

REVIEW

JOSEPHUS IN ROME

William den Hollander, *Josephus, the Emperors, and the City of Rome*. Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity, 86. Leiden: Brill, 2014. Pp. xii + 410. Hardcover, €115.00/\$149.00. ISBN 978-90-04-26433-5.

Few would deny that the Jewish priest, general, and historian Yosef ben Mattithyau, *alias* Titus Flavius Josephus, was, and still is, a good survivor. In the past decade, an astonishing amount of attention, new questions, and radical reinterpretations have been devoted to the inextricably linked life and work of a man who, after leading his people in the Jewish Revolt against Rome, saw the catastrophe of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE from the Roman camp, worked as a mediator and interpreter for the Romans, and spent the last twenty years of his life at Rome, writing in Greek on Jewish history and culture.

Den Hollander's (henceforth H.) dense study analyses the contacts between Josephus and Roman environments from the time of his imprisonment by Roman troops during the Jewish Revolt up to his twenty-year stay in Rome from the 70s to the 90s CE. As the author points out in the Introduction, critical examination of the circumstances of Josephus' life in Rome remained generally neglected, and the modern image of Josephus was almost schizophrenically divided into the opposed stereotypes of the servile propagandist or 'court historian' of the Flavians (Laqueur, Momigliano, Hengel), and the man who was never awarded the official title of *amicus Caesaris* and remained 'a member of the lower entourage, in the same category as doctors and magicians, philosophers and buffoons'.¹ Although, in 1983, T. Rajak's seminal study on Josephus contributed to constructing a more nuanced image of Josephus, and, in more recent times, Josephan scholarship has concentrated on the relationship between Josephus and Flavian Rome, scholars are still divided into those who consider Josephus to have been a marginal figure in imperial Rome, isolated and lonely, and those who see him as actively engaged with the Roman social and literary scene. Such divide is embodied by two edited volumes of 2005, by Sievers and Lembi on the one hand, and by Edmondson, Mason and Rives on the other.² The 2005 article by S. Mason,

¹ Z. Yavetz, 'Reflections on Titus and Josephus', *GRBS* 16 (1975): 411–32, esp. 431–2.

² T. Rajak, *Josephus. The Historian and his Society* (London, 1983); J. Sievers and G. Lembi, edd., *Josephus and Jewish History in Flavian Rome and Beyond* (Leiden, 2005); J. Edmondson, S.

a fundamental starting point for H., makes a strong case that Josephus operated in a local Roman environment that comprised Roman literati, particularly those interested in Judean culture.³ Others, like J. Price, thought that Josephus addressed readers in the East and that at Rome he was isolated; H. Cotton and W. Eck, too, point out that there is no positive evidence for any connection between Josephus and the senatorial or equestrian élite, reconfirming Z. Yavetz' earlier hypothesis.⁴ Recently, J. Barclay has suggested that we should draw a distinction between the intended audience of Josephus, at the time when his works were published, and the different usages that further or later readers made of his oeuvre, and that we should look at Josephus and his readers worldwide through postcolonial lenses, if we want to try and decode their strategies of integration or resistance, bearing in mind that the world had changed after the destruction of the Temple.⁵

Within this debate, H. argues that absence of evidence for significant contact between Josephus and members of the Roman élite must not be taken as evidence of absence of all such contacts. At Rome there was not only 'the Roman élite', but also other interlocutors, such as the Herodians, raised in Rome as allied kings, and acting as bridges between different social and ethnic realities, and the Jewish community of Rome (discussed in Chapter 6). H. is rightly cautious in the interpretation of Eusebius's claim (*HE* 3.9) that Josephus was 'the most famous Jew in his own time, not only among the fellow countrymen, but also among the Romans, so that in Rome they erected a statue and the seriousness of his works deserved the honour of the library', as the phrase may have followed Josephus' own statement (*Vit.* 363) that Titus ordered his *Jewish War* 'to be made public'; it is difficult to imagine that a strong-worded work such the *Against Apion* was honoured with a place in a public Roman library. H. (135) also summarises earlier hypotheses that the 'statue' may have been a bust of Josephus located along with his works (that is, the *Jewish War*) in Vespasian's new Temple of Peace.

After Chapter 2, in which H. discusses the trip of Josephus to Neronian Rome and his diplomatic dealings with Aliturus and Poppaea, underlining that the gulf between the empress and a young provincial priest cannot be

Mason and J. Rives, edd, *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (Oxford, 2005), both reviewed by D. Gera, 'Josephus: Craft and Environment', *Scripta Classica Israelica* 27 (2008): 113–31, esp. 118–22.

³ S. Mason, 'Of Audience and Meaning: Reading Josephus' *Bellum Judaicum* in the Context of a Flavian Audience', in Sievers–Lembi (2005) 71–100.

⁴ J. J. Price, 'The Provincial Historian at Rome', in Sievers–Lembi (2005) 101–18; H. M. Cotton and W. Eck, 'Josephus' Roman Audience: Josephus and the Roman Elites', in Edmondson–Mason–Rives (2005) 37–52.

⁵ J. M. G. Barclay, 'The Empire Writes Back: Josephan Rhetoric in Flavian Rome', in Edmondson–Mason–Rives (2005) 315–32.

bridged by any evidence, and that the encounter was enhanced by the embellished Josephan narrative as ‘an appropriate starting point of his public career’ (65), H. devotes the two central chapters (3 and 4) to an analysis of the relationship between Josephus and Vespasian and Titus respectively. He argues that, during his residence in Rome, Josephus had little contact with Vespasian or indeed with Titus, and that there is little evidence for a relationship between the two even prior to Josephus’ arrival in Rome. Josephus was never part of the imperial court, and, thus, his social milieu must be placed elsewhere.

It is with Titus that Josephus has always been understood as having had the closest relationship. The two were certainly in close proximity from January 70, when Josephus accompanied Titus on the return march from Alexandria to Caesarea, and subsequently at the siege of Jerusalem, to the spring of the following year, when they sailed together to the triumph in Rome. H. explores the so-called period ‘in the Roman camp’, a subject that had not been fully analysed, when Josephus had close contacts with the Roman military leaders, by whom he was used for purposes of intelligence. H. draws a concise history of the interpreters used by Roman generals under the *res publica* to prove that Josephus’ role as interpreter/mediator of Titus was a temporary, unofficial, and informal arrangement. He suggests, and shows with many examples and quotations from Josephus’ work, that we should not overestimate the strength or significance of the bonds between Josephus and Titus, as has been done in the past, and that we must liberate Josephus from the chains that have tied him too closely to the emperors in past scholarship (142). The special connection between Josephus and Titus is, for H., unsubstantiated by any external sources, and results from Josephus’ own embellished self-presentation, which basically aimed at self-preservation. In the footsteps of earlier studies by Parente and, above all, Mason, H. argues that, under the cover of obsequious flattery, Josephus succeeds in creating a less than flattering portrait of Titus, where bravery becomes recklessness, and *clementia* often degenerates into naiveté and inability to control the troops. The cracks in the rhetorical *topoi* that Josephus used for the portrait of Titus thus highlight a greater freedom of expression than was previously held, pointing to a conclusion along the lines of the aforementioned study by Mason, that the *Jewish War* cannot be simplistically regarded as a product of Flavian propaganda.

Chapter 5 challenges the idea that a change in the status of Josephus at Rome occurred when Domitian rose to power. Since his arrival in Rome, Josephus had pursued his own interests and those of his people, ‘seeking to remedy the negative atmosphere that had appeared in the aftermath of the revolt’ (199). Consequently, the assumption that the relationship with Domitian was different, and less intimate than that with the earlier Flavians, must be rejected. A survey of the reign of Domitian shows that, despite the length

of the rule, Josephus can hardly have developed any sort of relationship with that emperor. The information (in *Vit.* 429) that Domitian had defended Josephus from accusers is, for H., truthful, and shows that here Domitian simply continued the policies of his father and brother. H. (219) also hypothesises that the tax-exemption that Domitian granted to Josephus on his properties in Judea was requested by Josephus himself, as an open-ended gift that accompanied Domitian's positive ruling in the aforementioned judgement; Josephus may have omitted this detail from his narrative in order to emphasise the idea of a special imperial favour. For H., we cannot even assume that there was a direct encounter between Josephus and Domitian, as the historian may have defended himself through the agency of Epaphroditus, the dedicatee of the *Antiquities* and the *Against Apion*, who, as we will see later, was probably an imperial freedman. In the increasingly negative atmosphere threatening the Jews in Domitianic Rome, Josephus published the *Antiquities/Life*, a work 'targeted towards those who were already sympathetic to Judean customs' (244), and that aimed to defend the rights of the Jews through the enumeration of the various rights and privileges granted to the Judeans in history. For H., the *Against Apion*, too, of which we do not know the publication date, addressed a sympathetic audience of non-Judeans, even if its strong apologetic/protreptic tone suggests that it hoped to 'render an interested reader even more sympathetic.' H. assumes that the milieu in which the *Against Apion* was written is substantially the same as that of the *Antiquities*. However, one might object that the tirade against the Egyptians and their religion, and the praise of Judaism sound like something that Josephus could have written during the 'interlude of tolerance' in the early reign of Nerva rather than under the Egyptianised Domitian.⁶

Chapter 6 considers the relationships between Josephus and the inhabitants of Rome, including Romans, Herodian kings, and fellow Judeans. H.'s analysis of the relationship between Josephus and Agrippa II provides useful information and commentary of the crucial passages in *Vit.* 364–6. H. argues that Agrippa II had a long collaboration with Josephus and was his literary client since before the publication of the *War*. Following Mason, H. dismisses Josephus' remark in *Ap.* 1.51 that he had actually sold copies of the work to Agrippa II and to fellow-Judeans, but the reasons are unclear. H. argues that the unsympathetic portrayal of Agrippa in the *Antiquities* suggests that contacts between Josephus and the king ended after the initial circulation of the

⁶ See my article on 'The Common Roots of Egyptians and Jews: Life and Meaning of an Ancient Stereotype', in L. Arcari, ed., *Beyond Conflicts: Cultural and Religious Cohabitations in Alexandria and in Egypt between the 1st and the 6th Century CE*, forthcoming with Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. On the 'interlude of tolerance', see M. Goodman, 'Josephus' Treatise *Against Apion*', in M. Edwards, M. Goodman, S. Price and C. Rowland, edd., *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews and Christians* (Oxford, 1999) 45–58.

War. Whether or not Josephus hoped to restore the kingdom of the Herodians in the province of Judea, he certainly ‘used’ Agrippa II as a bridge between his work, the emperors, the Roman élite, and the Jewish community of Rome in the earliest phase of his stay in Rome. As Josephus explicitly says in *Ap.* 2.296, he owed the publication and marketing of his works among fellow Judeans to Epaphroditus, the dedicatee of both the *Antiquities/Life* and the *Against Apion*. This elusive figure is thoroughly discussed by H., who cautiously argues that any identification, either with the freedman of Nero who was executed by Domitian in 94/5, or with the grammarian and bibliophile from Chaeronea, is hazardous. All we can establish from a study of the diffusion of the name is that he probably was a freedman. H. concludes that, as suggested by Cotton and Eck, the obscurity of the figure reflects the isolation of Josephus and his distance from the emperors, although in the course of his work Josephus may have had assistants and supporters, among whom perhaps some freedmen such as Aliturus or Gaius’ former slave Thaumastus (288).

In *Ap.* 1.51, Josephus explicitly says that he had sold his books to ‘many of our own people, men also steeped in Greek wisdom’. H. (294) is perhaps overcautious in assuming that we cannot presume any personal relationship between Josephus and the people who bought and read his books. It is not guaranteed that the silence of Josephus on the Roman Jews of his time is evidence of either their low social status or his own complete isolation from his own fellow countrymen. H. admits that at Rome Josephus probably found attentive readers, and suggests (303) that he attended the synagogue there, but does not give enough emphasis on what possibly is the most fertile area for future research, that is, the relationship between the late productions of Josephus (especially the *Against Apion*) and the ‘Greek wisdom’ of the Jews who attended the eleven synagogues of Rome in the first century, a theme that has potential implications for the transmission of the Bible and the development of Christianity, among other aspects.⁷

H. is rightly cautious in attributing the Talmudic references to an unnamed Jewish philosopher, who lived in Rome under Domitian, and received visits from Judean rabbis like Joshua ben Hananiah, Aqiba, Gamaliel, and Eleazar ben Azariah, references that some identify with Josephus, but others discard as unhistorical.⁸ However, perhaps more space should have been devoted to the image of a ‘philosophical Josephus’, who defended Jewish values and participated in theological disputes with fellow Judeans. This Jewish audience of Josephus may be echoed by the philosophical tone of the second part of the *Against Apion*, especially the philosophical *excursus* in re-

⁷ On the eleven synagogues documented in inscriptions from Rome, see S. Cappelletti, *The Jewish Community of Rome* (Leiden, 2006) 3 n. 1.

⁸ *Der. Er. Rab.* 5; cf. *b. Abod. Zar.* 54b; *Midr. Gen.* 13.9, 20.4; *Midr. Ex.* 30.9; *Midr. Deut.* 2.24; *Midr. Eccl.* 10.7.

sponse to Apollonius Molon in *Ap.* 2.145–286, in which Josephus’s voice seems enriched by new readings and new philosophical sources.⁹ Besides, Josephus had often announced in his works that he was preparing a philosophical treatise on Jewish Law, a treatise that he never published; one may wonder who the target of the promised work was.¹⁰ The ancient rumour, still credited by both Jerome and Eusebius, that Josephus was the author of a *spoudasma* ‘On the Sovereignty of Reason’ (*Peri autokratoros logismou*), a sort of homily in the form of a Platonic treatise that exhorted the Jews to remain faithful to the Law, known conventionally as the fourth book of Maccabees (*4 Macc.*), because of its treatment of martyrdom, fits well within this picture.¹¹ The text enjoyed an early and great popularity among the Christians and was used by Church Fathers from Gregory of Nazianzus to John Chrysostom, from Ambrose to Augustine.¹² The praise of Jewish heroism and the defence of martyrdom in *Ap.* 2.146 and 218–35, where Josephus also talks of torture and of passions, key themes of *4 Macc.*, show that the ancient identification by Jerome/Eusebius of Josephus as the author of *4 Macc.* has been dismissed too readily, and would deserve a thorough reconsideration.¹³ An investigation on the audience of the ‘philosophical Josephus’, although based on scanty evidence, and a study of themes, would certainly enhance our historical imagination of the social milieu in which Josephus operated towards the end of his life.

To sum up, with this dense and highly detailed book, H. has contributed to the study of Josephus in a valid and constructive way, displaying solid knowledge, balanced judgement, and a thorough consideration of almost all earlier scholarship. As H. states in his concluding remarks, the study ‘has not presented any new evidence providing fresh biographical details of Josephus’ social life in the city of Rome’ (304), and rests primarily on the existing foundations of scholarship. Certainly, its comprehensiveness and accuracy make it a very useful tool for future research. Some omissions, however, need to be pointed out here. H. never mentions the studies by Lucio Troiani, whose pi-

⁹ As noted by J. M. G. Barclay in S. Mason, ed., *Flavius Josephus. Translation and Commentary. Volume 10. Against Apion*, Translation and Commentary by J. M. G. Barclay (Leiden and Boston, 2007) xxv–xxvi.

¹⁰ See *AJ* 1.25, 29; 3.94, 205, 223, 230, 259; 4.198, 302; and, above all, 20.268.

¹¹ Eus. *HE* 3.10.6; Jer. *De vir. ill.* 13 (*PL* 2.661) and *Contra Pelagianos* 2.6 (*PL* 28.567). On a date of *4 Macc.* between 90 and 100, see H.-J. Klauck, *4 Makkabäerbuch*, JSHRZ III.6 (Gütersloh, 1989) 668–9. See also G. Scarpata, *Quarto libro dei Maccabei* (Brescia, 2006).

¹² The reasons for a Christian cult of these martyrs are presented by John Chrysostom, *De Machabaeis* 1 (*PG* 50.622).

¹³ See *Ap.* 2.233 on the sadistic and ‘theatrical’ use of torture against the Jews by the conquerors. A reference to the strength of the passions, that not even Zeus was able to control, may be found in *Ap.* 2.246.

oneering article ‘Il pubblico delle *Antichità giudaiche* di Giuseppe: prospettive e problemi’, *Athenaeum* 64 (1986): 343–53, arguing for the presence of Diaspora Jews in the intended readership of Josephus, must be credited, at the very least, for having reopened the debate on the audience of Josephus.¹⁴ Another important addendum is Elvira Migliario’s essay ‘Da Yosef ben Mattithyau a T. Flavius Iosephus, o dei limiti dell’integrazione’, in G. Urso, ed., *Iudaea Sociata – Iudaea Capta* (Pisa, 2012) 213–28, which painstakingly reconstructs all the steps by which Josephus got in contact with the Roman leaders, and argues that Josephus never became part of the imperial court and had a modest social status. Migliario is convinced that Josephus spoke the truth when he said that he was an authority in the Jewish community of Rome (*Bf* 7.447), and suggests that he acquired strong links with the Diaspora communities, too, through his marriages to an Alexandrian Jewess first, then to a woman from the Jewish community of Crete, and possibly also through journeys that have escaped the historical record. She, too, agrees with Mason that the Josephan portrait of Titus is certainly not hagiographical, but reveals aspects of strong criticism, and concludes that, in his years at Rome, Josephus could not and did not want to be integrated. Josephus’ research was heading in a different direction, as the historian chose to revive the historical and religious foundations of the national Jewish identity, through a systematic and proud defence of the values and culture of this people, values that were clearly different from, and alternative to, those of the conquerors.

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¹⁴ See also id., ‘La genèse historique des *Antiquités juives*’, in Sievers–Lembi (2005) 21–8.