

REVIEW

THINKING THROUGH JOSEPHUS AND HIS READERS

Honora Howell Chapman and Zuleika Rodgers, edd., *A Companion to Josephus*. Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World. Malden and Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2016. Pp. xiv + 482. Hardback, £120.00/€150.00. ISBN 978-1-4443-3533-0.

From antiquity to the present day Yosef ben Matityahu, *alias* Titus Flavius Iosephus, has been undoubtedly the best source on the history of Judea in the Roman period and on the history of the Second Temple period in general. Without Josephus we would know little about the Jewish War and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE; or indeed on Judean politics and society in the Roman period, on king Herod, but also on the intellectual traditions that formed Josephus' own sources. A Jewish priest of royal descent born in Jerusalem in 37 CE, a leader of the Jewish revolt against Rome, and thereafter, a friend of the Flavians, a Roman citizen, and a writer in Rome, Josephus is a multifaceted figure that is hard to confine under a single label. Was he a Roman historian? Was he an historian at all? Serious or critical engagement with his work has emerged since the 1970s. Previously, scholars regarded him as simple and careless compiler, or a mine where information could be extracted regardless of its context, audience, aims, literary form: that was the 'classical conception of Josephus'.¹ In the 1970s, pioneering studies began to appear: Helgo Lindner (1972), Lucio Troiani (1974), Harold Attridge (1976), Tessa Rajak (1983), Martin Goodman (1987), Shaye Cohen (1989), and Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata (1987 and 1989) promoted and generated a paradigmatic shift that acknowledged the importance of Josephus, and put the historian, his preoccupations, and his public at the centre of scholarly attention, providing works that are still invaluable. The bibliographical studies by Rengstorf (1973–83), Schalit (1968), Schreckenberg (1972, 1977), and Feldman (1984, Feldman and Schreckenberg 1986) facilitated research immensely. From the 1990s, there has been a boom of 'Josephan studies'. New translations into English, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, and Japanese have tried to do justice to the original language, and many studies have looked at the political, cultural, and religious aspects of the man. Since 2000, seven volumes of the *Brill Josephus Project*, edited by Steve Mason, have presented a comprehensive

¹ Bilde (1988) 126, 141.

English translation and commentary of Josephus' works.² Professor Mason, a leading figure in this field, has also inaugurated a website, irenically called *PACE* (*Project on Ancient Cultural Engagement*), which links the Greek text of Josephus' works to English translations, as well as to abstracts of dissertations on individual Josephan topics, regularly updated online.³ The comprehensive volume under review here summarises and presents the most recent approaches to Josephus, and the progress in the field, especially in two major areas: the study of Josephus in his historical context, and the uses of his works in later ages.

Part One ('Writings') of this *Companion* is devoted to monographic analyses of Josephus' works by major scholars in the field. Steve Mason opens the first section (Ch. 1) discussing date, structure, context, and literary strategies of the *Jewish War*. In Ch. 2, Daniel R. Schwartz brilliantly analyses the working method of Josephus in the composition of the *Jewish Antiquities*, a 20-book survey of 5,000 years of Jewish history, from *Genesis* to 66 CE, and concludes that he built the work by organizing, in chronological order, extracts from various sources. Josephus' *Life* is the theme of Ch. 3, where Steve Mason favours the hypothesis that it was composed in 93/94, and links it to the presence in Rome of rhetoricised biographies of great men. In Ch. 3 John Barclay analyses the *Against Apion* as Josephus' last attempt to combat anti-Jewish prejudice, a 'strategy of resistance' similar to that adopted by postcolonial writers and intellectuals in modern times. He also acutely distinguishes various audiences (intended, implied, or actual) of the work.

² *Brill Josephus Project*, ed. S. Mason, published volumes, 2000–16:

L. H. Feldman, *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary, Volume 3: Judean Antiquities 1–4* (Leiden and Boston, 2000);

S. Mason *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary, Volume 9: Life of Josephus* (Leiden and Boston, 2001);

C. T. Begg *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary, Volume 4: Judean Antiquities 5–7* (Leiden and Boston, 2005);

C. T. Begg and P. Spilsbury, *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary, Volume 5: Judean Antiquities 8–10* (Leiden and Boston, 2005);

J. M. G. Barclay, *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary, Volume 10: Against Apion* (Leiden and Boston, 2007);

J. W. Van Henten, *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary, Volume 7b: Judean Antiquities 15* (Leiden and Boston, 2014);

P. Spilsbury and C. Seeman, *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary, Volume 6a: Judean Antiquities 11* (Leiden and Boston, 2016).

³ *PACE* (*Project on Ancient Cultural Engagement*), available at: <http://pace-ancient.mcmaster.ca/york/york/texts.htm> (last accessed 16.01.17).

Part Two looks at literary contexts. In Ch. 5 Steve Mason offers a magisterial analysis of the ‘publication’ process of Josephus’ works at Rome, by comparing it with the typical Roman book production through a patron and an audience. He also analyses the rhetorical poses adopted by Josephus in Rome, and his irony about contemporary emperors. In Ch. 6 Eran Almagor interestingly links Josephus’ choice of, and attitude towards, the Greek language to the rise of the Second Sophistic, presenting Josephus as familiar and at ease with the late first-century cultural activity, especially oratory. In Ch. 7 Paul Spilsbury evaluates the education in the Hebrew Bible that Josephus received, and his self-presentation as priest and prophet. Maren Niehoff (Ch. 8) focuses on one, if not the, most important precedent and source for Josephus, namely Philo of Alexandria. In Ch. 9 Helen Bond analyses how scholars have used Josephus to cast light on the historical Jesus, and in what ways Josephus may provide a counterpoint to the New Testament.

Part Three is devoted to Themes, and tries to cover all the possible implications and suggestions raised by the works of Josephus. In Ch. 10 Zeev Weiss looks at the interplay between the material culture of Galilee and Josephus’ texts. In Ch. 11 Jonathan Roth evaluates the importance of Josephus as a military historian, considering the abundance of information and detail on Roman and Jewish military affairs and practices, most famously the training and discipline of the Roman army in *Jewish War* 3. Tal Ilan (Ch. 12) devotes her attention to Josephus’ treatment of women, both Biblical figures and prominent women of his day. Erich Gruen in Ch. 13 looks at Josephus’ attitude towards the Hasmonean rulers, suggesting that he did not deliver a partisan interpretation of their actions, derived from the Hasmonean version in *1 Maccabees*, but presented a more nuanced, often conflicting account of this ruling family. In Ch. 14, Jan Willem van Henten reminds us of the importance of Josephus for the history of Herod the Great, who, especially in *Jewish Antiquities* 15–17, is portrayed as a tyrant. In Ch. 15, David Kaden looks at Josephus’ evaluation of Herod’s greatest building project, the Jerusalem Temple, in *Jewish War* 5 and *Jewish Antiquities* 15; the latter turns out to complement the former, with a critique to Domitian to be read between the lines. Albert Baumgarten in Ch. 16 examines Josephus’ attitude towards the *haireseis* or ‘sects’ (a term which he re-discusses) of Second Temple Judaism, from the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes to the Zealots, including figures like Bannus, John the Baptist, and Jesus. In Chapter 17, James McLaren analyses the self-presentation of Josephus as a priest and his vision of the high priesthood as an institution essential to the well-being of Jewish society. In Ch. 18, David Nakman considers the halachic material in Josephus, especially in Books 3 and 4 of the *Jewish Antiquities*, and in Book 2 of the *Against Apion*, and concludes that Josephus supported Pharisaic-rabbinic traditions, and that these actually reflected the accepted practice of the day. Richard Kalmin in Ch. 19 underlines the links that

existed between Josephus and the rabbis of the Babylonian Talmud, showing that they had in common similar (negative) traditions about the Sadducees, which came to be aggregated together some time in the mid-fourth century CE.

One of the most exciting aspects of the volume is the attention it devotes to the transmission and reception of the works of Josephus in antiquity and beyond, which is the focus of Part Four ('Transmission and Reception History'), and is also the object of a major research project currently led in Oxford by Martin Goodman and Tessa Rajak.⁴ Josephus was in fact 'the single most copied historical work of the Middle Ages'.⁵ In Ch. 20 Tommaso Leoni issues a call for a new critical edition of Josephus' *Jewish War*, while Levenson and Martin (Ch. 21) offer a pioneering investigation on 103 out of the 230 Latin manuscripts of Josephus, many of which are still inaccessible or lack critical editions. The survival and proliferation of manuscripts of Josephus' works is due to Christian transmission. However, as Sabrina Inowlocki shows in Ch. 23, this boom of interest in Josephus, at least for the period from the second to the fifth century CE, was at the service of Christian anti-Judaism, due to the polemical use by Eusebius, Jerome, and the author of *On the Destruction of the City of Jerusalem (De excidio urbis Hierosolymitanae)*. In one case Josephus was even described as a 'fifth gospel'.⁶ Christians were especially interested in the *Testimonium Flavianum*, a passage about Jesus of Nazareth that exists in all the extant manuscripts of Book 18 of the *Jewish Antiquities* (18.63–4) and that many scholars, from the 1600s till now, have regarded as an ancient interpolation by Christians themselves. Alice Whealey in Ch. 22 defends its (at least partial) authenticity. Josephus' résumé of the Bible remained fundamental in Christian intellectual and educational activity throughout the Middle Ages. A key passage was the sixth century Latin translation promoted by Cassiodorus in the monastery of Vivarium near Squillace, in Calabria, Italy. Karen Kletter in Ch. 24 carefully studies the reception of Josephus beyond Late Antiquity, including not only the literary references in manuscripts, but, interestingly, also the material in Latin vernacular literature, and shows among other things that, in popular non-clerical circles, his works were also used as an exegetical and topographical guide for Crusader accounts.

In Ch. 25 Saskia Dönitz looks at the *Sefer Yosippon*, a tenth-century Hebrew paraphrase of Josephus from Southern Italy. This text soon became the most influential Hebrew historical work of the medieval period. In Ch. 26 Kate Leeming examines another translation of Josephus, the so-called Slavonic version, whose origins are still obscure and which diverges from the Greek text in

⁴ *AHRC Josephus Project* (Faculty of Oriental Studies, Oxford University), available at: www.orinst.ox.ac.uk/research/josephus/home (last accessed 16.01.17).

⁵ O'Donnell (1979) 246.

⁶ Schreckenberg (1987) 317.

many points. Since Josephus, in the prologue of the *Jewish War*, stated that he had written an earlier version in his native language for Jews in the East, scholars have suggested that the Slavonic version preserves the original writings by Josephus; the followers of this hypothesis have also regarded the omissions and additions that may be ascribed to copyists, translators, students, or to Josephus himself, and that feature in the Greek text, as 'christological'. The question, however, is left open. In Ch. 27 Silvia Castelli shows that in modern times Josephus was read for different reasons. The first translation of the *Jewish Antiquities* into Italian, in the Renaissance, was undertaken not for the Church but for Hercules of Este, Duke of Ferrara, who was passionate about ancient (above all military) history and commissioned translations into the vernacular of several other ancient historians, including Herodotus and Xenophon. In the sixteenth century, however, the text came to be read as a safer alternative to the vernacular biblical translations, proscribed by the *Index of the Prohibited Books*, although the prohibition was lessened by Tridentine Council sessions of 1561–4. Thereafter, Josephus was suspected of heresy and prohibited by the Inquisition in Spain, but not in Rome, even though at this time the Jews were banished from the papal state, and the *Talmud* was burned in various Italian cities. In Ch. 28 Gohei Hata, being himself the first translator of Josephus into Japanese, traces a learned history of the English translations of Josephus.

In Ch. 29 Daniel R. Schwartz offers a balanced and very useful presentation of the reception of the figure of Josephus in twentieth-century Hebrew scholarship and its transformation from traitor (1930s) to skilled historian and writer (1990s), accompanied and determined by the archaeological discoveries at Masada and Qumran and the renewed appreciation of historiography as art-work and literature. Most importantly, Schwartz traces a history of the impact of contemporary politics on Josephan scholars, from the Holocaust to the wars of the 1970s and 1980s, reminding all of us that ancient historians also live in the real world, and that the burning issues of the present heavily interfere with the apparently detached questions they pose to the authors of the past. Honora Chapman (Ch. 30) closes the work on a lighter note, examining how two films, Monty Python's *Life of Brian* and *History of the World, Part I*, reflect both ancient dynamics of power and modern culture of the 1980s in the UK and the USA.

This monumental work, excellently organised and clearly written, displays a high level of coherence and internal logic. It is especially useful because it brings to light areas of Josephan scholarship, such as the Latin Josephus, the Late Antique and Medieval reception, the manuscript tradition, which had been poorly investigated or needed systematic re-examination, and points to the areas of potential interest. The work places at the centre of the stage the most recent trends in scholarship, namely Josephus and his later use by various types of audiences, while the question of the influence of the so-called 'Jewish-Hellenistic' literature is devoted slightly less space. This is not a criticism, as it

is obvious that including such a discussion would have probably resulted in the addition of one or more extra volumes, and would have made this work lose some of its coherence. Highly balanced in its judgements, thorough, learned, and up-to-date in its bibliographical references, this *Companion* does justice to the breathtaking richness of the works of Josephus, contributes to clarifying the wider context in which they were produced, and explains their long-lasting fortune. This excellent volume is certainly most welcome as a fundamental working tool and a must-read for anyone who intends to undertake serious research on Josephus, a man who probably was much less chameleonic than his readers.

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