

## REVIEW

### ESSAYS ON JOSEPHUS, PEACE, AND WAR

Viktor Kókai-Nagy and Ádám Vér, edd., *Peace and War in Josephus*. Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies 52. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023. Pp. xiii + 227. Hardcover, €119.95. ISBN 978-3-11-114603-4.

**T**he Jewish priest Flavius Josephus, or Yosef ben Mattatyahu according to his Hebrew name, participated as a general in what is usually called the Jewish war against Rome (66–70 CE). Two of his four works deal extensively with this war and his own role in it: *The Jewish* [or *Judean*] *War* and *The Life*. I note these two basic facts, since it is somewhat surprising that this volume *Peace and War in Josephus* does not concern an in-depth study of these two writings of Josephus or his participation in it. Instead, it is devoted to specific motifs, passages, and vocabularies in Josephus' writings that are related to the theme of peace and war. The volume offers the publication of the contributions to the first conference by the Josephus Research Institute at Komárom, Hungary in 2022, which promotes research on Josephus in Hungary as well as internationally. Six of the eleven authors in total are Hungarian.

The introduction to the volume by its two editors remains short and mainly offers a summary of the contributions that follow. Steve Mason analyses five speeches from Book 4 of Josephus' *War* (4.40–8: Vespasian at Gamala; 4.162–92: Ananus II in Jerusalem; 4.238–69: Jesus son of Gamalas at Jerusalem's Gate; 4.271–83: the Idumean leader Simon son of Cathias at the Gate; and 4.345–52, entitled by Mason 'A Rogue Disciple Blows the Whistle'). Mason persuasively argues that these speeches are integral parts of the narrative of *War* 4. They show that Josephus is a skilful author who is capable of crafting a suitable oration for each of the characters involved that would be interesting for his Roman elite audience. Mason also demonstrates convincingly that Josephus applies playful language and irony in these speeches, although their topics are very serious. He argues that the fifth speech is not a clumsy composition but a clever ploy by the Zealots to get rid of the Idumeans when they were no longer useful as allies (23). The appendix to his article offers the Greek text of these five speeches (according to the critical edition of B. Niese, 1887–1895) and Mason's translation of them. Tibor Grüll discusses the oaths of loyalty to rulers under Augustus and Josephus' references to similar oaths (*AJ* 15.368–71; 17.41–3). In *Antiquities* 17.41–3 Josephus informs us that

more than six thousand Pharisees refused to swear allegiance to Augustus and King Herod the Great. Their refusal becomes understandable if we assume that the oath referred to Roman deities and implied the promotion of the imperial cult, as can be deduced from the text of an oath of loyalty to Augustus from Paphlagonia taken on 6 March, 3 BCE. The authentication formula presupposes that Augustus was a living god. Grüll rightly points out important correspondences between Augustus' oath and the one briefly referred to at *AJ* 17.41–3, but differences should be noted as well. Josephus passes over the foreign deities. The Paphlagonian oath refers to loyalty to Augustus and all his children and descendants, but Josephus mentions the emperor and King Herod, which implies a double loyalty: to the emperor as well as to Herod as ruler of the Jews. The Jews confirmed under oath that they 'would be fully faithful to Caesar and the government of the king' (*AJ* 17.42).

Tal Ilan compares Josephus' report about what she, with Jonathan Price, calls the coalition government of 66–7 CE (Joseph. *AJ* 2.562–8; 4.158–365) with parallels in rabbinic literature. The government was established after the defeat and withdrawal from Jerusalem of the Roman general Cestius Gallus in the fall of 66 CE and it fell in the winter of 67–8 CE. Ilan argues that although the rabbis did not report about this government, specific information about individuals associated with it that re-occurs in rabbinic literature implies that the rabbis knew about the government. This links up with the results of the larger research project about the parallels between Josephus and rabbinic literature in which Ilan was involved: the rabbis knew about events reported in Josephus, but there is not much evidence for a literary dependence.<sup>1</sup>

Jirí Hoblík deals with Josephus' multifaceted views of prophecy, including Josephus' reflection about himself as a prophet and a messenger of God who knows God's will and conveys it to the Romans. The points he makes about prophecy are helpful, but they are not much related to the theme of the volume, although he highlights that the prophets of Israel were mediators of conflicts (81–4). Another chapter which is excellent but not much related to the topic of the book concerns Ádám Vér's analysis of a particular form of alliance in the eighth century BCE, the so-called *adê*-treaty. His point of departure is a detail in Josephus' rendering of the request for help by the Judahite King Ahaz to the Assyrian King Tiglath-pileser III (Joseph. *AJ* 9.252; cf. 2 Kings 16:5–9). Ahaz underpins his request by referring to his alliance (*symmachia*) with Tiglath-pileser III and promises to send him much money. This is an echo of the *adê*-treaties which were common in the eighth century BCE, as discussed in detail by Vér. József Zsengellér who gives a very helpful survey of Josephus' information about Jewish mercenary soldiers who fought in foreign wars in the Hellenistic period. Alexander the Great requests that the

<sup>1</sup> See T. Ilan, V. Noam et al., *Josephus and the Rabbis*, 2 vols (Jerusalem, 2017) (in Hebrew).

Jews would send him auxiliary troops and provisions, as they had done for the Persians (Joseph. *AJ* 11.317). Ptolemy I arranged that Judean captives be settled in garrisons in Egypt (*AJ* 12.8; *Ap.* 2.44) and Antiochus I arranged for a Jewish military settlement in Asia Minor (*AJ* 12.149–53). Zsengellér concludes that the Jews usually formed separate troops within the foreign army with their own commanders and that Josephus presents them as highly skilled and loyal warriors. István Karasszon's title ('Frieden bei Josephus. Esra und die jüdische Restauration in den *Antiquitates*') highlights the topic of peace in Josephus, but his contribution concentrates on Josephus' retelling of the restoration of the Jewish state after the return from exile. Josephus offers a continuous story that focuses on persons, and he fills the gaps in the biblical sources with parabiblical material (including 1 Esdras).

A highly relevant contribution to the book is Carson Bay's analysis of Josephus' vocabulary of war and peace, which focuses on the *Jewish War* and especially on phrases with the anarthrous genitive (i.e., without an article) of *polemos* and *eirēnē*, because these communicate an assumed attribute or aspect of war or peace. The most common of these phrases concerns 'a law of war' (*nomos polemou*, *War* 2.90; 4.260, 388; 5.332; 6.239 (with article) and 353), which indicates 'justified and/or expected collective behaviors that predict or prescribe wartime norms' (153). This vocabulary shows that Josephus is much more elaborate about the conceptual realities related to war than about those connected with peace. Martin Meiser analyses Josephus' vocabulary of *stasis* and *ochlos*, which is related to Josephus' interpretation of the *Jewish War* (briefly discussed at the end of his contribution). He argues that Josephus uses this vocabulary when he dissociates himself from the Jewish multitude because he interprets its behaviour as a rebellion. Some of the references given in his first footnote pertaining to the so-called golden eagle episode (*AJ* 17.148–64) do not support this hypothesis. Josephus' report may be ambiguous, but he introduces the instigators of what is presented as a rebellion against Herod, Judas son of Sariphaeus, and Mattathias son of Margalothus, in highly positive terms: they were among the most respected members of the Jewish people, they were the most erudite interpreters of the ancestral laws of their time, and they were beloved by the people because of their role as the educators of the young (17.148–9). Josephus is also critical of Herod's execution of the persons who destroyed the eagle. David Edwards discusses the theme of *stasis* in the *Antiquities* from the perspective of Josephus' political philosophy and his periodisation of history. He convincingly argues that *stasis* in *Antiquities* should be interpreted as part of a broader framework of national decline and that it can be overcome by the proper implementation of the Mosaic constitution (leading to proximity to God) and the aristocratic leadership of the priests (179; 190–1). Viktor Kókai-Nagy, finally, deals with the concept of freedom in the *Jewish War*, focusing on the use of *eleutheria*, which mostly occurs in speeches

(thirty-four occurrences out a total of forty-four). He discusses two of these speeches in detail, the one by Agrippa II (*BJ* 2.345–402) and the one by the rebel leader Eleazar (*BJ* 7.323–88). Agrippa points to the irrational hope for freedom of his addressees (2.346, 355), but Eleazar highlights that he and his fellows should prefer death as free persons over surrender to the Romans (7.323–9, 344). Kókai-Nagy presents close parallels from Seneca to passages in Eleazar’s speech and rightly points out that Eleazar’s view of freedom strongly contrasts with Josephus’ own view as presented in his speech at Jotapata (*BJ* 3.362–82; pp. 207–8, 212). The book concludes with a list of contributors, an index to Josephus’ passages and an index to other ancient Jewish and non-Jewish texts (which omits biblical passages).

The volume offers a discussion of selected aspects of the topic of war and peace in Josephus. Its coherence remains loose, also because an epilogue or concluding chapter that connects the chapters from a synthetic perspective is absent. All contributions are interesting and offer fresh perspectives on the relevant passages, but it is regrettable that some contributions hardly touch upon the subject of war and peace in Josephus. Nevertheless, the editors should be congratulated with this first international volume devoted to Josephus that appears under the aegis of the Josephus Research Institute at Komárom. Hopefully many more volumes will follow!

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