

Josephus in Rome: The Outsiders' Insider and Insiders' Outsider

Tessa Rajak

I open this essay with a vignette from a historical novel, now itself a historical artefact, and I shall move on to explore first, with the aid of a little prosopography, Josephus' own account of his first contacts at Rome, and then aspects of his literary discourse on earlier Roman Emperors. It will be seen that a broadly post-colonial perspective on hybrid identities, on the role of the subaltern go-between and on the mutability of insiderness/outsiderness has encouraged me to revisit Josephus' self-descriptions.¹ I venture to hope that our multi-talented and sparkling honorand will find not unappealing this juxtaposition of imaginative literature with "hard history", placed within somewhat larger perspectives, on a topic that she herself has addressed. I am sure that at least she will concur that the ancient historian in hot pursuit of 'how things really were' must avail herself of every tool in the box, including imagination; and I hope she will be indulgent if she occasionally finds here more speculation than she can wholly approve.

The vignette comes from Lion Feuchtwanger's reconstruction of a famous moment, Josephus' meeting with the empress Poppaea, the beautiful and notorious wife of Nero. When this historical novel appeared both in German and English in 1932, the first volume of a trilogy on Josephus, Feuchtwanger was already a celebrated author. Less than a year after it was published, the author was in exile from Germany, and the rest of the trilogy came out during a period of repeated displacement coinciding with the consolidation of the Nazi regime in Germany and continuing into the war.² The moment depicted here is the beginning of Josephus' public career, and it is a crucial moment, important because this is the beginning of the engagement with Rome of the agile priest from Jerusalem. He is on a diplomatic mission. The year is 64 CE. Unforgettably, from this mission, Josephus returns to a Jerusalem on the verge, so he tells us, of the outbreak of revolt against Rome. He is pulled unwillingly, again by his own accounts, into a half-hearted participation. He is appointed revolt commander of the whole Galilee and the Golan, not unchallenged, and he deals with (or adds to) a situation of considerable chaos. On the failure of his forty-seven day defence of the hilltop town of Jotapata against a Roman siege, he is sought out, he tells us, from his hiding place by two tribunes sent by Vespasian, then Roman commander-in-chief, and finally by a third, Nicanor, admitted to

¹ For the fruitful use of such an approach to Josephus, see Barclay 2005, and Barclay 2007, LXVI-LXXI.

² German trilogy: *Der jüdische Krieg. Roman*, Berlin 1932, Amsterdam 1933; *Die Söhne. Roman*, Amsterdam 1935; *Der Tag wird kommen*, Frankfurt 1952 (with first two parts of the trilogy). English trilogy, transl. Willa Cather and Edwin Muir: *Josephus. A Historical Romance*, London, 1932, New York 1932; *The Jew of Rome*, London 1935, New York 1936; *The Day Will Come*, London 1942, and as *Josephus and the Emperor*, New York 1942.

have been an acquaintance of his. Withstanding violent attacks from his fellow survivors, and in desperation inventing and then dodging a suicide pact, assisted by dreams and divine protection, he is brought to Vespasian and manages somehow to predict the general's future rise to the purple. When this prediction indeed materializes, it leads to his liberation as prophet — and, it would seem, indispensable companion to the generals. He is at Titus' side during the siege of Jerusalem and he returns with him to Rome, he presumably witnesses the triumph over "Judaea Capta" and he receives imperial favours that include the use of a former Flavian residence. There, or at any rate not in Jerusalem, Josephus goes on in later life to make major contributions to the Greek historiography of the Roman Empire (now finally beginning to be appreciated in that context), first with his account of the Jewish revolt against Rome. This will be followed in the 80s and 90s CE by the twenty-book *Jewish Antiquities*, to which is appended a short, self-justificatory autobiography, and lastly by a two-book polemical defence of Judaism, the *Against Apion*. Josephus is a hybrid figure if ever there was one; in Feuchtwanger's terms, his life turned him into a cosmopolitan and he came to epitomize the international man.

Here, then is Feuchtwanger:

The Empress gazed at him without concealment or embarrassment; a light perspiration broke out on him, and he tried his utmost to maintain a humble and obsequious expression. Her mouth twitched almost imperceptibly, and then she looked no longer childish, but an experienced and somewhat ironical woman. 'You are fresh from Judaea?' she asked Joseph. She spoke in Greek; her voice was a little hard and unexpectedly deep. 'Tell me', she said, 'What do people think in Jerusalem about the Armenian question?' It was a completely unexpected enquiry; for even if the key of Roman oriental politics lay in Armenia, Joseph had considered his native country far too important to be considered only in relation to a land so barbarous as Armenia, and in actual fact people in Jerusalem did not think of Armenia at all, or at least he himself never thought of it, and so he could find nothing to say in reply to the question. 'The Jews in Armenia are quite well off', he said a little doltishly, after a long silence. 'Really?' said the Empress, and now she smiled broadly, openly amused. She asked other questions of the same nature; she had her jest at the expenses of the young man with the long ardent eyes, who obviously had no idea what game was being played with his country. 'Thank you', she said at last, after Joseph had brought out a verbose sentence concerning the strategical position on the Parthian frontier, 'now I am considerably better informed'. She smiled appreciatively across at Demetrius Libanus; who was this comical specimen from the orient that he had brought to her? 'I actually believe', she exclaimed to the actor in surprised appreciation, 'that he is interesting himself for his three innocent men out of pure goodness of heart!' And she turned to Joseph with great politeness and amiability: 'Please tell me all about your protégés'. She sat comfortably in her chair; her throat was smooth and white, her arms and legs gleamed through the thin silk of her severe dress. Joseph drew out his memorandum, but when he began to read in Greek she said at once: 'But what are you thinking of? Read it in Aramaic'. 'Yes, but then will you understand it all?' Joseph asked somewhat fatuously. 'And who told you that I wanted to understand it all?' replied the Empress.

This reconstruction positions an arresting scene near the opening of a saga that was to continue over three volumes. An exchange that may come across to us as quaintly orientalist encapsulates an idea: the bringing together of Eastern wisdom with Western purposive rationality was in fact a major concern of Feuchtwanger's through his writing

career.³ While Feuchtwanger makes Greek the medium of communication in this conversation, he presents the language as still deeply alien to the young Josephus, who is still rooted in his own unintelligible tongue; thus the novelist sets up a classic Hellenism/Judaism opposition. The eager Judaeans, an object of fun, among the grand, if themselves somewhat dubious, Romans, is thus doubly “un-Roman”: an Eastern provincial, like many others, but also the beautiful, naïve, lost boy fresh from Jerusalem, representing another, purer world. The effect, in Feuchtwanger’s reading, is the sharpening of a sensitive and ambitious young man’s determination never to be made a fool of again; and the long-term consequence is his unshakeable understanding that there is no way forward for the Jewish people, nor indeed for the world order, except via Rome; but it is also a pointer to the future, marking out Josephus as inescapably and intrinsically the outsider, for all the efforts that he would be making through his life. The emblematic interview scene, for all its old-fashioned air, is psychologically compelling. I bring it forward here as a stimulus to closer questioning, and also because of its kinship with a number of modern interpretations. Nevertheless, I would argue that the picture is historically misleading, or at least in need of substantial qualification. This is unlikely to have worried the novelist, given his insistence that his historical fiction was an exploration of problems of his own time and a way of setting out his ideas about the world; he had no qualms about modifying ‘evidence which I knew to be documented if it appeared to interfere with my desired effect’.⁴ But it matters to us. I shall suggest, in contrast to Feuchtwanger, that Josephus came to Italy in 64 equipped to develop connections that were available to him, and that he was in a good position to have a shrewd grasp of what he was about. If this first, pre-revolt visit to Rome contained in embryo the shape of things to come, then this was the material that was carried forward. I shall also suggest that, in spite of the paucity of information, some connections can usefully be traced between this first visit and Josephus’ subsequent interactions with Romans.

It scarcely needs saying that how we understand Josephus’ relationship with powerful Romans and with Roman politics is a key determinant of our interpretation of his life and his writings. Most commonly, of course, Josephus the Flavians “lackey” dominates the picture. For all the labours of Josephus scholarship over the past forty years, this crude and dismissive term is still thrown at the author with surprising frequency. Even in Mary Beard’s welcome and energetic bid to get Josephus promoted to the pantheon of Classical writers, he remains an ‘apparatchik’.⁵ Seen in this light, Josephus emerges as detached from and suspect to his fellows, an isolated and probably lonely figure through most of his life⁶ — perhaps with some sense that there is a fitting punishment in that.

³ Waldo 1972; Berendsohn 1972; Weisenberger 1972; Leupold 1975 [1967], 49.

⁴ Both points are made clearly and explicitly in Feuchtwanger’s essay ‘Von Sinn des historischen Romans’ (1935), available in English as ‘The Purpose of the Historical Novel’ on the website of the Feuchtwanger Memorial Library, University of Southern California: <http://libguides.usc.edu/content.php?pid=31801&sid=592162>. See also Faulhaber 1972.

⁵ Beard 2003, 558. Admittedly, Pliny the Elder is here tarred with the same brush.

⁶ So, from different vantage points, Yavetz 1975; Cotton and Eck 2005; Price 2005. Mason 1998 puts Josephus rather low on the social scale, but still allows him a network of significant Jewish-Greek connections.

Another version of the lackey designation slips Josephus into the mould of the “court Jew”. This has been proposed by two scholars of European origin, David Daube and Zvi Yavetz.⁷ The type is familiar in Jewish history, especially in the early modern period, and it has its precursors in biblical figures, from Joseph, through Moses, on to Daniel and Mordecai. What is implied is a combination of supreme service and usefulness, rendered through adroitness and tireless energy, but coming with the precariousness inherent in the position of any court favourite, necessarily protected solely by his master’s favour, and capped by a special vulnerability to upsurges of the ever-latent and ubiquitous anti-Semitism: great success is paired with ultimate dispensability. Feuchtwanger himself had shot to fame through the publication in 1925 of his novel *Jud Süß* (based on his own earlier play), the dramatic story of Josef Süß Oppenheimer, financial adviser and faithful servant of Duke Karl Alexander of Württemberg, who was condemned to death for fraud and immorality in a rigged trial, after his master’s death in 1737, and ultimately hanged with great cruelty. Since, in the last volume of the trilogy, Josephus, widely reviled, meets with tragedy and comes to grief at the hands of the last of the Flavians, the Emperor Domitian, the analogy was likely in Feuchtwanger’s mind. The court Jew model seems indeed to be applicable to short periods within Josephus’ varied career: without doubt he gained handsome rewards from his rulers and masters for services that he was uniquely capable of rendering during the period of the Jewish revolt and its aftermath. It is not fanciful, moreover, to speak of the domestic environment and entourage of the *princeps* as a court. Thus, the comparison may be of some assistance in shedding light on Josephus’ constraints and opportunities. But it is a parallel with limited range, which soon deserts us when we come to making a reasonable surmise about Josephus’ varied career and especially, the realities of his long years at Rome. The historian’s main task remains that of contextualizing Josephus within the types of relationship, and above all the patron-client system, that governed society at Rome as well as the lives of provincials in the early Roman Empire; and of better understanding that system.

Martin Goodman has proposed that we view the post-revolt Josephus as a ‘Roman of the Jewish faith’, likely to have operated as a powerful patron for the Jewish community of the city of Rome, nearly all of them very ordinary members of the *plebs urbana*.⁸ This model too takes us only so far. For one thing, Josephus, in his writings, thinks globally and he does not speak the language of a local patron busy with the people immediately around him. Furthermore, there is an implicit parallel, for we are surely intended to think of the ideals of “Germans of the Jewish faith” in the modern era, and this does not map wholly well onto the ancient structures. By the time he becomes a “published” author, Josephus is indeed a Roman citizen. At the same time, however, he is a “Judaeen”, in terms both of place of origin and of ethnicity, and he is a proud ethnic Jew.⁹ He argues

⁷ Daube 1980; Yavetz 1975.

⁸ Goodman 1994.

⁹ I do not discuss here recent and influential contentions that the term ‘Judaeen’, as employed during the Second Temple period, and especially in Josephus, should always be translated as ‘Judaeen’ and not as ‘Jew’, nor the vigorous counter-arguments. My usage in this article

for a Roman empire made up of a diversity of harmonious ethnicities, or at least he has Nicolaus of Damascus, Herod's friend and Augustus's biographer, do so in his speech of advocacy on behalf of the civic rights of the Jews in Ionia (*AJ* 16.36). It is telling that, at different moments, both in the *Antiquities* and in *Against Apion*, Josephus sets forth his interpretation of the Jewish law, *nomos*, as a *politeia* (constitution) belonging to an *ethnos*. Even after 70, this description had validity in his eyes. Rather, then, Josephus stood not only as an aristocratic priest of a superior cult with adherents throughout the Mediterranean, but also as a proud member, by *genos* (lineage), of an ancient people.

We seek, therefore, a more nuanced assessment. The biographical dimension is inescapable, given the extraordinary concatenation of events that made up Josephus' career — though we need constantly to remember that we are at the mercy of the subject's own self-description — and the launch of that career is significant. It will be helpful to study more closely how Josephus goes about his business in the seat of empire, from that first embassy onwards, in very much the manner of any representative of a dominant class of a subaltern society, a role nowadays much explored and well understood. His twin task as an agent among the Romans is, on the one hand, to cultivate links with the ruling echelons, to get to know people and to become known; and, on the other hand, to take a stance which combines this co-operation with self-respect, and to communicate his mixed messages in both directions.

Josephus, we now know, ended up infiltrating the Roman narrative, and indeed Roman society, beyond the wildest dreams of a person in his position, and no doubt beyond his own wildest dreams. His undeniably crucial and indeed intimate role in the Flavian rise to power would give him a quite extraordinary handle on Roman politics. He was far from being merely another client. More than ever, and most recently from Fergus Millar's study of the monuments, we understand how indispensable the success of the Jewish war was and continued to be to the entire Flavian enterprise, right through all three Flavian reigns.¹⁰ Mary Beard has stressed afresh how it was precisely the triumphal progress to Italy, the formal return to the city of Rome and the reception by the Romans — the *adventus* — and finally the triumph of 71 with all its trappings, as memorialized in monument and as immortalized precisely by Josephus, that turned usurpers into a ruling dynasty. This refocused the origins of Vespasian's ascent away from its partisan beginnings fairly successfully, thus providing a cover for the more crucial but less publicly acceptable military success over the troops of his recently elevated predecessor, Vitellius.

Looking at the literary encapsulation of the list of the Flavian *omina imperii*, those signs and wonders, that, in retrospect, marked Vespasian out as ruler, as they are reported in Suetonius and in Cassius Dio,¹¹ the observer is struck by the seamless incorporation of Josephus' Jotapata prophecy into the literary sequence of those other orchestrated prodigies, manifested in the East and also in Italy, which justified and smoothed over Vespasian's claims in 69 CE. This prediction shares its core features with

makes my position clear. See Barclay 2007, LV-LXVI, on the way Josephus (as a 'Judaean') expresses his ethnic pride in defending his nation.

¹⁰ Millar 2005.

¹¹ Suet. *Vesp.* 5.6; Dio *Epit.* 66.1.4.

the other *omina* neatly enough to suggest that a unified list was established rather early, with Josephus in a prominent position. They have in common both the value put on divine guidance, communicated by dreams and other means, and the way in which a very Roman destiny identifies a future ruler through a sign. For Josephus, the dynasty's ascent is marked out by God's decree, and it thus has cosmic significance in terms of his own beliefs. It is noteworthy that *aeternitas* is found as a caption on coins issued by Vespasian in 71, promulgating, in a Roman vein, a comparable superhuman aura and evoking the *omina*.¹² The backdrop of achievement and of destiny went on to support Titus' transformation at Rome, from a badly-behaved and widely deplored personality into humanity's darling. Recollection of the prophecy could even tie that loose canon, the resentful younger brother Domitian, into the dynasty's legitimacy. Josephus' prophecy, extraordinary as it was, does not present us with the stark alternatives of dismissing it as fiction or accepting it as the divine manifestation that it claims to be. I have suggested that what may lie behind it is a shrewd understanding of Roman power politics acquired by the elite provincial, Josephus, through the workings of an intricate web of connections, partly but not wholly Eastern.¹³ Here I aim to enlarge our understanding of the metropolitan component. My conclusions give more weight to this element in the story than I previously allowed.

So now back to the beginning and to the basis of Feuchtwanger's imaginings, *Vita* 13-16. This may seem to be a passage too familiar to dwell upon. But we shall find that pressing Josephus' self-description can contribute still more, both to our interpretation of Josephus' activities on his first Roman trip, and to our grasp of his later position at Rome

1. Josephus' embassy to Rome in 64 was one of several concerned with problems between the ruling group in Jerusalem and the Roman government. There had been the freeing of those priests arrested under the procurator Ventidius Cumanus (*BJ* 2.243; *AJ* 20.132). There was the delegation of twelve that included the High Priest Ishmael and the Temple Treasurer, who successfully protested an addition overlooking the Temple to the palace of Agrippa II (*AJ* 20.189-96). If the embassy of *Life* is a response to a separate but similar incident, this points to very regular traffic indeed between the local political class and the emperor.¹⁴

2. The question of location seems not to have been discussed. Encounters of which this passage records only the barest outcomes could have taken place before Josephus even reached the city of Rome itself. We must remember that Rome can scarcely yet have recovered from the fire of July 64. What Josephus says is vague enough to permit this interpretation of his movements. In any case, in vacation time everyone who was anyone, and especially in Neronian society, was to be found in the grand villas around

¹² Cody 2003.

¹³ Rajak 2002, 186-7, where the difficulty is noted, however, of dating the first stirrings of Vespasian's bid for power to a moment as early as that in summer 67 to which Josephus ascribes his prophecy.

¹⁴ For these episodes, in relation to the incident sketched in the *Life*, see Rajak 2002, 39-40. It remains possible, we should allow, that the two accounts do refer to the same incident, erroneously described by Josephus in one of the two versions, and that Josephus came to Rome seeking to liberate none other than Ishmael and the Temple treasurer.

the bay of Naples and along the coastline, where, in 59, Nero had murdered his mother, and where he consoled himself after the death (that he himself had brought about) of Poppaea with his unborn child. Apart from Puteoli itself, which in 60 was favoured with the status of *Colonia Neronensis Puteolana* (not that Josephus mentions this), there were Antium, Baiae, and indeed Pompeii, where Poppaea's family owned no less than five houses.¹⁵ These out-of-town residences, designated for the pursuits of *otium*, were precisely the places for the cultivation of private relationships with a public significance. Josephus' little sketch of the delights of Baiae is revealing (*AJ* 18, 249).

This is a little city in Campania, situated about five stades from Dicaearchia (Puteoli). There are regal residences there, lavishly appointed, for each of the emperors was ambitious to outdo his predecessors. The locality also affords hot baths, which spring naturally from the ground and have a curative value for those who use them, not to mention their general contribution to a relaxed lifestyle.

As for Puteoli, on landing there some quarter of a century earlier, the desperately impoverished Herodian, King Agrippa I (Herod the Great's grandson) had received the bulk of a large loan extended to him by a wealthy Alexandrian Jew known as Alexander the Alabarch (*AJ* 18.159-60). It has been suggested that the Alabarch (whose title seems to indicate that he was a trader or perhaps a customs official) had something like a "branch bank" in Puteoli. If the family's interests in the town lasted, they are unlikely to have gone unnoticed by Josephus.

3. We see that friends were needed at court. But more than this, Josephus' remarks show how one progressed, moving upwards, from lower to higher connections. Yet perhaps not as low as we may think. Around Nero, artist and stage personality par excellence, how much better could one do than to seek out an actor (*mimologos*)? How skillful of Josephus, then, to seize a golden opportunity, the presence of Aliturus (or Haliturus), a Jewish actor (*ioudaios to genos*), and presumably a freedman, favoured by Nero, who could introduce him to Poppaea! These details are mentioned by Josephus with an air of complete normality. Other courts had their celebrity *pantomimi* too, freedmen or even slaves, such as Bathyllus for Augustus, Mnester for Caligula and Claudius, or Paris under Domitian. Rumours of affairs with high-born women tended to swirl around them, and indeed Mnester's name was linked with none other than Poppaea Sabina, the mother of Nero's Poppaea, before he was executed by Claudius for a liaison with the empress Messalina.¹⁶ But for Nero, it all meant so much more: everyone was aware that he regarded performance as the highest of avocations.¹⁷ Actors are good for networking because they tend to be liminal figures who sneak across boundaries and can slip under the net.

4. The priests whose release Josephus is securing are explicitly described as men whom he knew (*sunētheis*, V.13). We are evidently meant to infer that this is a reason why he in particular would come to their rescue. Here, then, is another, different kind of patron-client relationship, this one within the Judaeian environment — within, that is, the local elite. It is indeed highly likely that Josephus will have already learnt about the

¹⁵ For Poppaea's villas, see Griffin 1984, 102. See also D'Arms 1970.

¹⁶ Jory 2002, 238-9, with sources for Bathyllus and Mnester in n. 2.

¹⁷ As elegantly shown by Champlin 2003, 53-83.

handling of such relationships in the Jerusalem of his youth, where they are likely to have been amply visible, in part derived from Jewish custom and in part evolved under the impact of Rome.

5. To achieve what he did, Josephus needed to learn how *beneficia* operated on a level of reciprocity and mutual obligation, *gratia*. For, through seeking and accepting the patronage of Poppaea, he acquires, as a protégé, also ongoing obligations, as manifested by his explicit statement that he received gifts from the empress as well as securing his goal, the release of the prisoners (*Vita* 16).¹⁸ It is relevant to note that Poppaea was predisposed to be supportive: in the *Antiquities* (*AJ* 20.195) we were told that it was through her good offices (undated) that the earlier Jerusalem delegation of twelve had won their case with Nero, and her close involvement in the transaction is demonstrated in the sequel, that she kept the two leading Temple officials back as hostages. The attribute *theosebēs* attached to her by Josephus seems to imply Jewish sympathies of some kind; this would have deepened and strengthened the ties expressed through the exchange of gifts. In his commentary on these lines, Mason directs us to the use by Josephus at this point of the key term *euergesia*, best translated by the Latin *beneficium*, a favour or kindness bestowed upon a friend, whether in an equal or an unequal relationship.¹⁹ Josephus, no doubt, reciprocated Poppaea's gifts, even if he does not say so.²⁰ And along with the gifts, the flow of benefits not be entirely one way: there are many reasons why provincial clients had value for important Romans.²¹ In any event, after this, Josephus remains indebted and tied. After Poppaea's death, which occurred tragically and unexpectedly in the following year, there would in principle not be a clean break, but rather (short of a formal rupture) continuing obligations within the circle of her associates, should any of them have survived with reputation intact.

6. In this fashion, Josephus learnt early about the particular usefulness of imperial women. His evidence on the influence of Poppaea is striking: we might have expected such a manifestation under Claudius, with that Emperor's notorious subordination to his wives and freedmen. Yet, for all Nero's promises on his accession, not much seems to have changed since the previous reign. In the same vein, Josephus would later seek out Domitia Longina, wife and afterwards widow of Domitian, and daughter of the great Neronian general in the east, Cn. Domitius Corbulo, the man who surely would have been put in charge of suppressing the Jewish revolt but for his enforced death in 66. She was hailed as Augusta in 81. Rumours that Domitia had been the lover of Titus were strenuously denied (though her promiscuity seems to have been no more in doubt than

¹⁸ On the social codes and their application during the early principate, see Griffin 2013, 30-73; Saller 1982.

¹⁹ Mason 2001, 27, n. 119.

²⁰ While it is true that Seneca in his *de beneficiis* drew a philosophical distinction between *beneficia*, strictly voluntary, and *officia*, obligations (more than had previously been done by Cicero), he still allowed that the return of benefits was required by the codes of proper behaviour, and indeed, the conferring of *beneficia* created bonds and was thus instrumental for social cohesion; at the group level, reciprocation was all important, whether or not the donor was concerned to secure a return. On the distinction, see Griffin 2013, 23-9.

²¹ Saller 1982, 145-204, offers a North African case study.

that of her husband: Suet. *Tit.* 10.2).²² Josephus comments at the end of the *Life* (429) on his ongoing receipt of benefits from Domitia. Mason²³ observes that there too a cognate of the significant term *euergesia* is employed by Josephus, this time in verbal form, making this the second of only three occasions in the *Life* where the root appears. In an earlier generation, a different imperial woman, Antonia Minor, had anticipated Domitia, as we shall see. It may seem humiliating to have to operate through women (as perhaps Feuchtwanger wanted to suggest), but much less so if they were as grand as these.

7. Going beyond the women of the imperial circle, could Josephus actually have met Vespasian himself at Nero's court, in one location or another? He would not be likely to say so if he did, for this would have detracted for Romans from the impressiveness of the prophecy he made three years later, as well as underlining to Jews his treachery when he took on and then abandoned a leading role in the revolt, so soon after the embassy to Rome. Vespasian, after provincial service (serving as proconsul of Africa in 62), seems to have been fairly visible around the Neronian court (so much for the image he projected of the simple peasant from Reate). It was as a courtier that he went on Nero's notorious tour of Greece in 66, but there, famously, he got into trouble by falling asleep at one of Nero's embarrassing stage performances, and thus, allegedly, Vespasian became for a time *persona non grata* (Suet. *Vesp.* 4.4). That was not a bad story to tell once Nero was safely out of the way and discredited almost everywhere. The disapproval cannot have lasted long, however, since the Judaean command came to Vespasian quite soon after.²⁴ We may get a better sense of Vespasian's relevant connections with a little more delving: Vespasian had his first military post under the command of C. Poppaeus Sabinus, consul in 9 CE, governor of Moesia for 24 years, the grandfather of the empress Poppaea, Josephus' patroness.

8. I will mention, for the sake of completeness, the likelihood, according to Miriam Griffin,²⁵ that Epaphroditus, Nero's freedman in the office of *a libellis* was also present on Nero's Greek trip. The identification with this Epaphroditus of the dedicatee of Josephus' later works cannot be wholly excluded, in spite of the chronological tightness, (he was put to death at Domitian's behest in 95), and even though this personage has appeared to many (including myself) to have therefore the weaker claim of the two known possibilities.²⁶

9. A modicum of further probing will not come amiss: we recall that Antonia Caenis, Vespasian's mistress of very long-standing, was Antonia Minor's freedwoman.²⁷ Cassius Dio tells us that the venal Caenis sold procuratorships, priesthoods and other posts, and even imperial decisions (Dio *Ep.* 65.14.3) – that is to say, she was at the centre of a web of patronage, and Josephus can hardly have been unaware of this. As for

²² On Domitia, see Jones 1992: 32-8.

²³ Mason 2001 (n. 20), 27.

²⁴ Levick 1999, 25.

²⁵ Griffin 1984, 180.

²⁶ On the two candidates and the chronological difficulty, Rajak 2002, 223-4; Barclay 2007, 3-4; Cotton and Eck 2005, 49-52.

²⁷ See Jones 1984, 34; Mason 1998, 76. It was apparently Caenis who wrote the letter unmasking Tiberius' confidant L. Aelius Sejanus that the freedman Pallas delivered to the Emperor.

Antonia Minor herself, who had lived from 36 BCE to 37 CE and who died in the year Josephus was born, as the daughter of Mark Antony and Octavia, she was as close as can be to power. The important point for us is that her household had been the base for Jewish royalty and others with Jewish connections at Rome, as we learn, naturally, from none other than Josephus. As a close friend of Berenice, mother of Agrippa I, she took care of Agrippa when he needed it, which was quite often.²⁸

10. Josephus was evidently the social inferior of individuals like these. Yet the ramifications ran wide and continued forward in time. There was a connection between Antonia and Alexander the Alabarch, whom we have already met, and one of whose sons, Marcus Julius Alexander, married the daughter of another Berenice. The Alabarch's other son was Tiberius Julius Alexander, who had abandoned Judaism and who rose to become Prefect of Egypt. Tiberius Julius played his part in suppressing the Jewish revolt and, crucially, it was his two legions that declared for Vespasian on 1 July 69, the date taken as the official start of the new regime. Here we approach the circles where Josephus was, in my view, most at home, members of the Jewish-Greek elite of the Eastern Mediterranean;²⁹ and we return to the inspired guess that turned into his prophecy of power and saved his life.

11. Finally, let us recall the date of Josephus' visit to Italy, 63/4. This is guaranteed by his stated age — he had recently turned twenty-six when he set off (*Vita* 13), and he had been born in the year of Gaius Caesar's accession, 37/8 CE (*Vita* 5). Even if the entire expedition took as long as a year, Josephus will have been on his way back, or home, not only before Poppaea's unexpected death, but also before Nero's regime was shaken in April 65 by the foiled conspiracy of Piso that united against the Emperor opponents across the social spectrum, and probably even his tutor and adviser, the formidable Seneca.

12. At the time of his return, then, Josephus lost his patroness and, no doubt, other support of significance to him fell away as the regime entered its death throes. But he had made other friends. And at the very least he had learnt the value of remaining a close observer of court affairs, and of their volatility. Back home, he will have been watching to see whether Nero would stand or fall and what the new power in the land might have to offer.

We may identify, as always, countervailing forces and potential problems. Thus, Josephus had come to liberate priests, and only recently there had been the major argument between the High Priesthood and Agrippa II already discussed, over the addition to the royal palace. Nevertheless, cross-currents, dead-ends, setbacks and obstacles are inherent in any networking system. I would stress that we are considering flexible social bonds rather than tight factions or cast iron alliances. And so, even if the Herodian *clientela* had to be handled with caution and was perhaps in part off-limits, and even if Josephus had to steer his own route, we have at the very least uncovered starting points for his trajectory. There were openings through which the emissary from

²⁸ On Antonia Minor and her circle, see Kokkinos 1992; on this circle's continuation, Bowersock, 2005, 58-9.

²⁹ See Rajak 2005 on Josephus' ongoing involvement with the Diaspora of the Eastern Mediterranean.

Jerusalem could enter the maze of Roman society, opportunities for the outsider to learn how to play the insider's game; and there is evidence of his seizing them. Apart from new abilities, we have found some hints of the making of personal connections with future utility.

Cotton and Eck have investigated thoroughly new acquaintanceships within the military elite likely to have been derived from Josephus' activities in the generals' camp during the period of the revolt. While they are unrecorded as friends or patrons of Josephus, and we cannot know how far such relationships could have gone, from among these leading Romans will probably have come the much-vaunted recipients who are said to have given their approval to the *Jewish War*. I shall pursue a different line, moving now to examine how Josephus' observations on Roman matters reflect his dual position.

The Flavians may have constituted Josephus' Roman heartland — and he in a sense theirs. But it will also be instructive to consider how and why the mature Josephus, ever the emperor-watcher, wrote, in due course, about some of their predecessors. By the time of the composition of the *Antiquities* (which was published in 93/4 CE), he had, needless to say, travelled an immeasurable mental distance from that first taste of Rome. But perhaps the rules had not entirely changed; his unerring skill at the subaltern's game of continually shuttling between the sides, alternating "insiderness" with "outsiderness", had simply been honed and sharpened.

It has been of interest to Roman historians that Josephus gives a less black and white assessment of responses to Nero than the mainstream tradition, in his famous summary notice on that emperor.³⁰ His *Antiquities* are the only source to offer the unexpected information, of which contemporaries would have been not unaware, that some historians had actually praised the hated and reviled Nero (*AJ* 20.154-7). This comes after a succinct reference, in line with the tradition reflected in the Roman sources, to Agrippina's supposed engineering of the deaths of Claudius and Britannicus that secured her son's succession, and then of Nero's matricide, with an accent on scandal. When Josephus turns to the question of the historical record on Nero, he does not fail to seize the opportunity to lambast venial and dishonest historians (whether favourable or hostile) and to ride the hobbyhorse of his own supreme veracity. But this is not his only gain. To be noted is the subtle way in which Josephus presents himself as a man in-the-know, not the retailer of tittle tattle, but the reporter *au fait* with the nuances of the record, competent to assess and to criticize, and yet sufficiently distanced to be impartial. Thus he asserts his own usefulness to Greek and Jewish readers alike, two groups to whom these matters could be assumed to be relatively unfamiliar. In other words, Josephus' two main audiences were catered for: he is their man at Rome.³¹ It is less clear whether a

³⁰ Griffin 1984, 236; Champlin 2003, 24-5.

³¹ The identity of Josephus' primary audience remains a topic of discussion. Different constituencies seem to come into play at different points in his writing: see Feldman 1998, 46-50 (especially on a putative Jewish audience). On the importance of the gap between the declared audience explicitly mentioned in a work, the implied audience presupposed by the text, and the intended audience whom, as we may surmise, the author actually sought to reach, see Barclay 2007, XLVI-LIII (focusing on the *Against Apion*). For the Roman dimension, see Mason's studies, n. 42 below.

passage such as this had much that was new or interesting to offer any Roman reader. There was so much more he could have said, we are told by Josephus, were the moment more opportune. He carefully adopts the tone of the neutral and judicious outsider. And from that he slips deftly into his Jewish persona. He will not dwell on these matters any longer, because they are not central to his theme, and that theme is defined as ‘what happened to my own people’. In making such a move, Josephus announces his assumption of his second role, casting himself, in just a few words, as offering a non-Jewish audience a unique insider’s take on the Jewish world.

By contrast, to the interpreter of the function and aim of Josephus’ Roman material, the exceptionally long excursus on the assassination of Caligula and the accession of Claudius presents a bigger problem because of its sheer length, the quantity of detail in its blow-by-blow account, and its complete immersion in Roman political affairs, personalities and values. It is not exactly “Jewish archaeology”. Occupying 273 paragraphs, it occupies about three quarters of Book Nineteen (*AJ* 19.1-274). The question that has repeatedly been asked is why this long digression – for digression we have to account it — should be there at all.³²

Various explanations have presented themselves. We cannot fail to note the crucial role in the events played by the admired Herodian Agrippa I, who, as Claudius’ friend, acted as go-between with the Senate and persuaded him to accept the position. In support of this explanation is the manner in which the digression concludes, with the statement that Claudius confirmed Agrippa’s kingdom and eulogized him. Perhaps even more compelling is the fact that the coverage of the story in the parallel passage of the introductory first book of Josephus’ *Jewish War*, albeit naturally far briefer, is already out of proportion, and Agrippa is already prominent.³³ Another motivation for the insertion of the excursus could be simply the opportunity to present to readers Greek material probably known hitherto only in the Latin narrations of two important Roman senatorial historians (now lost): Cluvius Rufus was likely the main source, and Fabius Rusticus, a friend of Seneca’s, may also have figured.³⁴ Even the simple need to provide matter for Book Nineteen offers an adequate explanation, for Josephus needed to fill the space between the Babylonian excursus that concludes Book Eighteen, and the opening chapters of Book Twenty, the final book of the *Antiquities*.³⁵ There is also the sheer drama of the tale of assassination and accession, and especially its reversals: the tyrant is dispatched; the initiator of the plot, Cassius Chaerea, is thanked, praised and then

³² On possible motivations, Mason 2003, 581-8.

³³ Agrippa’s memoirs could well have supplied material concerning the King that Josephus inserted into the narrative of a Roman source in which Agrippa had played only a modest role: Schwartz 1990, 23-38.

³⁴ On the question of Josephus’s Latin source or sources, especially Cluvius Rufus, see Wiseman 1991, 2-14; 111-3.

³⁵ Book Twenty opens with negotiations over the keeping of the High Priest’s vestments between the Jerusalem hierarchy and the Roman administration of Syria which, once again, feature Agrippa I in a decisive role (*AJ* 20.1-16); this is followed, tellingly, by another long excursus that looks eastwards, towards the Jews of the Parthian Empire, on which Josephus evidently had good material, to recount the conversion to Judaism and the fortunes of the ruling dynasty of Adiabene (*AJ* 20.17-96).

executed by the senate; Claudius, the prince who has been entirely written off, is dragged onto the throne. Mason³⁶ has now offered us a tight and attentive reading, showing how closely the excursus meshes with Josephus' own political preoccupations — how to achieve constitutional stability, what is wrong with monarchy, what are the evils of tyranny, what can be expected from aristocratic rule. Mason³⁷ speaks in particular of 'a profound authorial investment in the discourse on freedom delivered by the consul Cnaeus Sentius Saturninus' (*AJ* 19. 167-84).

Without going over ground that has been well covered, I shall limit myself to considering here yet another way in which the digression works for Josephus; this reading can sit perfectly well with other explanations. Josephus gives us his own justification for including the narration; in doing so he speaks first as the Jewish insider. He says that the timing of Caligula's end meant salvation for the Jews. They were rescued from the imminent catastrophe of compulsory erection of the imperial image in the Temple and in synagogues, a signal demonstration of the workings of Divine Providence (*AJ* 19.15-16): the choice of this generic terminology, from a wider repertoire of ways of talking about the Deity at Josephus' disposal, is such as would be meaningful to pagan as much as Jewish readers. At the same time, Josephus goes on to display himself to great effect as an interpreter of Roman affairs, the insider who can decode Rome for both Jews and Greeks. He seizes every opportunity that presents itself to establish his credentials as an expert commentator on how emperors are unmade and made, how a new pharaoh succeeds the old one, as it were, and the world can be turned upside down. Vital to every inhabitant of the Empire, this knowledge of power reversals had perhaps a special resonance for its Jewish subjects, in terms of their time-honoured reading of their own history among the nations. Josephus, we are left in no doubt, understands the inner mechanisms. He is familiar with the personalities involved and he knows exactly what they stood for in terms of social position, of shades of dissident opinion and of reasons for participation in the conspiracy. He can compose a virtuoso exposition of the core values of the senatorial culture, the quintessence of the Roman elite's ideals. Surely this is an impressive display of his authority as a writer.

Throughout the narrative, Josephus makes a point of explaining Roman institutions with ethnographic precision. Thus, for example, the Romans' passion for chariot racing is spelled out, and we are told how crowding into the hippodrome gives the masses the opportunity to make their requests to the emperors, and emperors a chance to be popular by acceding to them (*AJ* 19.24). Again, the conspirators arranged to kill Caligula at the Palatine games, and so Josephus sees fit to brief his readers about the significance of this event in the lives of Romans:

They are held in honour of Caesar [Augustus] who was the first to transfer from the people to himself, and, a little way in front of the palace, a structure is constructed for them, and the Roman nobles watch with their children and wives, together with Caesar. They would have the opportunity, with tens of thousands of people jammed into a small space, to make the assault on him as he came in (*AJ* 19.75-6).

³⁶ Mason 2003, 581-88.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 586.

The Palatine itself is later described, in parenthesis, as the legendary location of the city's first settlement (*AJ* 19.223). Similarly, Josephus explains how the senate is recruited from the ranks of the *equites* when he recounts Caligula's attacks on them (*AJ* 19.75-6); and he informs his readers that the forum (*agora*) is where the people's assemblies are customarily held (*AJ* 19.158). Josephus' use of "they", rather than "we" language is noteworthy in such passages. Thus he talks of 'the Temple of Jupiter which *they* call the Capitoline, and which is *for them* the most honoured of temples' (*AJ* 19.4).

In such additions, Josephus' concern to guide and interpret is plain enough. But a closer look at the details of one small part of the long narrative about the assassination of Caligula will show the complexity of his operation, in a particularly delicate area. The deeply flawed Caligula is accused of sacrilege in relation to the Greek and Roman gods. 'He dared to address Jupiter as brother' (*AJ* 19.4). Systematically removing to Rome, 'the finest place', every fine artwork to be found in the temples of Greece, he even arranged for the transfer of the celebrated Zeus of Olympia by Pheidias (*AJ* 19.6-10). Worse still, Caligula, when he took his newborn daughter to the Capitol and deposited her on the god's lap, he declared her the child of two fathers — himself and Zeus, 'leaving open the question of which was the greater' (*AJ* 19.11). The offence against Zeus emerges as the very same offence that Caligula had sought to commit against the God of the Jews by installing his image in synagogues and, finally, in the Temple of Jerusalem. Josephus has previously told us, in connection with the latter episode (*AJ* 18, 260-309), how Gaius 'lined God up against himself'. He now shows himself aware that the uprooting of the Zeus statue abuses a precious artwork (an odd sensitivity perhaps for a Jewish writer), but, more importantly, that in the case of this desecration, just as in that of the Jewish Temple, Divine Providence intervened to rescue the statue. Moreover, the intervention operated in remarkably similar ways, by means of the agency of a responsive individual: in this case the praetorian legate P. Memmius Regulus heeded portents (as well as the advice of technicians), and was saved from execution by the providential death of the emperor. This small sequence of events strikingly echoes, but with fewer twists, the detailed narrations in Book Eighteen (261-288; 297-309) of the protection of the Jerusalem Temple by the delaying tactics of the scrupulous legate of Syria, P. Petronius, and of his own providential escape through the fortunate timing of Caligula's demise. Thus, the victimhood of the two nations, Greece and Judaea emerges as parallel — and Josephus, uniquely, can speak for and to both, against the backdrop of Rome, in his recital of each episode.

There is every reason to think that Josephus was not simply posing. On the contrary, he seems indeed to have been something of a Roman insider with regard to the political milieu at the heart of the affair, even though the events described took place when he was just four years old. To understand this, we need to summon up a little more prosopography. The most prominent participant in the successful conspiracy against Caligula is the prefect of the praetorian guard M. Arrecinus Clemens, described by Peter Wiseman³⁸ as the 'raison d'être of the whole episode'. Now the daughter of that Clemens, Arrecina, was none other than Titus' first wife. Clemens' son, M. Arrecinus Clemens, was also Titus' brother-in-law, and the friend of Titus' brother, Domitian

³⁸ Wiseman 1991, 70.

(Suet. *Tit.* 4.2). The younger Clemens was named praetorian prefect by C. Licinius Mucianus in 70, while that mainstay of the Flavian party was in charge of Rome. Clemens became suffect consul in 73; and he was perhaps consul again in 83.³⁹ Wiseman suggested that the importance of this would not have been lost on Josephus' source. I would add that exactly the same point applies to Josephus himself. If Clemens mattered greatly to the Flavians, he mattered at least as much to Josephus. The younger Clemens eventually came to grief as did others of the faction in the later years of Domitian's reign.

I will now, in conclusion, venture to formulate in a sentence a principle we might reasonably derive from our Josephan readings: the more Josephus speaks as the Roman insider, the more he makes a point of remaining connected with his Jewish base through the insertion of an appropriate observation or two to signal a measure of 'outsiderness'. This is achieved in the assassination narrative, for example, with the introductory statement on the providential character of the events for the Jews, as well as in the remark on sacrilege. While these may be short statements in relation to the whole episode, they are prominently positioned and programmatic in tone. And if we look back to what was said about the imprisoned priests in the *Life*, we will find this same Janus-faced approach. One point I did not single out there was the otherwise unexpected statement that the reason why the imprisoned priests deserved that Josephus should exert himself on their behalf, was their devotion to Jewish dietary laws, which made them subsist on a diet of figs and nuts.

The advantages to the author of such a strategy are evident. Its implications are various, and we can now proceed to sum them up. As the expert on Rome, Josephus will inform and impress Jews, and in so doing, he wins confidence by stamping himself as "one of us" but also "one of them". But this expertise, we may suppose, also played well with a Greek audience, by which I mean readers (or hearers) either physically or intellectually distant from the affairs of the metropolis. Those *Hellēnes*, his professed audience, presumably Roman provincials who were Greek intellectuals, lie somewhere between the Jews and the metropolitan Romans. They are part of an imperial elite and yet in a sense also subjects; they too may well have quiet reservations about *romanitas*. And so a Greek language version of the Caligula narrative brought to them by a would-be Roman insider also brings the piquant bonus of the observations of a Jewish outsider. Further, as the exponent of Judaism, both its religious customs and the full breadth of its eventful history, extending way beyond the Roman sphere and even as far as Babylon, Josephus will again serve this Greek, or Graeco-Roman audience; but he will also elicit, hopefully, nods of agreement and approval from his Jewish audience, and perhaps even bring them a measure of enlightenment concerning their own traditions. In other words, in the way he faces the world, Josephus's different "insidernesses" are intertwined and inseparable. Moreover, the picture is complicated by the presence not merely of two entities, colonizers and colonized, but of at least three.

There remains, still, the third major possible component of Josephus' audience, the elephant in the room, his potential readers (or hearers) drawn from the Roman literary

³⁹ On this nexus of powerful figures, see Jones 1992, 33-57; Levick 1999, 23-5; Mellor 2003; and especially Eck 2009

class of Rome. This audience has been raised to primary position in a number of recent scholarly studies.⁴⁰ The interpretation of select readings offered here serves, I think, less to rule out that Roman audience than to relegate it. For this is the audience with which Josephus' Roman "insiderness" would have resonated least. Such readers did not need to be told what the Palatine or the Capitol signified. They would scarcely have bothered with what Josephus could reveal to them of the make-up of their own ruling elite; and they surely would have bristled at his implicit claims of superior knowledge. And while those "real" Romans may in theory have been no less interested than Greek readers by what Josephus could tell them as a Jewish insider, we can imagine his elaborate dual strategy falling flat with them through the banality of its Roman dimension.

We have seen enough to indicate that Josephus chose his vantage point with great care and with considerable success. Whether ultimately such subtleties were effective in completely endearing him to any of the groups he serviced, and how many true friends he succeeded in the end in winning for himself by these means, that is a question that may be asked about many a colonial intermediary through the ages. And, on this question, we can, after all, come round to agreeing with Hannah Cotton and Werner Eck, and leave speculation to the novelists.

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⁴⁰ Notably in the sustained case presented by Steve Mason. See especially Mason 1998 and Mason 2005. Among the points in favour of a Roman audience made by Mason and others, the implicit convergence in the *Against Apion* of Jewish values with Roman (prizing antiquity, tradition, law, a simple lifestyle etc.), undoubtedly deserves attention.

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University of Oxford