I FROM JERUSALEM TO ROME: SITUATING JOSEPHUS

Introduction

The Roman world of the first century CE was a world of tremendous cultural complexity. Rome's empire was an intricate mosaic of languages, religious practices, customs, and ethnic identities, bound together in a common political structure and, particularly among provincial elites, by common intellectual and cultural trajectories, which were always, nonetheless, inflected and transformed by manifestations of localism. Amid all this diversity, the subject peoples of the Roman Empire, whether western or eastern, came to be subjected to ethnographic curiosity, sometimes by Roman authors and sometimes by Greek scholars whose culture was prized and promoted by Roman power. However, not all of the 'barbarian' subjects of empire were content passively to be scrutinized. Some of them tried to tell their own, and their own people's, stories in their own words, in Greek-language texts addressed to the wider world, and to make a place for their subaltern perspectives in the dominant scholarly and literary culture of the age. In other words, some of them wrote back.

Of the ancient non-Greek and non-Roman authors who tried to tell their people's stories in this way, the first-century CE Jewish historian Flavius Josephus was among the most prolific and significant. But this statement raises a question: is it right to consider Josephus as 'non-Greek and non-Roman'? His identity is more complex than the typical presentation of him as a 'Jewish historian' might suggest. Josephus was a Jewish priest, a Greek historian, and a Roman citizen, a fine instantiation of the complex identities which were fostered by Rome's empire. Such an accumulation of identities gave him a perspective distinct from authors who can more straightforwardly be categorized as 'Greek' or 'Roman'. But is it not likely, at the same time, that it gave him a perspective significantly distinct from many 'Jewish' thinkers too? Josephus was a product of empire, with all the complexities and ambivalences that that entails.

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Such a rich perspective should, of course, make Josephus profoundly interesting to scholars of the Roman world, especially in an age when the imperative to decolonize the fields of Roman history and classical literature is often voiced. But that does not seem to be the case. Although scholars of the New Testament and of Jewish Studies eagerly engage with this author's works, recognizing the value that he brings to their disciplines, it hardly seems as though Roman historians or classical historiographers are beating a path to his door. This book is an attempt to help remedy that state of affairs. While I hope that readers from a range of disciplinary backgrounds will find value in its pages, it is written very much with the Roman historian or the classicist in mind. Its goal is to provide a usable and concise introduction to Josephus for students or scholars of classics and Roman history who have not already been introduced to the mysteries, delights, and frustrations which he can present to modern readers. But it also has a persuasive agenda. This book is one Roman historian's attempt to persuade students in classics departments (and their instructors) of the value of this author, and to help them see that he deserves more of their time and attention than he presently receives.

The structure of the book is very straightforward, and is designed to be maximally useful to the Josephan neophyte. The focus will be (as it should be) on the texts: Chapters 2–5 will each discuss one of the four extant works of Josephus: in order of production, the *Jewish War*, the *Jewish Antiquities*, the *Life of Josephus*, and the *Against Apion*. Chapter 6 will survey the reception of these works, an area of rapidly growing scholarly output at the time of writing, before concluding with some general observations. But first, in this chapter, I will aim efficiently to establish some essential context, focusing on what is known of Josephus' life, of the society which produced him, and of the understandings of Jewish history which prevailed among both Jews and Gentiles in his lifetime.

From Jerusalem to Rome: the life of Josephus

By the standards of ancient authors, the life of Josephus is extensively documented, but there is a significant caveat: most information about him comes from his own works. This can raise questions about the reliability of the information presented; it also makes it misleading to use information about Josephus' life as 'context' for the written

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works, given that those works are the source of that supposedly contextual information. Nevertheless, in this introductory chapter it would not be out of place to survey the information which Josephus presents about himself, always bearing in mind that self-positioning and self-apologia are significant objectives throughout the Josephan corpus.

Josephus tells us that he was born in the first year of the reign of Caligula (37–8 CE). His father was named Mattathias, as was his brother; his mother's name is not recorded. On his father's side, he was a priest; on his mother's side, he claimed to be descended from the Hasmonaean dynasty which had ruled Judaea in the second and first centuries BCE (*V* 1–8). He clearly sets out to depict his family as elite and, while bearing in mind the caveats about self-promotion in his works, he is probably correct to do so. Although he was not a member of one of the high priestly families which dominated Jerusalem politics under Rome, Josephus' appointment to a significant command by a rebel faction dominated by the high priestly elite probably indicates that he was well known to them, suggesting that he and his family were among the wealthy Jerusalemite priests who moved in the orbit of those clans. In his youth (as will soon be discussed), he travelled to Rome as part of a Judaean embassy to the emperor Nero; in the Roman Empire more broadly, such a role would typically be played by members of local elites. In the Roman Near East, Greek education was a common marker of elite status, and all of Josephus' extant works indicate extensive familiarity with the Greek canon. Indeed, some measure of Greek education in his youth would seem to have been a necessary precondition for his fulfilment of that role as envoy to Nero. This, then, is probably the best reconstruction of the youth of Josephus according to the information which he presents: a privileged upbringing in an elite Jerusalem priestly family close to the high priests, and a mixed Jewish–Greek education befitting his status as both a guardian of Temple traditions and a local leader in the age of Rome.

Josephus thus probably spent much of his youth in Jerusalem, the ancient cult centre of the majority of the Judaean population. Estimates of the size of the city in the first century have varied widely, ranging from a minimal reconstruction of around 20,000 all the way up to somewhere in the vicinity of 100,000.[1] However large it may have

[1] For the minimalist view, see Geva 2014: 144–8; for a population of 100,000, see Reinhardt 1995: 243–5.

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been, it was clearly known far and wide: Pliny the Elder calls it 'by far the most famous of the cities of the east', and Tacitus 'a renowned city'.[2] Defended by three circuits of massive masonry walls and fiercely protected by its location, Jerusalem was dominated, literally and figuratively, by its great Temple, an especially imposing edifice after King Herod's extensive rebuild and expansion in the late first century BCE (see Map 1). Situated on Temple Mount, bordered to the east by the Kedron Valley with its impressive Hellenistic-style tombs and to the west by the Tyropoeon Valley which ran through the centre of the city, the Temple was of vital importance to Judaism globally, as the only site at which cult worship of Yahweh was permitted by the Hebrew Bible. Around the Temple, in the valleys and on the lower ground roughly where the Muslim Quarter and the eastern parts of the Jewish Quarter are today, extended the area known as the Lower City. Atop the hill on the western side of the Tyropoeon Valley, extending as far as the present-day Jaffa Gate, was the Upper City, which included the palace of the Herodian kings.[3] North of this lay Bezetha, or the 'New City', a substantial suburb constructed by Herod.

Some insights into the kind of life Josephus led are perhaps provided by the excavated elite houses of the Herodian Quarter in Jerusalem, in the old Upper City, which were once owned by leading priestly families before their destruction in 70 CE. These spacious residences are richly adorned with Roman-style frescoes and mosaics, comparable in many ways to those found at Pompeii, destroyed just nine years later. However, the decorations are not comparable in every respect. Representations of human forms are entirely missing from paintings and mosaics alike, as is statuary, in keeping with the biblical prohibition on graven images; meanwhile, the use of stone tableware (considered more ritually pure than ceramics) and the prevalence of *mikva'ot* (Jewish ritual baths) suggest an appropriately priestly concern for ritual purity. This may well have been the sort of milieu in which young Josephus was raised, combining clear reverence for local ancestral tradition with a cosmopolitan openness to Roman modernity.[4]

When discussing his upbringing, Josephus emphasizes the Jewish elements of his education. Early in his autobiography he depicts his

[2] Plin. *HN* 5.70; Tac. *Hist.* 5.2.

[3] On Jerusalem in the first century, see Magness 2012: 133–69; Josephus' lengthy description of the city and Temple is at *BJ* 5.136–247.

[4] On the Herodian Quarter houses, see Avigad 1983: 120–39; Magness 2012: 143–6.

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teenage self, like the young Jesus in Luke's Gospel (2:41–52), astonishing the learned elder priests with his insights into Torah (*V* 9). He goes on to recount how, around the age of sixteen, he undertook a course of study with each of what he presents as the three legitimate schools of Judaism at the time: the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes. He supposedly rounded off this tour of the sects with three years spent living with an ascetic wilderness hermit called Bannus (*V* 10–12).[5] These claims are probably exaggerated (it is difficult to fit such an extensive period of religious study into his known biography), and the exaggerations were perhaps made in order to inflate Josephus' expertise in the eyes of his readers. However, it was clearly important to him to emphasize that he had received a firm grounding in the religious traditions of his people.

His earliest-known contribution to public life was the aforementioned embassy to Nero in the mid-60s CE. He went to argue, before the emperor, for the release of certain Jerusalem priests detained on false charges of sedition. He does not dwell on the impact that his first (known) visit to the imperial metropolis, his future home city, had on him, but his account of how he succeeded in securing the embassy's objective is very interesting. He claims that he befriended a Jewish actor who was an imperial favourite, that through him he got to know Nero's wife Poppaea, and that she secured the release of the priests (*V* 16). As Steve Mason has noted, such a narrative would probably have seemed entirely plausible to a Roman reader versed in hostile Flavian-era representations of Nero's reign. Nero was often posthumously depicted as an emperor shamefully in thrall to the wrong kinds of people, and so this tale fits comfortably with the way the emperor was remembered. The story highlights the canniness and political acumen of the young envoy, who arrives in Rome and is immediately able to assess the nature of Nero's regime. This is a situation in which the usual channels do not work. Josephus correctly and astutely understands that, in order to move Nero, he will need to approach him through the kinds of intermediaries who should, according to traditionalist Roman thinking, be kept far from the levers of power: actors and women.[6] These qualities of craftiness, astuteness, and political skill are important components of Josephus' self-presentation throughout his corpus.

In 66, not long after his return to his homeland, revolt broke out. According to Josephus' own narrative, trouble started in Jerusalem,

[5] The sects are discussed at pp. 97–8 below.
[6] Mason 2005b: 99–101.

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where the daily sacrifices on behalf of the emperor ceased, the Roman garrison was massacred, and the Herodian king and procurator were forced to flee the city. Later in the year, the initial Roman military response failed, and a Roman army was cut to pieces in the pass of Beth Horon while retreating from the walls of Jerusalem (*BJ* 2.293–561). After that great initial victory (according to Josephus), a faction centred on the high priest Ananus ben Ananus attempted to assert control over the Revolt. Although Josephus presents them as the 'natural' leaders of a unified movement, it is clear enough from his narrative that some regional leaders did not accept their authority (e.g. *BJ* 2.585–624; *V* 62–7). This self-appointed 'rebel government' divided the region into districts and apportioned leadership over each area to one of their partisans. Josephus himself was given command of Galilee in the north. Josephus' two different accounts of his commission assign different objectives to his command: in the *War*, he is to defend his territory from the Romans (*BJ* 2.562); in the *Life*, his role is to attempt to curb the influence of local rebel elements unaffiliated with the new 'government' (*V* 28–9).[7] Either way, Josephus travelled north and busied himself quarrelling with local leaders, raising and training an army, and fortifying the hill towns of the region in preparation for the Roman re-invasion from Syria.

When that re-invasion came, it was under the command of Titus Flavius Vespasianus, an experienced senator who had distinguished himself as legionary legate in the Claudian conquest of Britain twenty years earlier, and who brought along with him his son, Titus, as commander of a legion. Josephus' first showdown with the Romans took place in the town of Jotapata, where the Romans besieged him for forty-seven days. According to the account in the *War*, this was a transformative time in his life. Throughout the siege, he had been receiving disturbing visions; with the help of certain biblical passages, he was able to interpret them as revealing important things about the future failure of the Revolt and, indeed, the destiny of the Roman Empire (*BJ* 3.351–3). He became convinced, he claims, that God wanted him to go to Vespasian as a messenger of these things; however, his fellow rebels refused to allow him to surrender. When the Romans eventually breached the walls, Josephus hid in a cave along with a group of rebels. After he failed to persuade them to surrender, they agreed on

[7] This (and other discrepancies between *BJ* and *V*) will be discussed in Chapter 5 below.

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a grim pact: in order to avoid suicide, forbidden by Jewish law, they would draw lots, and each selected individual would kill the person who drew the next lot, until only one remained to end his own life. But providence was watching over Josephus. He found himself among the last two survivors of this pact, at which point he was able to convince his fellow that the pair of them should surrender (*BJ* 3.340–91).

Upon capture, Josephus requested an audience with Vespasian and, when it was granted, he delivered to him this astonishing prophecy (*BJ* 3.400–2):

> Vespasian, you believe that you have merely taken a prisoner in Josephus, but I have come to you as a messenger of greater things. If I had not been sent to you by God, I would have fulfilled the law and died in the manner which befits a general. Will you send me to Nero? Why? The coming of Nero's successors is imminent, culminating in you. You, Vespasian, will be Caesar and emperor, you and your son here. So chain me more securely and keep me in your own custody. You, Caesar, are not only my master but also master of the land and the sea and the entire human race.

This prophecy of Vespasian's elevation was initially disregarded, and the prisoner was led off into captivity, although Josephus is keen to emphasize that it was an honoured captivity, with Vespasian and Titus solicitous to ensure that his needs were met (*BJ* 3.408).

History soon validated the prisoner's prophetic powers. Nero's death in mid-68 CE precipitated a civil war, which Vespasian entered from his Judaean command. In late December 69, Vespasian's Italian campaign (conducted by his allies while the man himself stayed in Alexandria) succeeded, the previous emperor was killed, and Vespasian was confirmed by the Senate as the new *princeps*. Before returning to Rome, however, Vespasian remembered the Jewish priest's prophecy and liberated Josephus (*BJ* 4.624–9). Josephus would spend the rest of the war with the Roman army, now under the command of Titus, assisting the younger Flavian in various ways, most visibly by declaiming speeches to the rebels before the walls of Jerusalem, urging them to lay down their arms (he details how, on one such occasion, he was struck on the head by a rock hurled by an unimpressed rebel and knocked unconscious; *BJ* 5.541).[8] He spent the six-month siege of Jerusalem in the Roman camp, and was presumably present to witness first-hand the burning of the Temple which he had once served as a

[8] *BJ* 5 and 6 chronicle the siege of Jerusalem: Josephus was present throughout.

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priest. After the war, he travelled back to Rome with Titus, where he was granted further tokens of the new Flavian dynasty's esteem: land in Judaea, Roman citizenship, some form of financial compensation, and accommodation in Vespasian's old house (*V* 422–6). It was in this context, in Rome, as a freshly minted Roman citizen known to the imperial family itself, that Josephus embarked on his career as an author.

The earliest-known work of Josephus, which does not survive, was an Aramaic account of the Jewish Revolt, supposedly written for the benefit of an eastern provincial audience (*BJ* 1.3). Although he presents this text as a prototype of the extant Greek *Jewish War*, it is unlikely closely to resemble that text, which seems too Greek in conception and execution to be a close adaptation of an Aramaic original.[9] There followed the four Greek works which do survive. The *Jewish War*, mostly (or even entirely) completed by the end of the 70s, was a Thucydidean contemporary history of the recent revolt and the author's role in it. Completed late in the reign of Domitian, the twenty-book *Jewish Antiquities*, Josephus' most ambitious work, is a total history of the Jewish people from the creation to the author's own time. Appended to this was the *Life of Josephus*, a short autobiographical addendum. Finally, the *Against Apion* is a combative two-book treatise which argues against hostile portrayals of Judaism in the works of certain Gentile authors.

Josephus' years of living in Rome can be glimpsed only sporadically in the works that have come down to us.[10] Occasionally (when he compliments the aesthetic qualities of Augustus' great Temple of Actian Apollo on the Palatine, or mentions bronze diplomatic inscriptions deposited on the Capitol, or charts the route of the Flavian triumph through Rome) we may be able to catch fleeting visions of the author as tourist in his new hometown.[11] His Roman life does not appear to have been entirely untroubled: he mentions one incident when he was accused of supplying arms and money to Jewish agitators in Cyrene (although Vespasian and Titus dismissed the case), as well as unpopularity among his fellow Jews and criticism of his *Jewish War* on grounds of both

[9] Hata 1975–6; Davies 2023: 51.

[10] Hollander 2014 is a valuable, if (by its own admission) sometimes speculative, reconstruction of Josephus' Roman life. Cotton and Eck 2005 also attempts a reconstruction.

[11] See *BJ* 2.81; *AJ* 14.188; *BJ* 7.121–62.

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honesty and aesthetics.[12] Some scholars believe that they can detect signs of Josephus' position declining between the *Jewish War* and the later works, on the basis that the former is dedicated to Titus while the others are all dedicated to one Epaphroditus, presented as a learned man with an interest in Judaism, and whose name suggests that he was a freed slave.[13] Certainly, after Domitian came to power in 81 CE, Josephus lost the strong personal connection to the ruler from which he had benefited under Vespasian and Titus. However, less pessimistic explanations for this change of addressee are possible: his later works had less direct relevance to the dynasty, which alone may explain why they did not receive imperial dedications. There is no need to imagine Josephus' life in Rome after the death of Titus as lonely, embittered, and alienated.

Besides, our author always had family to fall back on. Josephus married four times over the course of his life. All that we know of his first wife is that she was in Jerusalem during the Roman siege (*BJ* 5.419). His second wife was a Jewish woman captured in the course of the war, and the marriage was arranged by Vespasian. This short-lived marriage violated the Torah prohibition on priests wedding prisoners of war, a prohibition of which Josephus was aware, as he mentions it in *Antiquities* 13.291–2. With his third wife, a Jewish woman from Alexandria, he had three sons, of whom only one, Hyrcanus, was still alive when he wrote his autobiography. Wife number four, a wealthy woman from Crete, bore two further sons, Justus and Agrippa, also known as Simonides.[14] What became of those three sons, and how and when they (or indeed their father) died, are facts lost to history.

The people and the land

For all the complexities of his multifaceted identity, Josephus was strongly rooted in one particular place, Judaea under Roman rule (see Map 2). Properly speaking, the word 'Judaea' refers to a small territory surrounding the city of Jerusalem, roughly coterminous with

[12] See *V* 429 (cf. *BJ* 7.447–50); *V* 416; *V* 336–68; *C.Ap* 1.53–6.

[13] Cotton and Eck 2005 (with discussion of the identity of Epaphroditus at 49–52); Price 2005; Hollander 2014, esp. 242–304. For more optimistic readings, see Goodman 1994; Curran 2011. For more on the identity of Epaphroditus, see Barclay 2006: xxvi–xxviii.

[14] Josephus provides information on his family at *V* 426–7.

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the biblical kingdom of Judah. However, both in antiquity and today, the word is often used more expansively than this, to denote a region which includes Judaea proper but also incorporates the regions of Samaria and Galilee to the north, extending from the Mediterranean to the Jordan, and comprising the majority of the southern Levant. Though small, it is a region of remarkable ecological variety, stretching from the strikingly verdant lands of Galilee in the north to the arid rocky desert of the south, and combining a broad, flat coastal plain with a rugged and hilly interior. The Jordan Valley marked the region's eastern extent, together with its two large bodies of water, the fresh-water Sea of Galilee in the north and the extraordinary Dead Sea in the south. To the north of the land lay the ancient Phoenician cities and the vast Roman province of Syria; east across the river was the Transjordan, dominated in Josephus' time by the Decapolis, a league of Greek-style cities; south-east was the Nabataean kingdom; south-west was the province of Egypt.

In Josephus' day, the deserts south of Jerusalem were inhabited by an ethnic group known as the Idumaeans, the Arab descendants of the biblical Edomites, who had adopted Jewish religious customs in the second century BCE.[15] Meanwhile, Samaria, to the north, was home to a people who practised a variant form of Judaism, and whose most sacred site was not Jerusalem but Mount Gerizim, where they had their own temple.[16] Galilee, further north still, was a region of villages, lacking any significant cities until King Herod's son Antipas constructed two royal capitals there, Sepphoris and Tiberias, in the early first century CE.[17] Despite its lack of urbanization, Galilee seems to have been quite densely populated, such was the proliferation of villages found there in antiquity, possibly including a number of non-Jewish or mixed Jewish–Gentile settlements.[18]

Two major urban centres were of particular importance to this region in Josephus' lifetime. Jerusalem, inland where verdant north

[15] For the Idumaeans, see Kasher 1988; for their presentation in Josephus, see Applebaum 2009.

[16] For the Samaritans, see Mor and Reiterer 2010; for their presentation in Josephus, see Pummer 2009; Chalmers 2020.

[17] On Galilee and Antipas' impact on it, see Jensen 2010.

[18] The scholarly understanding of Galilee's cultural profile is changeable. While some works (e.g. Freyne 1980; Batey 1991) have painted a picture of a heavily Gentile-dominated Galilee, other scholars, beginning with Chancey 2002, have argued that this picture mostly derives from later evidence, and that there is very little evidence of Gentile presence in Galilee in the age of Josephus.

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meets arid south, has already been described.[19] On the coast Caesarea Maritima, an ambitious construction project of Herod the Great, housed the Roman governors for most of the year. Though the city contained a large and important Jewish community, Herod had expressly designed it to be a centre for the non-Jewish population of the region, and it shows in the city's very Graeco-Roman design. Boasting an array of Roman-style public entertainment venues and a grand temple of Augustus and Roma, with cult statues modelled on those of Zeus at Olympia and Hera at Argos, the city connected Judaea to the wider Mediterranean world through its large artificial harbour, a wonder of hydraulic engineering using Roman construction techniques and materials.[20]

Not everybody who inhabited this land was Jewish, but the majority were, and that majority had clear ideas about how their ancestors came to the region. The widely accepted narrative of Jewish history in Josephus' day derived, of course, from the Hebrew Bible, the collection of sacred texts known as the Tanakh in Judaism and the Old Testament in Christianity. The biblical historical narrative was clearly established as authoritative by Josephus' time, and we have little evidence that any Jewish person in antiquity fundamentally doubted the historicity of the tale.[21] It is this narrative which gave Josephus his sense of history and which informs much of his work. A summary is therefore in order here.

According to that narrative, the Jewish people originated in Mesopotamia. Their ancestor Abraham left his birthplace, Ur of the Chaldees, and dedicated himself to the worship of a particular deity, Yahweh. His peregrinations eventually brought him to the land of Canaan, the future Judaea, which God promised to his descendants. However, in the time of Abraham's grandson Jacob and great-grandson Joseph, famine caused the family to relocate to Egypt as honoured guests of the ruler. Some generations later, the situation of the Israelites in Egypt had degenerated into brutal slavery. God therefore engineered the departure of his people from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. As the Israelites wandered the desert for forty years, God

[19] See above, pp. 3–4.

[20] On Caesarea, see *BJ* 1.408–15; *AJ* 15.331–41. For overviews of modern excavations, see Roller 1998: 133–44; Magness 2012: 170–82; Meyers and Chancey 2012: 62–8.

[21] Philo records the existence of certain people who treated the Hebrew Bible as pure allegory (*Migr.* 89–94), and who may not, consequently, have felt it important to hold to the literal truth of biblical narrative.

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revealed his covenant to Moses, an expansive set of laws which guaranteed the special relationship between Yahweh and his people. As long as the Israelites lived in obedience to these laws, God would protect and champion them; conversely, any stiff-necked disobedience would result in the fulfilment of a gruesome litany of divine punishments, as detailed at the end of the book of Deuteronomy.

With the relationship between God and his people thus ratified, Moses died in sight of the promised land. The people came into the land under the command of Joshua and, after a brutal war against the Canaanites, they took control of it and occupied the territory promised to their ancestor Abraham. Initially ruled on tribal lines, in time the people came to desire the creation of the office of king in imitation of the surrounding nations. This is presented, in the book of 1 Samuel, as an undesirable development (imitating other nations is generally a bad idea in the Hebrew Bible). However, God reluctantly allowed the Israelites to appoint a king.[22] The history of the Israelite monarchy is related in the books of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings, a unified composition which some modern biblical scholars refer to as the Deuteronomistic History, and the Deuteronomistic History's initial scepticism about the institution of monarchy is retained throughout.[23]

The first king of the Israelites was Saul. However, Saul lost the favour of God and came to be supplanted by the complex figure of King David, whose dynasty was promised eternal rule by God; that dynasty would always be strongly associated with Israelite monarchy, and with the messianic hopes for the restoration of national sovereignty which would crystallize in later periods.[24] David was succeeded by his son Solomon, famed for his wisdom, who constructed the First Temple, but his other transgressions alienated God, who manifested his displeasure by causing the kingdom to fragment into two parts. The northern kingdom of Israel, comprising Samaria and Galilee, seceded from the southern kingdom of Judah.

[22] See 1 Sam 8:6–21 for this negative portrayal of the establishment of the monarchy.

[23] The notion of the Deuteronomistic History was first proposed by the biblical scholar Martin Noth (1943). It was subsequently expanded, and disputed, extensively. For an edited volume covering later refinements of and engagement with Noth's model, see Knoppers and McConville 2000. Römer 2020 has argued for the rejection of the unified authorship model, suggesting that, instead of a 'Deuteronomistic History', we should think in terms of a 'Deuteronomistic Library'.

[24] On messianism, see Fabry and Scholtissek 2002, esp. 11–56; J. Collins 2010, esp. 13–15.

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The Deuteronomistic History does not remember these two kingdoms fondly: all of the kings of Israel and most of the kings of Judah are presented as wicked, often worshipping foreign deities and even, in some cases, stooping to human sacrifice.[25] As the transgressions of the kings and the people accumulated, God expressed his displeasure by bringing the Assyrians against Israel, leading to the destruction of the northern kingdom; a little later, God also punished the southern kingdom of Judah, bringing the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar against Jerusalem. Ignoring the admonitions of the prophet Jeremiah, the Jerusalemites resisted, and the result was the devastation of their city and the destruction of their temple, accompanied by the removal of much of the population to Babylon.

The Deuteronomistic History thus ends on a bleak note, but not entirely without hope. God's promises to Abraham, to Moses, and to David were eternal. If God had turned his wrath against his people, that could only ever be a temporary state. One day, when the people had suffered and returned to obedience, there would surely be a restoration of independence in Judaea, of the Temple, of Davidic rule, and of God's favour. Thus, even amid the ruin of the city and the Temple, hope could be found in God's unchanging covenant.[26] Josephus, who lived to witness a rerun of these events when the reconstructed Temple was destroyed by another Gentile superpower, was profoundly influenced by the Deuteronomistic History's response to this catastrophe of remote antiquity.

The hopes which the crushed Judahites may have been nursing under Babylonian rule did not take long to reach fulfilment. In the mid-sixth century BCE, the Neo-Babylonian Empire was terminated by the rise of Persian power under Cyrus. According to the biblical books, this change in the world order was good news for Judah: Cyrus issued a proclamation permitting the Judahite exiles to return to their land and rebuild their temple.[27] The reconstructed precinct, the Second Temple, was apparently somewhat underwhelming in the Persian period, and so it would remain until Herod's redevelopment five centuries later.[28] Nonetheless, its creation was a significant

[25] On human sacrifice, see 2 Kgs 16:3, 21:6, 23:20.

[26] This 'hopeful' reading of the Deuteronomistic History departs from Noth's pessimistic interpretation, and is associated above all with Rad 1966.

[27] The purported text of the proclamation can be read at 2 Chr 36:23 and Ezra 1:2.

[28] In a speech attributed to Herod, Josephus draws attention to the unimpressive nature of the Second Temple and its inferiority to the First Temple (*AJ* 15.385–7).

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milestone in Jewish history, a recrudescence of hope after a period of suffering.[29]

For a little over a century, Judaea lived peacefully under Persian rule, and the reconstructed Temple resumed its function as the centre of the region's cultic life. Like a typical Graeco-Roman temple, its operations revolved around offering sacrifices, often animal sacrifices, on an altar situated outside the actual temple structure. However, in other respects it was peculiar. The Second Commandment prohibited the creation of a cult statue, a standard element in temples elsewhere, and the focus of the structure was, instead, the Holy of Holies, an empty room in which the presence of God was believed to reside, and into which it was strictly forbidden to trespass. The Temple was served by the priests (*kohanim*), a recognizable class within Judaean society, and a class to which Josephus belonged. Priests were divided into twenty-four *mishmarot* (literally 'watches', often translated as 'courses'), who took turns to officiate in a system of sacerdotal shiftwork. Each course would be expected to be on duty at the Temple for two weeks out of the year, in addition to the three great pilgrim festivals (Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot), when all courses were required to be in attendance to cater for the greatly inflated number of worshippers.[30]

The other central focus of religious life in the Second Temple era was Torah. While levels of commitment to Torah observance would vary from person to person, and while different people interpreted the laws differently, it is probably reasonable to assume that most Jewish people would have made at least some attempts to follow their understanding of the law. The sheer extent of the demands which the Hebrew Bible made on Jewish life is hard to parallel in other religious traditions in antiquity, except for those required of specially designated sacred individuals such as the *flamen Dialis* at Rome.[31] Some of those demands sharply distinguished Jews from others. Stringent Jewish dietary requirements perhaps made common Jewish–Gentile dining difficult. The insistence on the sole worship of Yahweh made participation in the religious practices of other peoples problematic to

[29] For Persian administration in Judaea, see Lipschits and Oeming 2006, especially the contributions by Lipschits (19–52), Kessler (91–122), and Dandamayev (373–98).

[30] The fullest account of the Temple's operations remains Sanders 1992: 129–310.

[31] For the fearsome list of taboos governing the life of the *flamen Dialis*, see Gell. *NA* 10.15.3–25.

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most Jews.[32] The observance of Shabbat was another highly distinctive feature of Jewish life. But as far as we can tell, the people of Judaea, with their curious temple and unusual customs, lived peacefully and unmolested in that century of Persian rule.

As the end of the fourth century BCE approached, all that would change. In a half-Greek Balkan mountain kingdom, a new world order was about to be born.

Japheth and Shem: Judaea in the Hellenistic world

In the *Jewish Antiquities*, Josephus provides a vivid account of Alexander's visit to Jerusalem (*AJ* 11.325–39). The king supposedly venerated the high priest, made sacrifices to God, and read his life as prophesied by the book of Daniel. In reality, none of this happened. Alexander did not even visit Jerusalem; these tales of a royal pilgrimage to the holy city were local Judaean legends. But the very existence of these legends, like the very existence of all the many other local legends which accrued around Alexander across west and central Asia, serves as testimony to the extraordinary impact which the king and his army would have on the territories that they conquered, as well as the powerful magnetism of Alexander's name and personality.

Once that magnetism was removed by Alexander's death in 323 BCE, there was nothing to hold his empire together. The Hellenistic kingdoms emerged from the wreckage of that short-lived entity, each ruled by the family of one of Alexander's senior commanders. Judaea initially passed into the control of the Ptolemaic kingdom, centred on Egypt. For the next century or so, it would be the object of frequent wars between the Ptolemies and their northern neighbours the Seleucids, based in Syria, and these wars would receive biblical commemoration as the conflicts between the kings of the North and South 'prophesied' in the book of Daniel (which actually reached its current form later).[33] The wars were likely disruptive, but we know of no major anti-Ptolemaic agitations in Palestine. In Judaea itself, perhaps the most significant legacy of the Ptolemies was the spread of

[32] Not necessarily all. Czajkowski 2015 argues, on the basis of some papyri, that some Roman-period Jews were willing to engage with aspects of imperial cult when swearing oaths for legal purposes.

[33] Dan 11:1–35.

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the Greek language, which came to be widely spoken in this region, not only by the elite. It joined Aramaic, which had taken root in the land during the Persian period, as a major local language.[34]

However, the major innovations of the Ptolemaic period in Jewish history happened outside Palestine. The early Ptolemaic period witnessed mass Judaean immigration into Egypt, and especially Alexandria, and Jewish settlers in that city came to enjoy an intermediate status, not possessing full citizenship but holding privileges which were not granted to the Egyptians.[35] Early Ptolemaic Alexandria was also the setting for the translation of the Torah into Greek, an event which, according to a surviving Jewish text known as the *Letter of Aristeas*, was the result of royal sponsorship, with seventy-two priestly translators being brought to Alexandria by Ptolemy II to create a version of the Jewish laws fit for the famous library. Greek versions of the Hebrew Bible were soon circulating widely, making Judaism more accessible to outsiders and serving the needs of emerging Greek-speaking Jewish communities throughout the Mediterranean.[36] At this time, Jewish communities were springing up in cities throughout the Levant, Asia Minor, Greece, and the islands, and even, by the early first century BCE, Rome. It was in the time of the Ptolemies that the foundations were laid for the Greek-speaking Mediterranean diaspora which was such an important part of the Judaism of Josephus' lifetime.[37]

Ptolemaic control over Palestine came to an end with the Seleucid conquest of the region by Antiochus III around 200 BCE, but it was the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 BCE), the villain of Hannukah, which precipitated a severe rupture between the inhabitants of this region and their Macedonian rulers. Two important Jewish texts from the second century BCE relate the story of Antiochus' transgressions and the militant Judaean response, 1 and 2 Maccabees. According to these texts, problems originated among a particular class of leading Judaeans, including priests, who attempted to introduce Greek customs into Jerusalem (these people are often known nowadays as the

[34] On language use in Judaea, see S. Schwartz 1995; Macfarlane 1997; Rajak 2002: 46–65; Smelik 2013: 100–22.

[35] The precise status of the Jews of Alexandria in the Hellenistic and Roman periods is complex and disputed. See Blouin 2005: 36–43; Gambetti 2009: 23–76; Gruen 2015: 70–7, with references to earlier scholarship there.

[36] See Rajak 2009, esp. 24–63, 125–75.

[37] On the emergence and development of the diaspora, see Gruen 2015; Rajak 2018. Bloch 2022 is a stimulating collection of essays on Jewish diaspora experience in antiquity.

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Hellenizers). Their sins are variously attested: they constructed a gymnasium; they 'made foreskins for themselves' (i.e. underwent epispasm, a cosmetic surgery procedure for foreskin restoration); they abandoned the traditional priestly duties; they developed an enthusiasm (*terribile dictu*) for wearing Greek-style hats.[38] Some years later, Antiochus mandated major changes to Jewish religious practice. Circumcision was outlawed; sacrifices to foreign deities were imposed; an altar of Olympian Zeus was erected on top of the altar at the Jerusalem Temple (Daniel's 'abomination which makes desolate'); any who refused to abide by the new dispensations were put to death.[39] The ferocity of the persecution prompted a militant response, the Maccabean Revolt, led by the priestly Hasmonaean family (Josephus' supposed maternal ancestors), who were eventually able to take advantage of ongoing Seleucid civil wars to establish an independent Judaean nation under a new, Hasmonaean, royal dynasty, ruling simultaneously as kings and high priests.

Whatever the historicity of Antiochus' persecution as related in 1 and 2 Maccabees, the presentation of these events in those texts offers insights into the intersection of Judaism and Greek culture in this period.[40] At first glance, both texts appear to validate a sharp distinction between the 'Greek' and the 'Jewish', and to represent a wholesale rejection of Hellenism on the part of Judaism. But such a reading would be misguided. Though 1 and 2 Maccabees are both hostile to the Hellenizers, they are also both clear that the Hellenizers were not the real cause of trouble: major unrest did not break out until Antiochus' ill-advised interventions. Although some aspects of 'Hellenism' may have been distasteful to some Jews, conflict between the Hellenic and the Judaic was not inevitable. Even the Hasmonaean family took Greek names, minted coins displaying Greek iconography and bearing Greek inscriptions, and constructed Greek-style mausoleums.[41] By the mid-second century BCE, Greekness was too deeply embedded, both in Judaea and in the wider eastern Mediterranean, for total rejection to be feasible. Judaea was part of a world whose political vocabulary and iconography of

[38] 1 Macc 1.11–15; 2 Macc 4.7–22.

[39] 1 Macc 1.41–64; 2 Macc 6.1–11; Dan 12:11.

[40] The bibliography on what actually happened in the 160s BCE is too large to cite here. Important contributions include Tcherikover 1959: 152–74; F. Millar 1978; Bickerman 1979; Honigman 2014.

[41] Gruen 1998: 1–140; Regev 2017. On mausoleums, see 1 Macc 13.27–9; Meyers and Chancey 2012: 39–42.

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power was emphatically Greek, and even after their revolt the Hasmonaeans had no option but to play the game.

Alexander's conquests brought significant change to the eastern Mediterranean. The Greek language and Greek culture came to enjoy hegemonic status, privileged over other cultures as the marker of trans-local elite status. The leaders of the non-Greek peoples of West Asia came to adopt Greek culture themselves, usually in complex combination with their own ancestral ways of life. The Judaeans were no different, though their cultural 'red lines' were more numerous than those of the rest. Even after the Maccabean rising, Judaea continued to be part of a substantially Greek world. This would not change with the coming of Rome. The cultural order created by the Hellenistic kingdoms, which privileged the Greek and devalued the 'barbarian' even as Greekness came everywhere to be inflected by local cultures, would remain in place, forming the intellectual landscape in which Josephus would operate.

The ships of Kittim: the coming of Rome

> Hyrcanus and Aristobulus were responsible for this suffering which befell the people of Jerusalem because of their dissension. We lost our liberty and became subjected to the Romans. . .and in addition the Romans extorted from us more than ten thousand talents over a short period of time. (*AJ* 14.77–8)

With this stark epitaph Josephus laments the loss of Judaean independence to Rome. He is referring to the intervention in 64 BCE of Pompey the Great into the region, the first direct Roman intrusion into Judaean affairs. Pompey was engaged in his campaign against Mithridates of Pontus. He turned to settling the affairs of Syria, and his attention was soon drawn to the Hasmonaean kingdom. On arrival, he found Judaea in tumult. Queen Salome Alexandra had recently died, appointing her son Hyrcanus to rule after her, but Hyrcanus' brother Aristobulus also pressed a claim, leading to a fraternal civil war. Pompey took Hyrcanus' side in the dispute, prompting Aristobulus' forces to seize the Temple and close the gates to the Romans. Pompey's army stormed the Temple, slaughtering defenders and priests alike, and the great man himself violated a profound Jewish taboo by entering the Holy of Holies. He did at least refrain from looting the Temple's treasures, according to Josephus (*AJ* 14.34–79; *BJ* 1.131–58). But even if Josephus is correct about Pompey leaving

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the treasures untouched, his desecration was severe. As episodes of 'first contact' go, this was catastrophic. In many ways, the picture would not improve in the coming decades.

With Aristobulus safely removed to Rome, Hyrcanus could continue governing the region as high priest and ethnarch, although the royal title was not permitted to him. Any poor impressions of Rome which might have been fostered by Pompey's desecration would be reinforced ten years later, when Pompey's fellow triumvir Crassus looted the Temple in order to fund his disastrous Parthian campaign (*AJ* 14.105–19; *BJ* 1.179). There soon followed the grim period of the civil wars which plagued Rome in the last years of the Republic, and distant Judaea was not spared from their ravages. A string of civil war combatants – Pompey's partisans, Caesar, Cassius, Antony – all headed east and raised money and recruits from the Levant, burdening Judaea with punitive financial levies to fund their conflicts.[42] The decisive moment, however, arrived in 40 BCE, when a Parthian invasion swept into the Roman province of Syria and Antigonus, the son of the Aristobulus whom Pompey had deprived of the kingship, was able to stage a coup and establish himself as the new ruler, with Parthian support. But Antigonus' reign was not of long duration. A certain Herod, a prominent and energetic Idumaean courtier of Hyrcanus, escaped from the usurper's clutches and fled to Rome, where, thanks to the patronage of Antony, he managed to get himself proclaimed 'king of the Jews' by the Senate (*BJ* 1.284–5):

> [Octavian] called a meeting of the Senate. Messalla, along with Atratinus, brought in Herod and spoke of his father's good deeds and his own goodwill towards Rome, and simultaneously demonstrated that Antigonus was their enemy, not only because of his previous conduct but also because he had now taken power with Parthian assistance in a way which showed contempt for Rome. This caused consternation in the chamber and, when Antony stood up and argued that Herod becoming king would be advantageous to Rome in the Parthian war, the vote in favour of regime change was unanimous. . .Then Antony hosted a public feast to celebrate the first day of the reign of Herod.

Three years later in 37 BCE, a Roman army stormed Jerusalem once again. Antigonus was killed, and Herod was able to claim the office which the Senate had voted him to receive.[43]

[42] This complex period is chronicled in detail at *AJ* 14.119–326, and more concisely at *BJ* 1.180–247.

[43] The Parthian incursion and rise of Herod are narrated at *BJ* 1.248–346; *AJ* 14:330–491.

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The long reign of Herod set a number of important precedents for the future of Roman-administered Judaea.[44] Unlike the Hasmonaeans, Herod was unable to hold the position of high priest due to his ancestry, and therefore he inaugurated the habit of the monarch appointing and firing the high priest, a prerogative which would later transfer to the Roman governors. His lavish building programme, both in his own kingdom and far beyond it, assisted in the dissemination of Augustan architectural messaging across West Asia.[45] Josephus accuses him of oppressive rule and intensive surveillance, and his domestic life was a terrible mess: over the course of his reign, he would end up executing his favourite wife, three of his sons, and several other relatives.[46] The dismal story of the massacre of the innocents of Bethlehem, from Matthew's Gospel (2:16–18), is probably not historical, but the very fact that such a story could circulate is perhaps illustrative of the reputation which Herod had earned, as is a tall tale concerning the end of the king's life. According to Josephus, Herod, on his deathbed, rounded up the most popular leading men from throughout Judaea and ordered that, when he died, they were all to be put to death, since he recognized that this was the only way that he could induce people to weep on the day of his demise. Luckily the monstrous scheme was overruled by his sister (*BJ* 1.659–60).

After the dismal old tyrant finally died, the Herodian family would remain important in the region until the death of the king's great-grandson, although none of Herod's successors would be able to establish such unshakeable and long-lasting authority.[47] Immediately following the king's death, his territory was divided between three of his sons; however, his principal heir, Archelaus, who governed Judaea proper as ethnarch, was found to be inadequate so, in 6 CE, he was exiled and replaced by a Roman governor. That basic division, with the Judaean heartlands run directly by Rome while outlying areas remained in the hands of members of the Herod clan, would persist up until the outbreak of revolt in 66 CE.

[44] On the reign of Herod, see Kasher with Witztum 2008; Richardson and Fisher 2017 (the former with caution). On Herod in Josephus, see Landau 2006; Czajkowski and Eckhardt 2021.

[45] Josephus gives a thematic survey of Herod's construction projects at *BJ* 1.401–30. For surveys of the literary and archaeological evidence, see Roller 1998; Richardson and Fisher 2017: 235–89.

[46] On surveillance and oppression, see *AJ* 15.365–9. On Herod's domestic trouble and the intrigues against him as presented by Josephus, see Bond 2012; Czajkowski 2016.

[47] On the dynasty beyond Herod himself, see Kokkinos 1998; Wilker 2007.

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Judaea in this period was not a fully constituted Roman province; rather, it was a special administrative area under the overall authority of the Roman governor of Syria.[48] Josephus' account of this period makes it clear that Syrian governors were free to intervene in Judaean affairs as and when they saw fit, and that people in Judaea could appeal decisions of the local governor to him.[49] The governors sent to Judaea by Rome were of equestrian, rather than senatorial, rank, indicating their juniority. In Judaea, as elsewhere in their empire, the Romans showed a preference for entrusting some governance to local elites. In addition to the Herod family, and to their courtiers and hangers-on (the people the New Testament calls 'the Herodians'), the local dimension in Roman governance of the region was represented by the high priest and his circle. He, along with a court or council known by the Greek name of 'sanhedrin' (συνέδριον), retained some civic functions, including a judicial role. From the time of Herod on, the high priesthood tended to devolve onto members of only four families. This effectively created an elite within the priesthood, with wealthy, land-owning, Jerusalem-dwelling priestly families close to the high priestly clans coming to dominate Jerusalem, although it should be remembered that not all priests were wealthy, and the majority should not be considered part of the elite.[50] It is this class – elite priests with a political role under the Roman administration – to which Josephus belonged.

'Jewish customs are irrational and foul': Greek and Roman views of Judaism

Before turning to Josephus' works themselves, one final preliminary matter should be addressed. His works were, among other things, acts of intercultural communication: attempts to translate Judaism and Jewish history into terms comprehensible to non-Jewish readers. However, the non-Jewish readers who were among Josephus' intended audience were not blank slates. They came to those works with pre-existing knowledge of and beliefs about Jews and Judaism. If we wish to be able to understand the important intercultural elements of

[48] Eck 2007: 1–52 is the best current discussion of the status of Judaea between 6 and 66 CE.
[49] See, for example, *AJ* 18.85–8; *AJ* 20.182; *BJ* 2.333–41.
[50] Goodman 1987 remains an indispensable study of the elite priestly class in this period.

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Josephus' works, we must first pay attention to those pre-existing notions, to what kinds of 'knowledge' about Judaism he could expect of his audience. What opportunities, and what obstacles, did Graeco-Roman preconceptions of Judaism present to authors like Josephus, who wanted to communicate knowledge about their people in a world where the prevailing mainstream intellectual traditions were produced by outsiders?[51]

Despite the Tacitus quotation in the heading of this section, not all Greek and Roman commentary on Judaism was hostile.[52] Some aspects of Judaism – namely the belief in the unitary nature of the divine, and the idea that God could not be represented by human hands – struck some Greek and Roman authors as philosophically advanced, leading to a notion, occasionally visible in the texts, that the Jews were a nation of philosophers.[53] Clearchus of Soli claims that his teacher Aristotle once met a Jewish man whose philosophical discourse showed that he had 'the soul of a Greek': Aristotle also, according to Clearchus, claimed that the Jews were descended from Indian philosophers called Calani.[54] The 'philosophical' reputation of Judaism led the philosopher Numenius of Apamea (second century CE) to declare that Plato, a well-known espouser of unitary notions of divinity, was simply 'Moses speaking Attic Greek'.[55] Strabo's account of Jewish origins is similarly admiring: he saw them as the better sort of Egyptians, who left their country under the leadership of Moses, dismayed at how debased Egyptian religion had become.[56]

In addition to these expressions of admiration for aspects of Judaism, we occasionally find a surprising degree of knowledge, sometimes accompanied by (clearly exceptional) familiarity with the Greek Bible. The Greek aesthetic treatise *On the Sublime* quotes the book of Genesis with approval.[57] Some scholars suggest that Virgil's poetry demonstrates familiarity with some parts of the Tanakh, chiefly

[51] M. Stern's collection of Greek and Latin authors on Jews and Judaism (1974–80) remains the most valuable resource for those exploring this topic. Important general discussions of these questions are provided by Schäfer 1997; Isaac 2004: 440–91; Bar Kokhva 2010; Gruen 2016: 313–32. On specific important authors, Bloch 2002 and Feldherr 2009a are helpful on Tacitus' Jewish excursus, and the introduction to Barclay 2006 is indispensable for the numerous Gentile authors quoted or paraphrased by Josephus in *Against Apion*.

[52] The quotation is from Tac. *Hist.* 5.5: *Iudaeorum mos absurdus sordidusque*.

[53] On the 'philosophical Jews' trope, see Gruen 2016: 133–52.

[54] *C.Ap* 1.177–81.

[55] Des Places 1973, fr. 8.

[56] Strabo 16.2.35–7.

[57] [Longinus] *Subl.* 9.9.

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Isaiah.[58] The Late Republican polymath Varro and the eccentric emperor Caligula both knew the Hebrew name of God.[59] In the second century, the philosopher Celsus, most famous today as an early critic of Christianity, showed extensive familiarity with the contents of the Hebrew Bible, and was even able to quote Jewish traditions about Jesus which are also transmitted in rabbinic sources.[60] Furthermore, we know of certain non-Jewish individuals in the Roman world whom the sources label 'God-fearers': people who did not become Jewish but were nonetheless attracted to some aspects of Judaism, and who offered support to the Jewish communities in their cities.[61] So, despite the general ignorance of Judaism and Jewish literary traditions, it is clear that some non-Jews held Judaism in fairly high regard, and others evinced indications of more knowledge than seems to have been the norm.

But outside these cases, in general it seems that familiarity with Judaism was a rarity. The biblical books, despite having been available for a long time in Greek, were not considered part of the essential canon of the educated person. A small number of 'facts' about Judaism were well known. The figure of Moses was famous, as was the basic story of his leading the people out of Egypt. This caused many Greek and Roman authors to hypothesize that the Jews were Egyptian by origin (and, though Josephus repeatedly takes strong exception to this claim, we ought to note that such a suggestion is not, in and of itself, pejorative). The numerous Graeco-Roman versions of the exodus story which circulated recognizably tell the same story as the Hebrew Bible, but the details are often twisted to the detriment of the Jewish people. For instance, on Tacitus' reading, the Israelites were not delivered from Egypt thanks to the protection of God, but were driven out by Pharaoh at the command of the gods of Egypt, who saw them as polluters.[62] Thus, rather than God's chosen people, the Tacitean version reconceptualizes the Israelites as undesirable aliens, sources of contamination, and god-cursed vectors of disease. Tacitus goes on to claim that Moses devised the laws of Judaism and Jewish religious practice in conscious opposition to the religious practices of

[58] See, most recently, Hejduk 2018.
[59] Lydus, *Mens.* 4.53; Philo, *Legat.* 353.
[60] Alexander 2021.
[61] This term, once a staple in considerations of Second Temple Judaism, has recently been contested. See Kraemer 2014 and Fredriksen 2015 for an overview of evidence and arguments.
[62] Tac. *Hist.* 5.5.

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the rest of the world, a Judeophobic twist on Herodotus' reading of the Egyptians as 'mirror-people' whose customs were the inverse of everybody else's.[63]

Certain elements of Jewish practice deriving from biblical laws attracted comment from Greek and Roman authors, with a tonal range extending from amused curiosity to outright hostility. Jewish food taboos (especially pork abstinence) were an unfailing source of amusement; sabbath observance was taken as a mark of laziness or extreme superstition; Jewish aversion to abortion and infanticide was seen as odd, as was male circumcision.[64] The Jewish aversion to idolatry clearly came to be suspected by some authors, who accused the Jews of venerating the image of an ass in Jerusalem.[65] Perhaps above all, the sense of separateness which distinctive Jewish customs created led to the very frequent charge of ἀμιξία, misanthropy towards outsiders.[66] In addition to these stereotypes, which all relate directly or indirectly to authentic features of Jewish law and practice, Jews were subjected to the kinds of generalizing negative stereotypes to which all the 'barbarian' peoples of the empire found themselves vulnerable. For instance, Cicero claims that Jews are naturally fit for slavery, while Tacitus remarks that they are especially prone to lust.[67]

Anti-Judaism in more extreme forms can also be found in the literary record. A particular vulnerability of Jewish communities in the Roman period was the charge of disloyalty, arising from the refusal of most Jews to participate directly in forms of imperial cult which were otherwise ubiquitous, and this dangerous charge could be weaponized by opponents and critics of Judaism.[68] Probably the most extreme anti-Jewish tale from Graeco-Roman antiquity is a conspiracy theory which Josephus reports from the works of Apion which claimed that, when Antiochus Epiphanes violated the Temple, he found a Greek

[63] Hdt. 2.35–6.

[64] All of these features receive comment from Tacitus at the beginning of *Hist.* 5. On pork abstinence, see Caligula, at Philo, *Legat.* 361–2; Juv. 6.155–60; and the mildly Judeophobic joke attributed to Augustus by Macrobius at *Sat.* 2.4.11. On sabbath observance, see Plut. *De Superst.* 169C; Agatharchides, quoted at *C.Ap* 1.209–11. On abortion and infanticide, see Hecataeus, at Diod. Sic. 40.3.8. On circumcision, see Petron. *Sat.* F50; Strabo 16.2.37.

[65] Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 670D-E; Apion quoted at *C.Ap* 2.80; Mnaseas, quoted at *C.Ap* 2.112–14.

[66] On this charge, see Mason 2019.

[67] Cic. *Prov. cons.* 10; Tac. *Hist.* 5.5. Tacitus' phrasing suggests that this accusation is targeted solely at Jewish men; however, Ovid (*Ars am.* 1.75) identifies the sabbath, 'sacred to the Syrian Jew', as an auspicious time to go looking for a female partner, perhaps indicating that the stereotype could extend to Jewish women too.

[68] E.g. Philo, *Legat.* 355, *Flacc.* 41–50; *C.Ap* 2.65–78; Tac. *Hist.* 5.5.

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imprisoned inside. The Greek told him that, every year, the Jews abducted a Greek man and sacrificed him at a ceremony where they feasted on his entrails (*C.Ap* 2.89–108). This absurd yarn is shocking, but it is clearly exceptional. Apion's tall tale demonstrates that it was possible for one Greek author to conceptualize Judaism as a sinister cannibal cult, but it certainly cannot be taken as evidence that this view was widespread. It plainly was not.

So in Josephus' lifetime, aside from a small number of Gentile authors who demonstrated an unusual level of engagement, knowledge about Judaism was sparse and often of poor quality. Hostile variant versions of the Jews' own origin myth circulated; Greek and Roman authors show awareness of a handful of genuine Jewish customs, generally the most obvious and visible; and a limited repertoire of mostly hostile or mocking stereotypes about Jews was repeated endlessly from text to text. A few authors expressed admiration for the 'philosophical' qualities of Judaism; others spread malicious and dangerous conspiracy theories. Most authors fall somewhere between these extremes. But perhaps the key element is the unwillingness on the part of Greek and Roman authors to allow Jews to tell their own story. Even authors like Tacitus who specifically devote attention to Jewish history show no inclination to read Jewish texts. In the world under Rome, only Greek and Roman scholarship carried the imprimatur of empire. More than anything else, this unwillingness on the part of the intellectual mainstream to let Jews speak for themselves was the greatest obstacle which Josephus faced in trying to tell his people's story to the wider world.

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