a wholly circular process of certification by fame resulting from prior endorsement. Josephus' authority sprang ultimately from the high esteem in which powerful Romans had first held him.²⁷

Justus of Tiberias presents a telling contrast. Although Justus wrote an account of the war that challenged Josephus in various ways (*Life* 336), making it extremely valuable for historical investigation, and even Josephus credits him with literary talent (*Life* 40–41, 340), Justus found no real uptake among Christian authors. Why? He had lost the competition for status. Josephus commanded an initial prestige that carried over until the Christian apologists could establish his worth on theological grounds, and once he was established as the source for Judea, Justus had no future. Eusebius's adoption of Josephus' moral critique of Justus without quibble (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.10.8) shows that the contest had long since been settled. The ninth-century Patriarch Photius claims to have read Justus' work, but he similarly repeats with enthusiasm Josephus' dismissal of the contender:

But Josephus, even though he had taken this enemy in hand many times, impassively—and with words only—reproached him, [insisting that he] leave off *his crimes*. And *they say* that the history which that man [Justus] wrote happens to be mostly fabricated, especially in what concerned the Roman war against the Jews and the capture of Jerusalem. (*Bibl.* 33; italics added)

²⁷ Hardwick, *Josephus as an Historical Source*, 74.

The “they” who say are Josephus, and this highly partisan verdict from Photius may have sealed the fate of Justus’s legacy (if his work had survived intact until then).²⁸ By the time of the *Suda Lexicon* in the following century, the compiler’s entry on Justus appears to depend entirely on Josephus: “[Justus] took it upon himself to compile [NB: this is Josephus’ language: *Life* 40, 338] a Judean history and write up certain commentaries, but Josephus exposes this fellow as a fraud—he was writing history in the same period as Josephus.” In winning the fathers’ confidence, Josephus’ works rendered superfluous all other evidence.

1.3. *The Modern Preference for Anonymous, Objective Facts*

Modern manuals of the New Testament world continue to use Josephus as their *Companion to the New Testament*, but their rationale is markedly different from that of the church fathers. As the basis for esteem, Josephus’ personal prestige has given way to a conception of raw *facts* presumed to be embedded in his accounts. Here is an index of the shift from ancient and medieval assumptions, for if Justus’ work had survived to the modern period we may be sure that it too would have been welcomed for its facts, employed as a critical counterweight to Josephus. Because Justus’ work did not survive, however, Josephus’ position as sole source created a methodological short-circuit.

Anticipated by intellectual currents in the Renaissance, Reformation, and the Age of Reason, the eighteenth-century Enlightenment represented in principle the repudiation of knowledge derived from authorities. Common reasoning applied to repeatable observation became the only acceptable way of knowing in this newly grown-up world.²⁹ Philosophical and scientific inquiry burgeoned as recent discoveries in astronomy, world exploration, biology, physics, and engineering were assimilated into brave new conceptions of the cosmos and of human

²⁸ For Photius as gatekeeper of book preservation in Byzantium, see N. G. Wilson, *Photius, The Bibliotheca: a selection* (London: Duckworth, 1994), 6–7. Although Wilson’s point is the positive one that Photius’s recognition of a book may have ensured its preservation, the negative corollary seems to follow: his disapproval (in relation to a more trustworthy account) would encourage disdain and neglect.

²⁹ Immanuel Kant’s *Was ist Aufklärung?* (1784) is a classic statement. The opening paragraph declares: “‘Have the courage to use your own understanding’ is therefore the motto of the Enlightenment.”

life. History was also being rethought, as another discipline that needed to be rescued from accrued, sacred tradition.

Josephus' historic role as companion to the New Testament meant that his fate in this rethinking of history was married with the urgent reinvestigation of Christian origins. The charter story that had been handed down by church authorities (both Catholic and Protestant) for at least a millennium and a half was being uprooted. Voltaire's reflections on ancient history³⁰ and Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* are representative products of eighteenth-century Deism. They both rejected all historical propositions about Jesus and his first followers that were based on tradition but contrary to common reasoning derived from experience of the world. Enlightenment scholarship and its heirs would be no "respecters of persons" or authorities. Once the clear-sighted critic had burned away the fog of tradition and clerical orthodoxy, it was hoped, the plain facts of astronomy, biology, physics, geography, and history—for Deists, facts were the word of God—would impose themselves on honest thinkers and demand a new view of the world.

Ancient history did not, however, immediately take up the positive "scientific" logic of the Enlightenment agenda. The *philosophes* of the eighteenth century (e.g., Hume, Voltaire, Robertson), in a curious parallel to their ancient elite counterparts, saw history as but one of their many encyclopaedic pursuits, and they shunned pedantic specialization in the field. (The difference was that Pliny and Tacitus were part of an aristocratic elite who wrote under the general method of rhetoric, whereas the *philosophes* were an anti-aristocratic, intellectual elite writing under the banner of philosophy.) Though often diligent in examining sources, they tended to write sweeping interpretative histories that, assuming the commonality of all human experience, lent themselves to clear moral assessment. In their animus against Christianity and tradition they were hardly objective, though they believed their harsh assessments justifiable in the service of obvious truth.³¹ Some were also duly cautious about the application of scientific models to ancient history, as Voltaire:

But to attempt to paint the ancients; to elaborate in this way the development of their minds; to regard events as characters in which we may

³⁰ E.g., in the entry on "History" in his *Philosophical Dictionary*.

³¹ An excellent analysis, with vastly more nuance, is in P. Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation. The Science of Freedom* (New York: Norton, 1969), 368–396.

accurately read the most sacred feelings and intents of their hearts—this is an undertaking of no ordinary difficulty and discrimination, although as frequently conducted, both childish and trifling. (*Philos. Dict.*, “History” pt. III)

The full accommodation of history to science came chiefly in the nineteenth century. Historians such as B. G. Niebuhr and Leopold von Ranke insisted, against the generalist synthesizers and moralizers, on studying the details of particular places and times without assuming common standards or universal moral criteria—and on withholding moral assessment. The prime directive was to get the particular facts correct and only with great care, where possible, to move up from the particular to the general. Ranke drove a particularly sharp wedge between historical facts and their evaluation. He made extensive use of non-literary documents from newly accessed archives, which seemed to offer facts without the sort of interpretative overlay found in historical narratives. The momentum in historical study was moving decisively towards the atoms thought to constitute the surviving evidence, whether these were found in material remains and non-literary documents or in sources distilled from the literary texts (a specialty of Niebuhr).

The scientific turn in history was greatly enhanced in the later nineteenth century as thousands of material remains from antiquity were found, catalogued, and interpreted: coins, papyrus documents of ordinary life, funerary and civic inscriptions, and remains of monuments. This gathering of new evidence under rigorously scientific principles of stratification and classification was highly productive: it generated dictionaries, encyclopaedias, and other reference works of hitherto unimaginable quality, considerably refining our understanding of social, cultural, legal, and linguistic variation.

A problem, however, was that the new enthusiasm for “raw data” implied that all such data could be treated alike no matter where they originated, and this conditioned the interpretation of ancient literary texts, including Josephus’. The scholar’s aim was to get past the subjective, moralizing interpretation to the facts beneath or, if not the facts, to the earliest sources behind the extant writings. Although the presence of two or more overlapping literary sources for a given period appeared to make the task of extracting facts eminently reasonable, for one text could be weighed against the other, the problem of what to do when only one narrative survived—most often the case with Josephus—would take decades to be recognized as a problem. In the meantime,

Josephus or his sources tended to be accepted by default, if there was no specific reason to reject them, as if they also *inscribed* or *mirrored* the realities of life in some sort of neutral, value-free language. Scholars were confident that Josephus could be compelled by a sufficiently scientific method to yield up his facts.

This distinctively modern adoption of Josephus as preserver of facts is embodied in the greatest background manual for New Testament readers ever produced: Emil Schürer's *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (1886–90), which had first appeared in the previous decade as a *Manual of New Testament Backgrounds*. Schürer's *History* remains a standard reference work, following extensive revision in the 1970's by an Oxford-based team. As the title and Introduction make clear, his purpose was to assist the New Testament scholar in relating "Jesus and the Gospel" to "the Jewish world of his time."³² Strikingly absent from the Introduction, however, was any mention of Josephus, his credentials or fame—or statue. Rather, the German historian implied that he was dealing with *facts in themselves*, not with the messy problems of human perspective.

So, for example, his second paragraph begins with a confident historical pronouncement: "The chief characteristic of this period was the growing importance of Pharisaism." But how does he know that? Though Schürer does not disclose it, this ostensible fact comes mainly from the stories of Josephus.³³ Because it was not a rigorously argued historical conclusion, but only a borrowing from literary portraits, it could easily be doubted in later scholarship.³⁴ Josephus had become for Schürer an anonymous quarry or fund, a "source" he would say, of neutral data.

Before beginning his historical account, Schürer surveys all the sources on which it will be based—archaeology, coins, inscriptions, and writers other than Josephus—and finally comes to describe Josephus. After allowing that our author is "*the main source* for the

³² E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (175 BC:–AD 135) (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1973–1987), 1:1.

³³ *War* 1.110; *Ant.* 13.297–298; 17.41–45; 18.15, 17. Cf. S. Mason, *Flavius Josephus on the Pharisees: A Composition-Critical Study* (Leiden: Brill, 1991).

³⁴ E.g., M. Smith, "Palestinian Judaism in the First Century," in *Israel: Its Role in Civilization*, ed. M. Davis (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), 67–81; E. P. Sanders, *Judaism, Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE* (London: Trinity Press International, 1992), 7, 386; L. L. Grabbe, *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 470–471, 616.

history studied here,”³⁵ he describes the “facts” of Josephus’ life, briefly reviews the chronological and material coverage of each work by Josephus, and finally considers Josephus’ own *sources*. The striking omission here, from more recent perspectives, is any concern about *why* Josephus wrote, what his interests were, the artistic arrangement or structure of each account, the sort of language he employed, how freely he retold stories—in short, what his evidence for the past might *mean* in its narrative context. This is the short-circuit mentioned above: an attempt to link story to fact directly, a procedure that succeeds only in putting out the light.

Schürer’s method was to tackle each new historical period or problem by first identifying the “sources” as if they were a palette of coloured paints (i.e. facts), which he could then harmoniously combine in a single picture. Problems of contradiction, error, and omission among the sources were relegated to the notes (much enhanced by the Oxford team), as incidental to the main project of certifying the factual history. For most of the post-Hasmonean history, his sources turned out to be chiefly or exclusively the relevant passages in Josephus, which Schürer simply took over as neutral fact.

A few sentences (emphasis added) will illustrate the point. “Antipater was now all-powerful at court and enjoyed his father’s absolute confidence. But he was *not satisfied*. *He wanted total power and could hardly wait for his father to die.*”³⁶ “But Sabinus, *whose conscience was uneasy because of the Temple robberies and other misdeeds*, made off as quickly as possible.”³⁷ “His [Philip’s] reign was *mild, just, and peaceful.*”³⁸ How can we know about such motives and moral qualities, which we would hesitate to attribute even to our contemporaries, about whom we have considerable independent information? Schürer’s famous model made it acceptable to treat Josephus’ gripping stories as facts. He did not explain how he made this transition, or whether he recognized that a transition was involved.

Such handling of Josephus, now regarded as an information portal (often called “the ancient *sources*”), drove the New Testament-backgrounds industry of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Thus, the scholarly biographies of King Herod before Peter Richardson’s

³⁵ Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, 1:43; italics added.

³⁶ Ibid., 1:324.

³⁷ Ibid., 1:332.

³⁸ Ibid., 1:339.

1996 study were to a large degree paraphrases of Josephus: thoughts attributed to the king by Josephus for the sake of a compelling story were assumed to reflect the monarch's actual motives and views. Two textbooks deserve special attention in this essay because they frame themselves as guides to *Josephus* for the New Testament reader.

The scholar who translated Josephus' *War* and Eusebius' *Church History* as Penguin paperbacks addressed his *The World of Josephus* (1964) itself to the typical British school graduate who knew the New Testament stories from religion class, but assumed that the sacred history told therein was quite distinct from any secular context.³⁹ Josephus was worth this reader's attention, G. A. Williamson proposed, because his remarkable life had bonded the Judean world of the New Testament to its larger Roman canvas.⁴⁰

Although the conception of this book as *Josephus' world*, rather than as the *history* of New Testament times, might seem to promise a departure from Schürer, Williamson betrays the same positivistic method when in the Introduction, before mentioning Josephus, he describes the Judean-Roman war in ostensibly factual terms: "On the other [Judean] side was a motley host, torn by dissension and bloody strife, and led by rival self-appointed chieftains lusting for power..."⁴¹ Yet this merely translates Josephus' distinctive, thematic lexicon of στάσις, λησταί, and τύραννοι. Williamson is not about to accept everything Josephus says, but his opening critical questions reflect the limits of his scepticism. Are Josephus' narratives "as objectively true as we would wish them to be?... Is it within our power to separate the true from the false, to distinguish the sober statement from the gross exaggeration?"⁴² This already implies that a "sober statement" may be taken as factual; at least, that facts are present among whatever else is there.

As his account unfolds, Williamson occasionally introduces doubt about Josephus' veracity: in those rare cases where competing versions of the same events survive from other authors⁴³ and where Josephus himself provides contradictory stories.⁴⁴ Where there is no such reason to doubt, however, Williamson accepts Josephus in whole and part—

³⁹ Williamson, *World of Josephus*, 15.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 280.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 166–176.

events, motives, and moral assessments: the priests' devoted observance of the Sabbath in Pompey's time (72); Herod's putative relationship to Augustus and M. V. Agrippa (80); the character of the various governors of Judea (130)—Gessius Florus was "heartless, dishonest, disgusting; he filled Judaea with misery, accepting bribes from bandits" (145); the minutes of a secret meeting among the Zealots reported by Josephus (207); the speeches of various actors (204–6); and in general their motives, deeds, and ends. Yet these are all ingredients of Josephus' story, not simply "what happened." In some cases, Williamson accepts Josephus on the curious ground that his is the only story we have.⁴⁵

A nicely illustrated and well researched study entitled *The Topical Josephus: Historical Accounts that Shed Light on the Bible* (1992) employs a similar method. Under the headings "People," "Institutions," and "Events," Cleon Rogers quotes and paraphrases Josephus' account, supplementing it now and again with notes on archaeology or contemporary literature, to create an ostensibly historical record. For example, he cites Josephus' assessment of Herod's military virtue (*War* 1.230) and proceeds to "demonstrate the validity" of this assessment by citing examples of Herod's valour—from Josephus!⁴⁶ Yet this demonstrates only that Josephus' narrative holds together, not that it reflects reality. The paraphrase of Josephus as fact continues: "When Nero heard the news of Roman losses in Judea, he was inwardly very much upset, even though he outwardly tried to conceal these concerns (*War* 3.1–3)."⁴⁷ Again, "When Titus entered the city, he was amazed at the strength of the fortifications... 'God indeed,' he exclaimed, 'has been with us in the war. God it was who brought down the Jews from these strongholds.'"⁴⁸ But how could Josephus have had access to Nero's or Titus's inner thoughts? As for speeches, ancient historians normally composed them for their characters.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ "But as we have no other sources of information, we must take his account as it stands" (Williamson, *World of Josephus*, 121; this, in reference to Josephus' early life).

⁴⁶ C. L. Rogers, *The Topical Josephus: Historical Accounts That Shed Light on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 18–20.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁴⁹ Already Voltaire ("History" part III, *Dictionary*): "Many of the ancients adopted the method in question [composing speeches for their characters], which merely proves that many of the ancients were fond of parading their eloquence at the expense of truth."

While narrating, Rogers inserts explanatory Greek words in parentheses,⁵⁰ as if this historical “record” is drawn from a master text. It is, and the text is Josephus! Such statements have no standing as independently verified history; they are excerpts from Josephus, silently transmogrified into what objectively happened.

Although most scholars nowadays are more cautious than Williamson and Rogers, this is a quantitative rather than qualitative difference: they doubt more.⁵¹ Few hesitate to reproduce as facts those passages they consider unproblematic reflections of reality, overlooking problems of structure and language (below). The *Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum* series is a partial exception, for it includes expert essays by H. W. Attridge⁵² and Louis H. Feldman⁵³ on the artistry of Josephus’ works. But those essays have no discernible effect on the use of Josephus for facts in the rest of the collection.

I have said that the new factual mindset did not accept everything in Josephus. In fact, its mandate of painstaking comparative research led some attentive German critics to identify for the first time many perceived contradictions and other shortcomings in our author. But they assumed that these too could be neutralized, by proper scientific (*wissenschaftlich*) means, which could recover sources and facts. Indeed, the greater Josephus’ incompetence and the more ineffectual he was imagined to be as a compiler, the more useful he became for historians. How so?

It is beyond dispute that Josephus depended heavily on written sources and oral traditions, as we have seen. Even for the *War*, he was not present in the besieged Galilean/Gaulanite towns after Jotapata fell, or in Jerusalem or Masada; much less did he have direct knowledge of Judean politics before about 50 CE, when he turned 14. German scholars of the late nineteenth century became acutely sensitive to his

⁵⁰ E.g., Rogers, *Topical Josephus*, 91, 129.

⁵¹ An example is the influential Sanders, *Judaism*, where apparent confusions between Josephus’ story and history are frequent: pp. 92, 140–41, 380–85.

⁵² H. W. Attridge, “Josephus and his Works,” in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus*, ed. M. E. Stone (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1984), 185–232.

⁵³ L. H. Feldman, “Use, Authority and Exegesis of Mikra in the Writings of Josephus,” in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. M. J. Mulder and H. Sysling (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1988), 455–518.

changes in diction, seeming redundancies or doublets, awkward editorial remarks, or apparent contradictions, and cited these as proof of editorial seams: places where Josephus had tried to bond his disparate sources together.⁵⁴ They contended that he took over his sources with such a lack of comprehension, skill, and editorial intervention that we can still recover them, to a large degree, by peeling off his meager additions. Identifying the clumsy joins would allow specialists to undo them, recreating Josephus' own desktop,⁵⁵ as it were. Therefore, irrespective of Josephus' own competencies, not to mention his morals, one could use him with great profit as transmitter of facts.

This approach was widely paralleled at the time in the criticism of classical authors such as Polybius, Diodorus, and Livy, and in the source and form criticism of Old Testament and New Testament texts. It seemed particularly promising in the case of Josephus, a parochial Judean priest and Pharisee (as it was thought), whose native language was Aramaic, and who was surely incapable of writing most of what has been transmitted under his name. By the time of Gustav Hölscher's 1916 essay for the Pauly-Wissowa *Realencyclopädie*,⁵⁶ it seemed reasonable to explain almost all of Josephus' writings on the basis of his sources, which he had retouched only lightly with editorial bridges. That most of these putative sources were "anonymous" only abetted the illusion of dealing in impersonal facts.

An expression of this approach commonly still found is the proposition that Josephus' editorial summary statements (e.g., about the influence of the Pharisees, which had so impressed Schürer) should be discounted for historical purposes because it was easy for him to skew those editorial remarks, whereas his more reliable source material comes through in the narrative itself, which he often took over bodily.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ So H. Bloch, *Die Quellen des Flavius Josephus in seiner Archäologie* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1968 [1879]); J. von Destinon, *Die Quellen des Flavius Josephus in der Jüd. Arch. Buch XII–XVII—Jüd. Krieg. Buch I* (Kiel: Lipsius, 1882), G. Hölscher, "Josephus," *PWRE* 18 (1916): 1934–2000. More recent examples of the method are D. R. Schwartz, "Josephus and Nicolaus on the Pharisees," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 14 (1983): 157–171; idem, *Agrippa 1: The Last King of Judea* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1990), and R. Bergmeier, *Die Essener-Berichte des Flavius Josephus: Quellenstudien zu den Essener-Texten im Werk des jüdischen Historiographen* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1993).

⁵⁵ The image is used by D. R. Schwartz, *Studies in the Jewish Background of Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1992), 2.

⁵⁶ Hölscher, "Josephus."

⁵⁷ Sanders, *Judaism*, 7; Grabbe, *Judaism*, 470–471.

A related principle for distinguishing gold from dross in Josephus holds that wherever he talks about his own life (especially in *War* 2–3 and *Life*) he should not be trusted, whereas in the narrative devoted to other matters he was usually a conscientious historian—i.e., preserving sources intact.⁵⁸ This is in effect another way of accepting Josephus' sources while setting aside his own contributions.

1.4. *Composition, Language, and Fact*

Any simple programme for isolating facts in Josephus or disambiguating sources from the existing narrative faces problems related to the nature of the texts and also the problem of language. On the texts: it is an antecedent theoretical possibility that he used his sources as an anthologist would, binding them together with editorial seams and summaries but not otherwise touching them much. Anthologies existed in the Roman world, from Alexander Polyhistor's *On the Judeans* in the first century BCE to Eusebius' various compendia. In a few places Josephus has cross-references to an earlier writing that we do not possess, and some scholars took these as proof that he had carelessly taken over even such references from his sources.⁵⁹ Yet Josephus does not claim (as did Polyhistor and Eusebius) to be anthologizing, and several developments make it impossible to view him as anything other than a writer-composer in the fullest sense.

First, in 1920 Richard Laqueur showed that the main disparities in Josephus' narratives are not well explained by recourse to different sources because those disparities are most evident in the two accounts of his own life story (in *War* 2–3 and the *Life*). In autobiography as in describing the Hasmoneans, Herods, and governors, Josephus plainly felt free to retell the same stories in dramatically different ways. Although Laqueur's explanation, that Josephus rewrote stories because of systematic changes in his loyalties later in life, is also impossible to maintain from the evidence, his essential point endures: Josephus (and not new sources) was chiefly responsible for these changes.

Second, since Laqueur's time many new resources have appeared to facilitate the study of Josephus' language. Among these are the *Complete Concordance to Flavius Josephus* (1983) edited by K. H. Rengstorf,

⁵⁸ Williamson, *World of Josephus*, 302–3.

⁵⁹ These did not bother Eusebius, who matter-of-factly assumed that Josephus had written other books that did not survive: *Hist. Eccl.* 3.9.8.

studies of the manuscript tradition by Heinz Schreckenberg,⁶⁰ and the electronic databanks of the *Perseus Project* and *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*. Analysis of Josephus' language with the aid of these tools disallows at least the more extreme source-critical images of Josephus as mere copyist. For it emerges that across the range of his works, in spite of his experimentation with different styles, he writes with care and even artistry, consistent in his main preoccupations, key terminology, preferred phrases, literary devices, and historiography. In his magnificent paraphrase of the Bible (*Ant.* 1–11), where we know his ultimate source, Josephus has refashioned his material at macro- and micro-levels to reflect themes that pervade the whole work.⁶¹ It is therefore not possible to recover his sources from his narratives, even if we know *that* he used sources, any more than it is possible to reconstitute the eggs from a cake.

If the nature of Josephus' narratives precludes the old supposition that we could recover sections of other writers in Josephus, a more general reflection on human language and historical method should caution us against hoping that we might find simple historical facts anywhere in literary texts. When we speak or write, we spin out an elaborate web of language, a world of discourse that is uniquely our own. In what I have written above, though I aspire to tell the truth, I have inevitably used my own conscious and unconscious forms of expression: a structure, diction, and syntax that have meaning for me. I may even have chosen a few expressions playfully, because of their significance for me, without expecting my envisaged readers to know that personal significance. At any rate, my language is no one else's; it is not objective, and it cannot merely reflect historical reality. The past furnishes no neutral language of its own, and every writer must interpret it in his or her own words.⁶² Josephus is no different. The research tools mentioned above invite us to marvel at the depth and subtlety of

⁶⁰ Schreckenberg, *Flavius-Josephus-Tradition*, 173.

⁶¹ See C.T. Begg, *Josephus' Account of the Early Divided Monarchy* (*AJ* 8,212–420): *Rewriting the Bible* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993); idem, *Josephus' Story of the Later Monarchy* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000); L. H. Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); idem, *Studies in Josephus' Rewritten Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

⁶² On the impossibility of neutral, unbiased language in contemporary newspaper reporting, see D. Okrent, "The War of the Words: A Dispatch from the Front Lines," *New York Times* ("Week in Review"), Sunday March 6, 2005.

his discourse. But this helps us not at all with the problem of recovering facts.⁶³

An example will help to make these abstract considerations concrete. Pontius Pilate is an important figure for New Testament readers, who understandably wish to know what Josephus says about him. From a variety of independent sources (gospels and pastorals, Philo, Josephus, archaeology) we may be confident that Pilate had been the governor of Judea for a significant period—at least ten and perhaps eighteen years⁶⁴—preceding Josephus' birth in 37 CE. (If he came in 19 CE, he was governor of Judea through Jesus' entire adult life.) Such a long tenure would have decisively shaped the atmosphere of Judean-Roman relations in which Josephus grew up. Yet in the *War* Josephus relates only two episodes from Pilate's long Judean career: one concerning the governor's introduction into Jerusalem of military standards bearing images of Caesar, the other involving his appropriation of temple funds to build an aqueduct for the city (2.169–177). Since these events occurred before Josephus' birth, he must have known them through traditions or sources from his parents' generation.

Careful examination of the *War*'s two episodes on Pilate, however, should give the historian pause. First, Josephus has thoroughly assimilated this figure to his larger narrative tendencies, which include the celebration of such Judean virtues as courage and endurance⁶⁵ and the portrayal of all Roman governors as low-level and unworthy "procurators"⁶⁶ (though they were "prefects," reporting to the legates of Syria). Second, Josephus' diction throughout the two episodes is neither neutral nor self-evident, imposed by the events on a neutral observer, but is typical of his distinctive writing style: "huge disturbance" (ταραχή μεγίστη), "set [a disturbance] in motion" (κινέω), an event as spectacle or "sight" (ὄψις), "trampling on the laws" (πατέω... τοὺς νόμους), "representation [of an image]" (δείκην), "[the masses move] in close order" (ἄθροος), "fall down prone" (καταπίπτω πρηνής), "hold out" (διακαρτερέω), "bare their swords" (γυμνῶ τὰ ξίφη), "incline [their necks]" (παρακλίνω), "transgress the law" (παραβαίνω

⁶³ Helpful observations in a similar vein are made by J. S. McLaren, *Turbulent Times? Josephus and Scholarship on Judaea in the First Century* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 18, 67, 76–7, 179–218, though I find his solution difficult to pursue (264–288).

⁶⁴ See Schwartz, *Studies in the Jewish Background*, 182–217.

⁶⁵ *War* 2.171; cf. 1.138.

⁶⁶ *War* 2.169; cf. 2.118.

τὸν νόμον), and “calamity” (συμφορά). Most of these terms are unattested or rarely found before Josephus, and yet he uses them to shape his narrative in the desired directions: they are part of his meaning-charged lexicon.

Third, and most problematic, although the underlying substance of the two Pilate episodes appears quite different in kind—the first describing a provocative measure that occurred during a single night, the second a response to a public benefaction that must have required months at least—in the retelling Josephus has assimilated each story to the other. He achieves this partly by parallel structures: they both involve life-threatening protests by aggravated masses before Pilate and his soldiers, secret plans and signals, encirclements involving weapons, a hearing before the governor’s tribunal-platform (βῆμα), and fatal consequences. Josephus drives home this assimilation by repetitive diction in the two accounts: “disturbance,” “aggravation,” “rabble,” “prone,” “tribunal-platform,” “surrounding,” “concealed,” “sword,” “agreed signal,” “trampled.” This repetition is partly for the sake of dramatic irony: the concealed standards anticipate concealed weapons; the trampling of the laws leads to the physical trampling of Judeans; and whereas the Roman forces must train hard to remain in close order, the indignant Judean masses move in close order spontaneously; they also instinctively act “as if by an agreed signal,” whereas the soldiers need secret signals to be carefully planned. Our narrator has plainly fashioned the two episodes to convey a certain atmosphere.

Now, are these accounts reliable or unreliable? How may we extract from them a historical kernel? Where do the plain facts reside? If we ask what constitutes these accounts, what they are made of, there can be only one answer: Josephus’ creative language. It is not possible to remove his language—even “and” and “but” are carefully chosen and manipulated—to expose any neutral, historical core. When Josephus is removed from his narrative, no residue remains.

It seems obvious, if these examples may stand for the whole, that we can have little confidence in any supposition about the historical realities underlying Josephus’ artful accounts. In the Pilate stories of *War* he bends whatever material was at his disposal (it is no longer at ours!) to make his points. We may well have our suspicions: that the masses could lie motionless for five days and nights (2.171); that the long project of aqueduct-building—*Ant.* 18.60 blithely halves *War*’s 80 km. length—really sparked a single massive demonstration (on comple-

tion? at an initial public announcement?); or that this public work was seen by everyone as misuse of temple funds. We may harbour *suspicions*, but we have no means of refining this story to produce what actually or probably happened: what exactly Pilate did and why, how he went about planning it, the local political conditions, and the reaction of leading figures in the Jerusalem establishment. We can neither embrace Josephus' story as fact nor excise his language, since we have no other language to substitute.

None of this deterred Schürer. He had the historical Pilate beginning his career with the standards episode (because it is the first of the two stories in Josephus), the masses besieging Pilate for five days and nights at his residence, Pilate's clever plan and signal, the Jews' defiance with bared necks, the shrieking mob protesting against the aqueduct, the concealed clubs, and the merciless beating of the people.⁶⁷ Although he related all this material from Josephus as if it were simple fact, Schürer became curiously guarded when he came to the New Testament episodes concerning Pilate, recognizing *their* limitations and biases.⁶⁸

Now, we can confirm from contemporary literature (the gospels and Philo) and from a rare piece of material evidence—the *tiberieum* inscription from Caesarea—that there was a Pontius Pilatus in Judea under the principate of Tiberius. We can even confirm from the inscription and other indications that Pilate's title was "prefect," and not Josephus' "procurator." But what Pilate did during his long stay in Judea, and why he did it, the nature of his tenure as governor, are impossible to recover—even *here* where we have such independent evidence. For the vast majority of episodes in Josephus, where he is our sole source, there is *a fortiori* little or nothing we can know with confidence. People really did things in the first century, of course, and for various reasons, but for us today those facts exist only as refracted, sampled, interpreted, and structured within Josephus' world of discourse. Our situation is much like that of an audience for a historical film "inspired" by real events. We know *that* events lie behind the film but, in the absence of other information, we do not know where. Just as we would not walk up to a cinema screen and expect to draw out real objects and people, realizing that the film is a composition with

⁶⁷ Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, 1:384–385.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:385.

its own integrity and criteria and different from the underlying reality, so in Josephus' narratives we meet an artful production that is opaque in relation to underlying historical *realia*. Where other evidence of the back-story exists, we might have a chance to get behind Josephus, though the example of Pilate does not encourage great optimism even there.

The fundamental problem of Josephus' compositional art has usually been ignored by scholars eager to use his works for information about first-century Judea and New Testament backgrounds. In spite of occasional cautionary remarks about his biases, they still leave the impression that those biases might somehow be bypassed or evaporated off to leave a residue of fact. Josephus' narrative is assumed to present facts with the same neutrality of language as might be conveyed by "the colour blue"—something that all observers could agree on having seen if they had been present. If Josephus had been interested in describing the physical features of his characters, which could be indicated by relatively neutral terms, then we might indeed debate his accuracy. Did he accurately give the height of Titus or John of Gischala? Was he correct about their hair or eye colour? Did they carry the scars that he claimed? Like most other authors of his time, however, Josephus says not a word about such things. His history is mainly about interpreting the actions of his characters in terms of their motives, describing the outcomes, and offering explicit or implicit evaluation. Objective language for such portraiture does not exist. Therefore, there is no possibility of refining his narratives to produce neutral facts. Historians must proceed differently.

1.5. *"Historical Accuracy, Reliability"*

To clarify the problem, it may be useful to unpack the category of Josephus' "historical reliability" into several discrete components. Others could be adduced, but these will suffice.

- a. Scenic elements that can be measured and described in the neutral language of size, shape, colour, and technical nomenclature. Did the places that Josephus mentions actually exist? The landscape features, buildings, and landmarks? Were the groups and institutions he mentions operative at the time to which he dates them? Can we confirm the existence of the persons he names along with the roles and titles he gives them?

- b. Events in general. Did a roughly parallel event happen where and when he claims? E.g., Did Pilate authorize an aqueduct for Jerusalem, or introduce offensive images into the city on military standards? Did Eleazar son of Ananias halt the temple sacrifice for foreigners (*War* 2.409–410)?
- c. Event details. Exactly who did what, when, and in relation to what other actions? (If Eleazar did halt the sacrifice for foreigners, how did he do it exactly—in consultation with whom, and by what process? What happened to the animals? Were there specific stimuli not mentioned by Josephus? What role did Eleazar’s opinion play in the decision: was it his initiative or a compromise with others? Was it planned as a permanent measure or a temporary protest?) Did Josephus know and/or divulge all or most of the relevant information that we would have known if we had been there? How can we know whether he did? Through Josephus or not, can we have any confidence that we have enough contextual information to assess what was done in relation to what else?
- d. Motives, values, and interests. If we could travel back in time and interview the actors whose names appear in the narrative, would they explain their intentions and values much as Josephus does? (If Eleazar halted the sacrifice, what was his aim in doing so? What were the aims of his associates and advisers? Were these all the same?) No matter what they said, should we believe either them or Josephus? (Do we believe our own politicians and business leaders when they explain their motives?) How can we know their actual motives, or extract these from Josephus?

If we separate out even these elements of the stories, we see immediately a problem with incommensurate categories. Whereas (d) constitutes the heart of Josephus’ history, and (c) provides a narrative basis for his moral evaluations, modern historians tend to speak almost exclusively about (a), with a dash of (b), when they declare him “credible” or “reliable.”⁶⁹ That is because only material in (a) and to some

⁶⁹ E.g., M. Broshi, “The Credibility of Josephus,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33 (1982): 379–384; M. Aviam, “Yodefāt/Jotapata: The Archaeology of the first Battle,” in *The First Jewish Revolt: Archaeology, History, and Ideology*, ed. A. M. Berlin and J. A. Overman (New York: Routledge, 2002), 121–133; D. Dyon, “Gamla: City of Refuge,” in *First Jewish Revolt*, ed. Berlin and Overman, 134–153.

extent (b) can easily be verified by archaeology, which has become since the 1960's the primary basis for confirming Josephus' "trustworthiness."

But if Josephus can be proven largely correct about the physical realities of his homeland—distances between familiar places, landscape features, major Herodian structures—that only puts him on the level of a good historical novelist. Even the fairly spectacular finds at Gamala and Jotapata, which confirm that the inhabitants tried to reinforce the walls before being overrun by the Romans,⁷⁰ cannot prove his accounts of who did what, when, and *why*—the stuff of his history. We may not say: he was right about the scenic elements and *therefore* he was probably right about the history itself. Given that his narratives are woven from his own linguistic and conceptual threads, what could it mean to declare them either "reliable" or "inaccurate"? We are not able to assume Josephus' world-view, perspective, prejudices, and language, even if we wished to do so. It is therefore meaningless to say that we either affirm or reject these accounts. We can only try to understand them.

Since critics do not often explain how they find reliable material in Josephus, it seems that most often they trust their instincts, accepting a story against the criterion: "Why would he make up something like this?" But instinct is of little use in historical scholarship, which requires us to describe our reasoning so that our steps may be traced by others examining the same evidence. Instinct cannot be reproduced, and it is also contra-indicated by the evidence of Josephus. Almost any given story in *War*, about the Hasmoneans or Herods or Josephus in Galilee, may seem plausible enough within that narrative. Josephus wrote in order to be plausible. Yet of the hundreds of episodes in *Antiquities-Life* that represent retellings of stories from the *War*, almost all have been significantly changed—with respect to date, immediate context, numbers and amounts, *dramatis personae*, and motives.⁷¹ When read on their own, the later stories too seem plausible. But two contradictory narratives cannot accurately reflect the

⁷⁰ See the essays by Aviam and Syon in previous note.

⁷¹ A quick impression of the problems may be gained from Appendix C in S. Mason, *Life of Josephus: Translation and Commentary*. Vol. 9 of *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*, ed. S. Mason (Leiden: Brill, 2001).—S. J. D. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome: His Vita and Development as a Historian* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), explores the problems in great detail. See further section 3 below.

same events. Josephus' freedom in *retelling* suggests a comparable freedom in the *first* telling, which should make us doubt *any and all* accounts.

In some important recent studies, intuition has been brought to bear upon apparent *contradictions* in the narrative: where Josephus contradicts his narrative interests, it is proposed, he must be preserving a reliable fact, for although he would have a satisfactory motive (in his historian's conscience) for including factual material that stood in some tension with his literary aims, he would have no motive for introducing false information to undermine his agenda.⁷² The problem here is that identifying what contradicts Josephus' biases assumes an adequate account of those biases, whereas the contradictions proposed by these studies often turn out to be minor or contrapuntal themes within Josephus' highly textured narratives.⁷³

Alas, the widely shared hope of transforming one kind of material (Josephus' artful narrative) into something quite different (real human actions and their motives) has more to do with alchemy than with history. Whether we are interested in the events themselves or content ourselves with Josephus' sources, the urgency of our *need to know* does nothing to remove the problem that we have no reasonable way of recovering these things from Josephus.

2. *Josephus and the New Testament Narratives as Parallel, Crafted Stories*

Although the traditional Christian use of Josephus and the modern humanist sequel had very different philosophical underpinnings, they shared two important features. First, they depended upon, and trusted, Josephus to transmit reliable, more or less ready-made facts. Reading Josephus and doing history were parts of the same operation, even if one conceded that not everything in Josephus was factual. Second, paradoxically, in spite of their eager and comprehensive embrace of

⁷² Especially M. D. Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judaea: The Origins of the Jewish Revolt against Rome AD 66–70* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 20–21 and J. J. Price, *Jerusalem under Siege: The Collapse of the Jewish State, 66–70 CE* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 33, 186.

⁷³ See S. Mason, "Flavius Josephus in Flavian Rome: Reading on and Between the Lines," in *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text*, ed. A. J. Boyle and W. J. Dominik (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 559–589.

Josephus, neither model had the slightest interest in what Josephus actually wrote about: stories with beginnings, middles, ends, plots, and characters. As recently as 1988, in a thoroughly researched conspectus of Josephus studies Per Bilde was unable to cite much if any scholarship concerning the aims, structures, and dominant themes of Josephus' two major works.⁷⁴ So much *use*; so little reading! This shocking state of affairs highlighted the prepossessions of both traditional and modern scholarship.

Bilde himself was a significant catalyst in bringing about a new view of Josephus—as a competent and even sophisticated author.⁷⁵ This view has inescapable consequences for the project of doing history with Josephus, for if his narratives are wholly crafted artistic compositions, requiring interpretation, then historical reconstruction must be fully decoupled from *reading*, and become an entirely distinct intellectual exercise. This is not to say that the interpreter does not already have historical questions in mind—while reading. As in reading any text, we always maintain a dialectic between the words and the things to which the words refer, as a stimulus to interpretation. But attending to one story about the past, such as Josephus', is a different enterprise from reconstructing that past in itself; the latter task is driven not by any narrator's interests but by the investigator's questions, and hypotheses, and systematic interpretation. A new view of Josephus and history has necessarily reframed the subset problem of using Josephus for New Testament study.

⁷⁴ P. Bilde, *Flavius Josephus Between Jerusalem and Rome: His Life, His Works and Their Importance* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1988), 71, 92, 102, 118.

⁷⁵ An early work respecting Josephus' literary talents, which unfortunately had little impact on English-language scholarship at least, was B. Brüne, *Flavius Josephus und seine Schriften in ihrem Verhältnis zum Judentume, zur griechisch-römischen Welt und zum Christentume, mit griechischer Wortkonkordanz zum Neuen Testamente und I. Clemensbriefe nebst Sach- und Namenverzeichnis* (Wiesbaden: M. Sändig, 1969 [1913]). Henry St. John Thackeray also stood back from source-critical ambitions in his famous published lectures, H. St. John Thackeray, *Josephus: The Man and the Historian* (New York: Ktav, 1967 [1929]). He still removed the narratives from Josephus' authorial control, however, with his theory that industrious literary assistants were responsible for the *War* and the last quarter of the *Antiquities*. Other crucial works before Bilde, which in various ways portended the shift of scholarly interest, included H. Lindner, *Die Geschichtsauffassung des Flavius Josephus im Bellum Judaicum* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), H. W. Attridge, *The Interpretation of Biblical History in the Antiquitates Judaicae of Flavius Josephus* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976), and T. Rajak, *Josephus: The Historian and His Society* (London: Duckworth, 1983).

The scholar who arguably did the most to force the question of doing history with Josephus was Horst Moehring of Brown University. Already in his 1957 Chicago dissertation he showed that the novelistic-erotic elements that had already been found in Josephus' biblical paraphrase,⁷⁶ which could have come only from the author and not from his sources because they matched larger tendencies throughout the *Antiquities*, persevered also in the narratives of the Herodian period and first century CE (*War* 1–2; *Ant.* 14–18). Josephus was, therefore, truly the author of the works that bear his name.

Moehring reflected that since Josephus fashioned these later narratives, which had usually been considered “historical,” with as much art as he had applied to the biblical paraphrase, we must accept that his narratives are literary creations with no necessary connections to what actually happened.⁷⁷ In a review discussing the work of a scholar who had attempted to wring historical facts from Josephus, albeit in a fairly sophisticated way, Moehring declared: “every single sentence of Josephus is determined and coloured by his aims and tendencies... To assume that what Josephus added to the facts is fiction merely indicates a complete misunderstanding of Hellenistic historiography.”⁷⁸ And in his own major essay on Josephus' exploration of Judean-Roman relations, for *Aufstieg und Niedergang* (1984), Moehring would similarly caution: “It is entirely useless to make any attempts to separate in Josephus any supposedly ‘objective’ passages from any supposedly ‘subjective’ interpretations.”⁷⁹ His position was a forthright repudiation of the fact/value distinction that had been the defining characteristic of modern historiography since Ranke.

Welcoming Josephus into the ranks of real authors, and the resulting radical separation between the task of his interpreters and that of historians finally catches up with some basic insights of many related disciplines: philosophy of language, hermeneutics, literary criticism, and philosophy of history. We lack the space to explore these here, but the question of historical method is crucial. As R. G. Collingwood (among others) observed, anyone who systematically ponders history

⁷⁶ M. Braun, *Griechischer Roman und hellenistische Geschichtsschreibung* (Frankfurt a.M.: V. Klostermann, 1934).

⁷⁷ H. R. Moehring, *Novelistic Elements in the Writings of Flavius Josephus* (Ph.D. thesis, Faculty of the Division of the Humanities, University of Chicago, 1957), 64, 87, 144.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 241.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 868.

soon realizes that the historian cannot be in the business of taking some existing tailored account and declaring it accurate or inaccurate as it stands—or even in part. That would amount to another form of knowledge via authority. Even were the authoritative text treated critically, it would remain the source for—and therefore circumscribe the boundaries of—all possible knowledge about the events in question. Its concerns would become our concerns.

Collingwood argued rather that the historian, like an investigating detective, begins with a carefully formulated problem of his (or her) own. The historian's task is to assemble all relevant evidence, literary or material, and first understand that evidence in its own context. What were this author's aims and interests? Why does he/she include any information about the problem I am investigating? What sort of access did this person have to the people and events in which I am interested? What language does he/she use for these events, and why? Only when all the evidence is thus understood *in situ* is the detective-historian in a position to test hypotheses that might explain how the range of evidence came into being: what actually happened. History is therefore a fully autonomous exercise, in keeping with the spirit of the Enlightenment, *not* a mere christening of some traditional accounts as (more or less) "accurate."⁸⁰

With the 1990's, after the Josephus *Concordance* and the first forms of electronic textual-analysis tools had appeared, came a number of efforts to work out the principle that Josephus and the New Testament are parallel corpora, which should be read first and foremost for their literary and rhetorical structures. Gregory Sterling's revised dissertation on historiography and self-definition in Josephus and Luke-Acts (1992) explored the parallels of genre—"apologetic historiography"—between these two important Jewish and Christian authors. Sterling was interested much more in the forms and functions of the compositions than in the external referents or underlying events. His was a truly historical study all the same, but with history now including the contexts and conditions of literary production.

Also in 1992 came Lester Grabbe's two-volume reference work, *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian*. Although he did not write for New Testament scholars in particular, Grabbe was responding directly to the positivist reference-work tradition embodied by Schürer. Rejecting

⁸⁰ R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976 [1946]), 256–257.

any naïve quest for historical facts in the sources, his work distinguishes itself by its method. Whereas Schürer's procedure had been to list the primary sources and bibliography, and then move quickly to an ostensibly reliable historical narrative, Grabbe's configuration reflected his keen sensitivity to problems of method. For each period he touched upon (through seven centuries), he first presented a bibliographical guide and then a description of each kind of primary evidence in context: its aims, themes, and character. With this preliminary understanding of the evidence in hand, he specified the historical issues relevant to the period in question that seemed to demand resolution. One can follow here all the stages of historical inquiry: circumscribing the investigation, gathering evidence, understanding it *in situ*, and posing specific problems. Only with these steps completed did Grabbe attempt to work out historical hypotheses that would solve the problems and explain the evidence.

The methodological chasm separating Grabbe's method from Schürer's is evident in his willingness to concede, at the end of several attempts at synthesis, that the evidence does not permit us to state with any confidence what happened.⁸¹ The message is clear: historical work is not merely or even primarily about determining facts. Even where we cannot reach that ultimate goal, the process itself becomes a goal. Interpreting texts and material evidence responsibly is a fundamental historical exercise, though it is conceptually different from trying to verify events mentioned in the ancient texts.

Like Schürer, Grabbe realized the unique importance of Josephus for Judean history and devoted special space to him in the Introduction. But his method was different in principle. With an eye on Schürer he remarked that, "the Jewish historian's works have often been misused and cited without actually being read."⁸² Unfortunately, Grabbe's important study fell short in exploring the character of Josephus' narratives in the depth suggested by his Introduction, especially in one significant chapter.⁸³ Still, his work marked a conceptual shift in dealing with the nature of the evidence and the problem of history.

Still another product of 1992 was the first edition of my *Josephus and the New Testament*. I aimed to introduce the New Testament reader to Josephus in keeping with the sort of methodological considerations

⁸¹ E.g., Grabbe, *Judaism*, 93, 98, 111, 268, 281.

⁸² Grabbe, *Judaism*, 10.

⁸³ The admirable method is abandoned in ch. 8 (e.g., Grabbe, *Judaism*, 468–482).

indicated above. Of the six chapters, accordingly, the first three were devoted to Josephus alone, on his own terms and for his own sake: his use in western tradition, his life story, and an overview of each composition. My point was that it is impossible to use any part of Josephus for other purposes, including New Testament interpretation, if one does not first have some idea of what the part means in light of the whole. Each element of Josephus' narratives was there to serve some larger interests, which must be understood before the item can be "used."

The latter three chapters took up, within that framework, issues prompted by New Testament study: figures important in the New Testament world, early Christian figures mentioned by Josephus, and the relationship between Josephus and Luke-Acts. Also in this latter half I wanted to present Josephus' works not as a source of historical data that could be plucked out by New Testament readers, but as contemporary, parallel narratives of extraordinary interest, that (taken as a whole) opened up new possibilities for understanding the New Testament and its world. The historical realities underlying the texts I mainly left untouched, though in a couple of cases (e.g., with John the Baptist) I undertook a preliminary historical probe as an illustration of how such an inquiry might look—if one first paid attention to all relevant narratives. My overriding argument was that reading Josephus and the New Testament contextually, irrespective of the facts referred to in the stories, is already enlightening historical work.

The method employed in *Josephus and the New Testament* was continuous with my earlier, more technical study of Josephus' Pharisees (1991). That book argued that historical claims about the Pharisees, which had proliferated for more than a century and which were often contradictory, should await a reasonable grasp of *Josephus'* portraits of the group. Rather than drawing out his statement that Pharisees were "reputed to be the most precise interpreters of the laws" and taking it as Josephus' obvious endorsement, for example, I tried to show that in context this Josephan language had other connotations. Sayings of Josephus were not independent data to be used at will, but components of a story. Others had already examined the Pharisees in rabbinic literature and in each of the gospels and Acts, but characteristically Josephus had not yet been thought worthy of *interpretation*. Scholars were still using his narratives as if they were immune from standard principles of language and historiography.

Jacob Neusner had much earlier paved the way for such a treatment of the Pharisees with a small textbook (1973) that first surveyed each

text's portrait on its own terms; he was followed by Anthony Saldarini (1988) and Günter Stemberger (1991 [ET 1995]).⁸⁴ Such an approach is rapidly becoming *de rigueur* in studying figures and events from the New Testament period. The scholar first interprets each of the relevant narratives (or pieces of material evidence if available), only then proceeding to historical problems and hypotheses that might explain the whole range of evidence.

A promising field for such comparison between Josephus and the earliest Christian texts that I did not include in my book is his elaborate biblical interpretation. About a third of Josephus' corpus (*Ant.* 1–11 and several sections of *Against Apion*) is given over to biblical interpretation: the laws or “constitution” given by Moses and events in ancient Israel/Judah. This material has been the subject of intense and highly illuminating analysis over several decades, chiefly by Louis H. Feldman and Christopher Begg.⁸⁵ Although the use of scripture is of course a basic issue for the study of Christian origins, Josephus' biblical paraphrase has rarely been brought to bear on New Testament interpretation. It is odd that the enigmatic Dead Sea Scrolls, as well as Philo's abstruse allegories, should seem more relevant for New Testament scholars than Josephus' compelling and systematic reinterpretation.

Another large arena for comparative-narrative analysis includes the social, economic, and political history of first-century Judea and Galilee: the social structures of Jerusalem and the Galilean towns and villages, pre-war conditions in these places, the identity of the Galileans, *sicarii*, and countless others. Although these questions have of course been taken up in many reference works since Schürer, as also in recent studies of Galilean and Judean society, the use of Josephus still tends toward the positivistic. Instead of using his narrative as background, or passing critical judgement on the truth or falsity of his claims, I am proposing something different: trying to enter his narrative world in order to understand how the players, places, and events function

⁸⁴ E. Rivkin, *A Hidden Revolution* (Nashville: Abington, 1978) should also be mentioned as a formal model of the procedure, though in execution he tended strongly toward assimilation of all the texts to his theory of the Pharisees.

⁸⁵ Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation*; idem, *Studies in Josephus' Rewritten Bible*; idem, *Judean Antiquities 1–4*. Vol. 3 of *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*, ed. S. Mason (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Begg, *Josephus' Account*; idem, “Solomon's Apostasy (1 Kgs. 11,1–13) According to Josephus,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 28 (1997): 294–313; idem, *Judean Antiquities 5–7*. Vol. 4 of *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*, ed. S. Mason (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

within his stories, and how they would have been understood by his first readers. His perspectives⁸⁶ on the phenomena described above are, again, not facts but ingredients of a world-view that merits close consideration before one asks about the historical phenomena themselves.

3. *Rhetoric and Historiography in Josephus and the New Testament*

The ways in which scholars have sought to illuminate the study of the New Testament with the help of Josephus, described thus far, may be schematized as follows. In antiquity and the Middle Ages, he was regarded as a prestigious and approved guide:

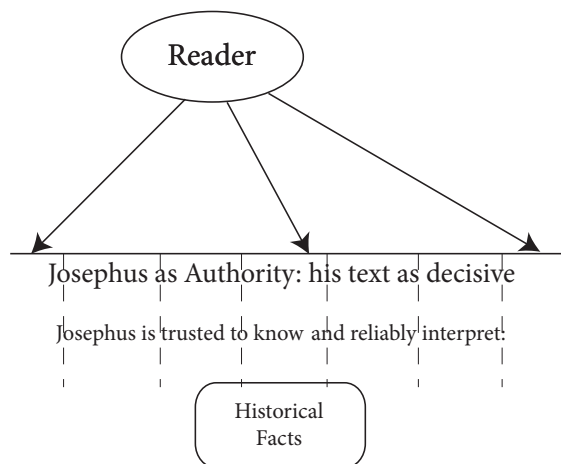


Figure 1

In the post-Enlightenment period, it was not Josephus' prestige but the facts and sources he was thought to transmit that established his value. Scholars imagined they could read *through* Josephus to realities beyond the text—events and sources:

⁸⁶ A preliminary effort for some of these issues is S. Mason, "Chief Priests, Sadducees, Pharisees and Sanhedrin in Acts," in *The Book of Acts in its Palestinian Setting*, ed. R. Bauckham, *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*, 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 115–77.

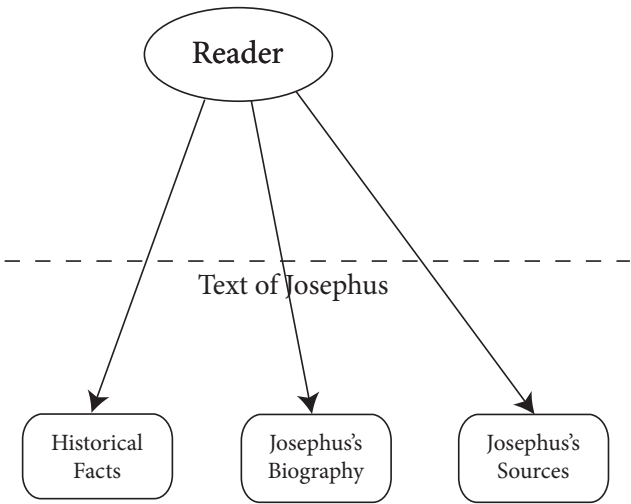


Figure 2

More recently, careful study of Josephus' narratives has rendered them largely opaque (in the absence of other evidence) to underlying realities, generating the increasingly accepted principle that interpreting Josephus and reconstructing history are distinct operations, the former being a necessary condition of the latter:

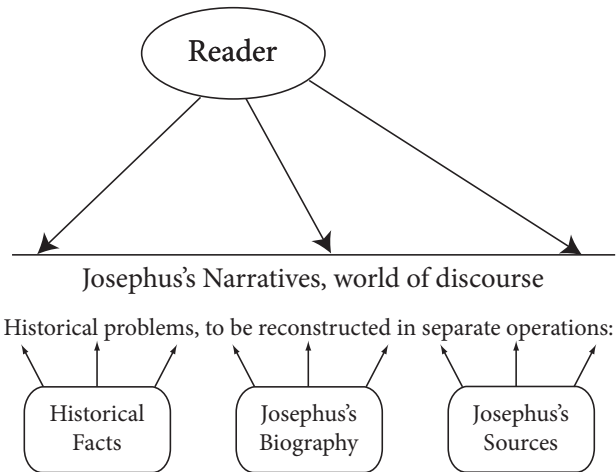


Figure 3

In this final section I would like to propose yet another model, which (following the same visual logic) might look like this:

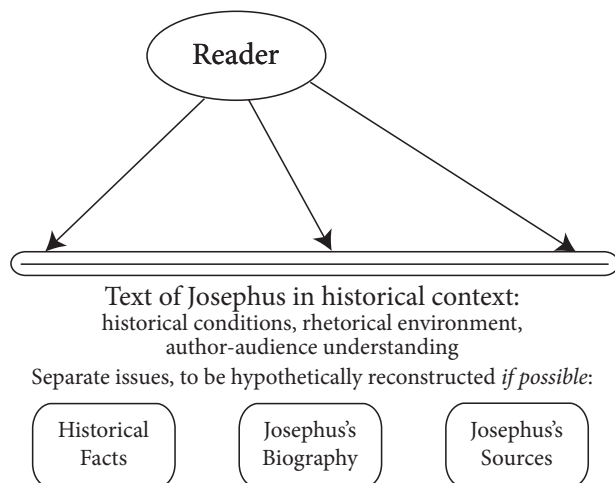


Figure 4

This is a significant refinement of the approach described in the previous section. There, the investigator was still focused ultimately on the events recounted in Josephus' narratives, but the problem of interpreting Josephus was recognized as a major obstacle. The New Testament reader interested in Pontius Pilate, the Pharisees and Sadducees, the temple leadership, or Herod's descendants had first to understand the functions of these groups and individuals in Josephus (as in each relevant text) before proceeding to a hypothetical reconstruction. But a further realignment of scholarly interests may turn out to be more productive for New Testament and Josephus scholars alike.

Three questions prompt this kind of refinement, namely: What is a text? What is historical? And what (from Josephus) will be most useful for New Testament study?

Just as facts do not speak for themselves, neither do texts. A text is a *medium*, a set of codes created by an author to communicate with specific envisaged audiences. Neutral, self-interpreting texts are inconceivable. Most obviously, the author must choose a language (Greek, Aramaic, English, Chinese) and a dialect of it that the envisaged audience will know. And that is only the beginning of the decisions: the

author must then choose the pitch or register (e.g., high-literary, middle-brow, vernacular), the attitude or tone (e.g., dispassionate, passionate), the voice (omniscient observer, participant), the vocabulary (challenging, varied, neologistic; fashionably contemporary, evocative of classics; plain, emotive, highly symbolic; repetitive, formulaic), and the syntax—for example—that will reach particular audiences in desired ways if communication is to succeed. An important consideration is the audience's prior knowledge and value systems: What will need to be explained? At what point might explanation become condescending? What will make them laugh or shock them? What can be evoked (and with how much effort, or by what techniques?), possibly by way of satire or irony? All texts are media of communication, and Josephus is no exception.

We have seen (section 1) that Josephus composed in the first instance for audiences where he lived, in Flavian Rome.⁸⁷ Given the function of the text as medium between author and audience, we need a new kind of investigation of his narratives as themselves historical events: as transactions between author and audience (signaled in the diagram above by the penumbra around the text line). We are in a fairly promising position to learn about the political, social, and literary environment in Flavian Rome during the Flavian period (70 to 96 CE), through material and literary remains.⁸⁸ Once we abandon a textual fundamentalism that would expect a text to be all-sufficient and self-interpreting, once we take seriously its function as medium of communication with a real audience, the text may come alive again for us. Such dynamic analysis opens our imagination to literary devices understood by author and audience, unspoken cues and allusions that may have been more effective than a static reading of the text would suggest. Whereas a static reading of Josephus, as if his works were intended to be all-sufficient statements for all possible readers, predisposes us to lament his obscurities and contradictions, reading his works as transactions with Flavian audiences puts things in a different light. We

⁸⁷ For Josephus' audience: S. Mason, "Of Audience and Meaning: Reading Josephus' *Bellum Iudaicum* in the Context of Flavian Rome," in *Flavius Josephus Between Jerusalem and Rome*, ed. J. Sievers and G. Lembi (Leiden: Brill, 2005): 71–100.

⁸⁸ A. J. Boyle and W. J. Dominik, eds., *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), and J. S. Edmondson, S. Mason and J. B. Rives, eds., *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) begin to gather this evidence.

need, in brief, to recover and re-enter the rhetoricized mentality of first-century Rome.

Admittedly, such a reorientation of our historical interests from underlying facts to the world of the text makes a virtue of necessity. Even in our own time we find it difficult or impossible to assess the motives of politicians, entertainers, and other celebrities. Investigations of recent crimes, even where copious evidence appears to exist, often seem unable to determine what really happened, and carefully mounted prosecutions fail. How, then, shall we claim to know with probability who did what and why *two millennia ago*, on the basis of a single artful interpretation of sources unknown? Although we ought certainly to try where it is feasible to reconstruct specific phenomena from the past, a reorientation from the events behind the texts to the historical world of the text will pay dividends for the New Testament reader as for other students of antiquity.

Let me offer four examples of the ways in which the study of Josephus' historical world might be beneficial for the New Testament reader: architectonic literary structure, paraphrastic freedom, serious playfulness, and loyalty to patrons. Although countless other ancient texts also afford access to the ancient assumptions and values involved here, Josephus' proximity in time and interest makes his narratives particularly helpful for the New Testament reader.

3.1. *Architectonic Literary Structure*

Rhetoric, which was the pinnacle of the ancient educational system and which provided the orientation also for lower-level study, was grounded in a combination of memory, imitation, and mental versatility.⁸⁹ In a literary culture that was still to a large extent oral and aural, techniques for memorization of large bodies of material had wide currency. A basic principle was to organize one's mental material as the rooms of a large house, with resources of a similar kind kept in

⁸⁹ Excellent recent studies are J. P. Small, *Wax Tablets of the Mind: Cognitive Studies of Memory and Literacy in Classical Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1997), R. Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), and N. T. Habinek, *Ancient Rhetoric and Oratory*, Blackwell Introductions to the Classical World (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005).

a given room or place (*locus* or *topos*), to which one could then resort as needed to draw them out for the purpose of persuasive argument.⁹⁰

This architectural visualization of literature, coupled with the Greek and Roman taste for symmetry, suggested a technique for patterning literary-rhetorical creations, especially narratives and plays. The text would develop gradually towards a central pivot or fulcrum and then move away from it, so that the end balanced the beginning. A writer might structure the progression more or less densely, the degree of “concentricity” depending upon the number of parallel stops along the way. Josephus displays an awareness of the principle when he recalls in the prologue to the *Antiquities* (1.6–7) that he opted not to include the ancient history of the Judeans in the *War* because he wished to balance off (συμμετρέω) the *beginnings and end* of that work proportionately.

Each of his compositions, it turns out, is constructed around a pivotal episode, with matching beginning and end as well as parallel interim stops. In the *War* the central panel is the murder of the chief priests Ananus and Jesus in Jerusalem (4.314–333), which Josephus makes the decisive turn toward tyranny and banditry in the city. In the *Antiquities* the centre is the destruction of the first temple at the end of book 10, which anticipates the eve of the second destruction in book 20. In the *Life*, the central panel is that book’s only dream revelation to Josephus (208–209), which persuades him to stay and care for the Galileans. In the *Apion*, the end of book 1 and beginning of book 2 comprise his defence against Egyptian-Alexandrian writers, bounded on either side by the positive celebration of Judean culture. Although I lack the space to show it here, each work reveals also a fuller pattern of concentricity, with the two extremities and various points in between matched symmetrically in the two halves.⁹¹

As is well known, each of the gospels reveals comparable structural concerns. This is perhaps most easily noticeable in John, where the raising of Lazarus in chapter 11 is pivotal to the work in many respects, and in the two-volume Luke-Acts, in which the steady movement toward Jerusalem throughout the gospel (since Luke 9:51), the scene of Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension (Luke 24/Acts 1), is

⁹⁰ Small, *Wax Tablets*, 81–116; Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind*, 166–167.

⁹¹ See the third chapter of S. Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992; rev. ed. 2003).

matched by the deliberate move away from that centre in Acts (e.g., 1:8). Peter's confession in Mark 8:27–30, after which the mood of the narrative sharply changes in anticipation of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, more or less bisects that story. And Matthew 13 hosts the third of that gospel's five concentrically patterned speeches. In none of these cases does the concentric structure necessarily dictate the work's primary *meaning*, for other structures, including the dramatic development to a climax nearer the end, are intertwined with it. Josephus' works illustrate, nonetheless, the ways in which a Greek-speaking author contemporary with the evangelists could overlay multiple structural patterns.

In addition to such macro-structures in his compositions, Josephus frequently uses micro-structures within units, such as the A-B-A pattern. This can have several functions, for example: to introduce or seed a character, group, or theme, that will become more important later, or to build suspense. A striking example of the latter comes in *War* 2, where Josephus begins the story of King Herod's succession hearings before Augustus in Rome, but then abruptly breaks off the narrative to describe in detail the revolt of 4 BCE in Judea, before returning to conclude the succession hearings (*War* 2.1–100). Such patterns are well known in both Paul (e.g., 1 Cor 8–9–10) and the gospels—especially in the famous Marcan “sandwich” technique.

3.2. *Paraphrastic Freedom*

An axiom of rhetorical training was that one should never tell the same story twice in the same way. The prime directive in the art of persuasion was not to bore audiences, and the chief prophylactic against boredom was variety: of voice pitch and volume in speeches; of content, person, location, perspective, diction, and style in writing. The standard preparatory exercises in rhetoric included many forms of manipulating an episode or saying (*chreia*): rewriting it in each grammatical case-set; rebuttal and confirmation of its moral position; the application of encomium and invective to various behaviours; and—what interests us most—rewriting (παράφρασις).

The rhetorical handbooks (e.g., Theon, *Prog.* 62–64, 107–110; Quintilian, *Inst.* 1.9.2; 10.5.4–11) explain paraphrase as “changing the form of expression while keeping the thoughts.” According to Theon of Alexandria, one might do this in four ways: change of syntax, addition of words and phrases, subtraction and substitution of the same.

Although this may appear to be a fairly conservative undertaking (“keeping the thoughts”), we have numerous examples of the ways in which sayings, incidents, and stories were actually retold, and these reveal substantial differences of location, date, persons involved, and forms of sayings. Plainly, maxims and *chreiai* were heavily worked over for manifold uses, attributed to different individuals and contexts.⁹² Among historically sensitive writers, Plutarch provides much material for us to track different versions—sometimes very different—of the same material as he reused it in his biographies and moral essays.⁹³

Josephus is perhaps more directly relevant to the New Testament reader because he rewrote entire narratives from the *War* in the *Antiquities-Life*. Hardly any of the rewriting is verbatim, and much of it matches Theon’s four techniques for changing a story while keeping to the same thoughts. Yet there are also major differences between *War* and *Antiquities-Life*, as I have mentioned above. It may be helpful to consider one example, because it intersects with the concern for concentric structure just discussed.

In *War* 2.614–625, Josephus relates how the people of Tiberias revolted from his leadership at the instigation of his arch-rival John of Gischala. At the end of that story, Josephus (the character in the story) gathers the names of John’s followers and threatens their families and property if they do not yield to him (*War* 2.624–625); this produces thousands of defections and leads directly to John’s appeal to Jerusalem for help against Josephus (*War* 2.626), which produces a delegation from Jerusalem to oust him. When Josephus retells this episode in his *Life*, however, he clones it so that *two* very similar Tiberias-revolt stories now appear: at the one-quarter and three-quarter points of the narrative, respectively (*Life* 85–103, 271–308), thus enhancing the volume’s symmetry. The first part of *War*’s story (2.614–619) finds a close match to the first Tiberian revolt in the *Life* (85–103). Between the two *Life* stories, the *dramatis personae*, dramatic details, diction, and denouement are conspicuously similar. But the rounding up of John’s followers described in the single *War* story cannot occur at story of the

⁹² V. K. Robbins, *Ancient Quotes and Anecdotes: From Crib to Crypt* (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1978); Criore, *Gymnastics of the Mind*, 238; C. Pelling, *Literary Texts and the Greek Historian* (London: Routledge, 2000), 49–52.

⁹³ See Pelling (previous note).

first revolt in the *Life*, for John still has a large role to play there. It occurs instead near the end of the *Life* (369–372), *after* the delegation from Jerusalem has come and failed, and long after the first Tiberian revolt (85–103), appearing now as a delayed consequence of the *second* revolt (271–308).

Thus, what the *War* describes in a single episode would cause problems for the story line in the *Life*, and *Life*'s two revolts could not fit in the *War*. Evidently Josephus has, for literary reasons, split one conflict into two for the later work. This bifurcation illustrates the lengths to which even a conscientious historian could go to sustain literary patterns.

This is not the place to rehearse the many differences among the synoptic gospels' accounts of parallel events: famously, Jesus' birth, trial, and resurrection, but also hundreds of smaller details. I wish only to suggest that the rhetorical mindset of ancient authors, illustrated by Josephus' sometimes radical reworking of stories, might provide fruitful ways of thinking about the literary assumptions and values of the New Testament writers.

3.3. *Serious Playfulness*

The study of Josephus as narrative is only now at a point that was reached by scholarship on many other classical and biblical texts decades ago, namely: taking his compositions seriously enough to look for their structures, ongoing themes, characteristic phrasing, and literary devices. The mere recognition that Josephus should be read in earnest has been a long time coming. But almost immediately after gaining that summit, we begin to realize that writing in ancient Rome was *not* entirely earnest, that rhetorical training inculcated—even for the most serious discussions—a sort of playfulness with words. Ancient speakers and their educated audiences were much more attuned than we normally are to the possibilities of language for figures of speech and particularly for double meaning, irony, and sarcasm.⁹⁴ In the case

⁹⁴ E.g., F. Ahl, "The Art of Safe Criticism in Greece and Rome," *American Journal of Philology* 105 (1984): 174–208; S. Bartsch, *Actors in the Audience: Theatricality and Doublespeak from Nero to Hadrian* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); V. Rudich, *Political Dissidence under Nero: The Price of Dissimulation* (London: Routledge, 1993); idem, *Dissidence and Literature under Nero: The Price of Rhetoricization* (London: Routledge, 1997); W. J. Dominik and J. Garthwaite, *Writing Politics in Imperial Rome* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); S. Mason, "Figured Speech and Irony in the

of the New Testament, although scholars have explored linguistic play and irony in some texts (notably in John), the great burden of the scholarly and theological traditions still predisposes readers to look always for earnest ideas and propositions. Perhaps the coming of age in Josephus studies can have a beneficial effect also here for New Testament study.

Space permits only a few examples of the sort of thing that Josephus can do with language. In the *Life* as a whole, as in parts of his other works, he establishes an ironic context from the start: the Jerusalem leaders know that Rome cannot be defeated, but they also know that it is futile or dangerous to oppose the masses when they desire war, and so they embark on a deliberate programme of doublespeak: thinking one thing but saying another (*Life* 17–22). Some of the ways in which this plays out are humorous for the knowing reader, for example in the interplay between Josephus and the Jerusalem delegation as they exchange diplomatic letters with each other that try to mask their true intentions (*Life* 216–31). More abstractly, throughout his works Josephus deploys to great effect the Platonic contrast between what merely seems or appears to be the case (one kind of appearances in the petty grasping after *titles* by tyrants and pretenders) and what *really is* the case (e.g., the lack of authority exercised by titled rulers) (*War* 1.110–112, 209, 561, 648; 2.2, 208; *Ant.* 17.41; 19.332; *Apion* 1.18, 67).

On a different level, Josephus enjoys playing with various meanings of the same word, sometimes picking up a term, reusing it in different ways, and then dropping it.⁹⁵ Again, he has fun—even in serious contexts—with people's names. So, the two most disreputable and faithless leaders of Tiberias (*Life* 35–36) are *Justus* and his father *Pistus* (“righteous” and “faithful”). A crooked viceroy is named *Varus* (“twisted, crooked”), who is replaced by a sort of white knight, *Aequus Modius* (“fair measure”) (*Life* 61).

New Testament scholars are familiar with similar devices in gospels, from Matthew's plays on *genesis* in the birth narratives (Matt 1:1, 18) to the ironic situation established by the authoritative prologue to John (1:1–18), which exposes many subsequent speakers as foolish or

Works of T. Flavius Josephus,” forthcoming in Edmondson, Mason and Rives, *Flavius Josephus*.

⁹⁵ Just one example: δημοσιόω appears only twice in all of Josephus, once meaning publication of a book (*Life* 363) and a few sentences later (*Life* 370) meaning the confiscation of property—two very different kinds of “making public.”

mendacious. The seeming/being contrast comes to the fore in numerous places, not least in Paul's disparaging description of the Jerusalem leaders as "those who (merely?) appear to be something" (Gal 2:6) and throughout Hebrews. As for names: it seems that Paul is having some serious fun at Apollos' expense when he finds a biblical passage in which God threatens (in Greek translation), "I will destroy (ἀπολῶ) the wisdom of the wise" (1 Cor 1:19).⁹⁶

3.4. *Patronage and Loyalty*

The last area I shall mention in which Josephus' works may throw light on the New Testament texts has to do with questions of patronage and loyalty. Nowadays most New Testament readers know something of how important social networks were in the Roman world, and of the mainly unwritten system of benefactions flowing from the more to the less powerful, in exchange for unswerving loyalty.⁹⁷ It is one thing to describe the system in theory, another to see it in practice. Roman literature abounds with examples, but the Judean aristocrat Josephus also provides vivid instances of many aspects of patron-client relationships in actual life—that is, in the life-like situations related by his narratives.

On the one hand, he is the appropriately grateful, indeed boastful recipient of honours from his undisputed social betters: Nero's consort Poppaea Sabina, Vespasian, Titus, Domitian, and Domitian's wife Domitilla (*Life* 16, 414–430). Tokens of recognition from the most powerful, along with his putative illustrious ancestry and sterling character (*Life* 1–6), are understood to enhance his status immeasurably by ancient standards. On the other hand, he is an exemplary patron himself, the powerful man who freely exercises his authority to rescue and assist his less fortunate friends in time of need, especially after the Roman conquest of Jerusalem, when prisoners were being processed (*Life* 418–421). It is a telling sign of our different social assumptions that this story, no doubt related by Josephus to illustrate his reliable role as patron, has been read by modern readers in the opposite way: as an indictment of his character for failing to care about those he could not help.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ For Apollos as interloper in Corinth, cf. 1 Cor 1:11; 3:10–15; 4:15; 16:12.

⁹⁷ E.g., R. P. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

⁹⁸ Williamson, *World of Josephus*, 303.

Perhaps most interesting for New Testament readers is Josephus' palpable sense of grievance when those who he thinks should be his grateful clients turn on him to follow other patrons. We see this throughout his *Life*. Even though he has treated the Galileans kindly and with restraint, managing their problem with bandits, facilitating travel for family contacts, and providing for their every need (as he presents it), time and again he encounters defection to a rival who seems temporarily more persuasive (87–103, 104–111, 122–125). Many of the tactics that Josephus employs to win his people back, as a military commander (e.g., *Life* 170–178), were not available to Paul, though the traveling preacher does threaten a group in Corinth—now favouring another leader who has interfered in Paul's territory—that he might come “with a rod” (1 Cor 4:21). Paul seems to be keenly aware of a principle that groups established by him belong to him: he will not interlope on others' turf (Rom 15:20), and he becomes furious when others impose themselves on his groups (1 Cor 4:15–21; 2 Cor 10:13–11:23; Gal 1:6–9; 4:10–20). He also seems to be trying to trick the Corinthians into contributing to his collection for Jerusalem in 2 Cor 9:1–5, by citing his earlier assurances to the Macedonians concerning their willingness to give, in a manner that the wily Josephus, who used many feints to subdue the Tiberians (*Life* 128–144), might well have admired. At any rate, in both cases one can see similar emotions of offence and outrage at the defection of groups that should belong to the founding patron.

4. *Conclusions*

The main point of this essay may be succinctly stated. Traditional use of Josephus for illumination of the New Testament began with a trust in his work because of his prestige. In modern times his authority remained undiminished, but for the very different reason that he was thought to preserve excellent sources or even raw data. Notwithstanding the many refinements in the contemporary study of other ancient texts, including the New Testament, it seemed marvelously possible still to gain from Josephus at least snippets of fact—even if these needed to be cautiously removed from their tainted packaging. Recent approaches to Josephus, by contrast, are preoccupied with his writings as sophisticated artistic productions. This shift of perspective has created new possibilities for using Josephus in relation to the New Testament: both corpora are seen as highly wrought collections that must

be studied patiently if the parts are to make sense in terms of the whole. Historical reconstruction of the underlying events and personalities in both or either set of texts depends upon such careful interpretation of the evidence.

This paper has argued, however, that possibly the greatest value for New Testament readers in studying Josephus lies in less obvious places. We may never, without future discoveries, reach much certainty about many of the persons, groups, institutions, and events to which Josephus and the New Testament both refer, *a fortiori* those that figure only in Josephus. Yet we do have the very rich texts themselves, and in the case of Josephus we know a good deal about the general environment in which he wrote. If we stop looking for a “quick fix” from these compositions, for bits of reliable information, and undertake the more ambitious project of understanding his works in light of their audiences and social situations, we shall begin to rediscover a large corpus of texts produced in one of history’s most portentous moments: Rome’s Flavian era. Seeing how another prolific writer with connections to Judea’s history and scriptures expressed himself in Flavian Rome can only enhance our reading of the New Testament.