

## Josephus' Description of Paneion

Alla Kushnir-Stein

There are three descriptions of Paneion in Josephus' writings, two in *Bellum Judaicum* and one in *Antiquitates Judaicae*. The description in *BJ* III (509-515) is part of a fairly long *excursus* on the geography of the region adjoining the Sea of Galilee. The other two (*BJ* I 405-406; *AJ* XV 364) follow upon the references to the temple to Augustus built at Paneion by Herod. Although widely separated from each other, these descriptions may be more closely connected with one another than appears at first sight.

The long geographical *excursus* in *BJ* III begins with a description of the Sea of Galilee (506-508) and then moves on to the river Jordan (509):<sup>1</sup>

'The Jordan runs through the middle of the lake. This river has its apparent source at Paneion; in reality it rises in the pool called Phiale'.<sup>2</sup>

Next comes a story about how the true source of the river Jordan was discovered by the tetrarch Philip (510-513),<sup>3</sup> after which the narrator says:

'The natural beauties of Paneion (τοῦ μὲν οὖν Πανείου τὸ φυσικὸν κάλλος) have been enhanced by royal magnificence, the place having been embellished by Agrippa at great expense. After issuing from this cavern (ἀπὸ τοῦδε τοῦ ἄντρου), the Jordan, whose course is now visible, intersects the marshes, ...' (514-515, translation of LCL, adapted).

As neither the cavern nor the site as a whole are described in any of the immediately preceding passages, the mentions here of 'the natural beauties of Paneion' and of 'this cavern' seem somewhat puzzling. In order to find the reference points of both we must go back two books, to paragraphs 405-406 in Book I of the *Bellum Judaicum*. In this part of his narrative, Josephus enumerates Herod's building projects, among which he notes the temple dedicated to Augustus at Paneion. Here he writes that 'Herod ... dedicated ... a temple of white marble near the sources of the Jordan, at a place called Paneion' (404) and then gives a description of the site:

'At this spot a mountain rears its summit to an immense height aloft; at the base of the cliff is an opening into an overgrown cavern (ἄντρον); within this, plunging down to an immeasurable depth, is a yawning chasm, enclosing a volume of still water ...'

Josephus ends this description by saying:

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<sup>1</sup> All translations in this paper are from the Loeb Classical Library, by H.S.J. Thackeray (*BJ*) and R. Marcus (*AJ*).

<sup>2</sup> Phiale (modern Birket Ram) is situated c. 13 km east of Caesarea Paneas.

<sup>3</sup> Modern archaeologists reject this story as incorrect: G. Boettger, *Topographisch-historisches Lexicon zu den Schriften des Flavius Josephus*, (Leipzig 1879), 130-131 (s.v. *Gennesar*); Z. Safrai, 'The description of the land of Israel in Josephus' works', in *Josephus, the Bible and History*, L.H. Feldman and G. Hata (eds.), (Detroit 1989), 304.

'outside and beneath the cavern (τοῦ ἄντρου) well up the springs from which, as some think, the Jordan takes its rise; but we will tell the true story of this in a sequel'.

He then returns to an enumeration of Herod's building enterprises.

Since the section *BJ* I.401-425 is generally devoted to a summary of Herod's building projects, the introduction, in this context, of a fairly dramatic description of Paneion seems somewhat out of keeping. It is true that within this section there are two more geographical notes, a longer one about Caesarea (409) and a shorter one about Antipatris (417). As regards Caesarea, however, the description of its seaboard clearly serves as an explanation why a new harbour was needed there, while in the case of Antipatris there is only a remark that the city was founded 'in the fairest plain in [Herod's] realm, rich in rivers and trees'. Both these notes thus appear to be integral parts of the subject of this section, i.e. Herod's building projects. The description of Paneion, in contrast, sounds as if it had been given for its own sake, for it stresses the sources of the Jordan, rather than the temple built there. But even if we assume that it was also intended as a kind of explanation for Herod's choice of site, there would still remain the question of why the description ends in such an abrupt and enigmatic way, leaving the reader in suspense about the true sources of the Jordan while promising to enlighten him on the matter later on.

It seems, then, that both descriptions of Paneion in *BJ* have odd features, and these features complement one another: the earlier description looks somewhat out of place and refers to the later one for its continuation, while this latter account lacks appropriate points of reference which are only to be found in the earlier one. This hints at the possibility of a very close connection between the two passages, and, indeed, when paragraphs 405-406 from *BJ* I are moved to the beginning of the description in *BJ* III, after the first mention of Paneion at section 509, it becomes evident that the earlier description was originally part of the later one. The beginning of the combined text can be tentatively reconstructed as follows:

'This river has its apparent source at Paneion; at this spot a mountain rears its summit to an immense height aloft; etc.' (καὶ δοκεῖ Ἰορδάνου πηγὴ τὸ Πάνειον· ἔνθα κορυφὴ μὲν τις ὄρους εἰς ἄπειρον ὕψος ἀνατείνεται, κτλ).

(Needless to say, the sentences at the seams of both descriptions must have been somewhat modified by Josephus in order to allow for smooth transitions.) The passages transferred from Book I are now in harmony with their surroundings, the main subject here being the course and the sources of the Jordan; they also provide the missing reference points for the mentions of 'the natural beauties of Paneion' and of 'this cavern' which are found in the continuation. The word for 'cavern', ἄντρον, used in *BJ* III 515, is the same as its antecedents in *BJ* I 405 and 406. This word appears in *BJ* only three times<sup>4</sup> — all three uses are found in the two passages under discussion; the word used for 'cavern' (or 'cave' or 'grotto') elsewhere in the work is the more prosaic σπήλαιον (15 cases).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> K.H. Rengstorff, *A complete concordance to Flavius Josephus*, vol. I, (Leiden 1973), 146.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, vol. IV, (Leiden 1983), 32. The word ἄντρον is rare in Josephus in general. Apart from the description of Paneion, it appears only once more in *AJ* XIV 429, as against 25 mentions of σπήλαιον elsewhere in this work. There is one case of σπήλαιον also in *Vita* and two in *Contra Apionem*.

Josephus' promise in *BJ* I 406 to provide the true story of the sources of the Jordan in the sequel can only indicate that while he was writing Book I he had in front of him the fully-finished description of the region of the Sea of Galilee found in Book III. The fact that he inserted part of this description into Book I and then continued his narrative in Book III from exactly the point at which he had cut himself short in Book I leads to the same conclusion. This can be explained in two ways: either Josephus composed all the descriptions found in *BJ* even before beginning to write the work itself, or else he marked or separately copied passages during the preparatory stage, while perusing various sources on the war, and later inserted these passages at appropriate places in his own book.<sup>6</sup>

In choosing between these two options, we may concede that it is of course theoretically possible that Josephus not only composed his geographical descriptions prior to the writing of the book itself but already gave them their finished literary form at that time. However, the usefulness of such a procedure does not seem entirely clear, especially in view of Josephus' later, somewhat ineffectual tampering with the excursus under discussion. Tampering of this kind with a passage taken from an external source would be much easier to comprehend.

There may be further significance in the fact that Josephus indicates Paneion rather than Phiale as the source of the Jordan in his third passage on Paneion in *AJ* XV 364, part of his second account of Herod's reign. This passage runs as follows:

[Herod] erected to [Augustus] a very beautiful temple of white stone in the territory of Zenodorus, near the place called Paneion. In the mountains here there is a very beautiful cave, and below it the earth slopes steeply to a precipitous and inaccessible depth, which is filled with still water, while above it there is a very high mountain. Below the cave rise the sources of the river Jordan'.

Had Josephus indeed composed the excursus on the Sea of Galilee by himself, he would have certainly known that the theory that the sources of the Jordan rise at Paneion was demonstrably wrong. However, if he did indeed borrow the excursus from an external source, he might have reproduced it without internalizing the story of the discovery by the tetrarch Philip, or perhaps simply forgotten it over time. This is probably the correct explanation, since in two other passages where Josephus deals explicitly with the tetrarch Philip and Paneas, he again emphasizes the proximity of this locality to the sources of the Jordan (*BJ* II 168: ὁ Φίλιππος, ὁ μὲν πρὸς ταῖς τοῦ Ἰορδάνου πηγῶν ἐν Πανεάδι πόλιν κτίζει Καισάρειαν; *AJ* XVIII 28: Φίλιππος δὲ Πανεάδα τὴν πρὸς ταῖς πηγῶν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου κατασκευάσας ὀνομάζει Καισάρειαν).

<sup>6</sup> Suggestions of an external source for the geographical *excurses* in *BJ*: W. Weber, *Josephus und Vespasian*, (Berlin, 1921), 79-80, 142-149; A. Schlatter, 'Der Bericht über das Ende Jerusalems. Ein Dialog mit Wilhelm Weber', in A. Schlatter, *Kleinere Schriften zu Flavius Josephus* (K.H. Rengstorf, ed.), (Darmstadt 1970), 55-64; H.S.J. Thackeray, *Josephus, the man and the historian*, (New York 1929; reprinted 1967), 40; T. Rajak, *Josephus. The historian and his society*, (London 1983), 216. For a different view, see: P. Bilde, 'The geographical *excurses* in Josephus', in F. Parente and J. Sievers (eds.), *Josephus and the history of the Greco-Roman period. Essays in memory of Morton Smith*, (Leiden 1994), 261-262; Safrai (n. 3), 304; Y. Shahar, *Josephus Geographicus. The Classical Context of Geography in Josephus*, (Tübingen 2004), 190-267.

Why Josephus decided to use a section of the larger account already in *BJ* I remains an open question. The sentence just before the description in *BJ* I 405-406, part of his earlier account of Herod, also places the sources of the Jordan at Paneion. Thus, this assertion is most likely to originate from Josephus' main source on Herod, Nicolaus of Damascus. It is also possible that Nicolaus did mention some geographical features of the place but that Josephus chose to replace it with the description he had at hand. Whatever the case, Josephus must have realised at some point that if he were to reveal the full story of Phiale already here, in *BJ* I, he would have to introduce Philip the tetrarch, Herod's son, even though he was still dealing with the time of Herod. He may have then decided to postpone the tale and relate it in the sequel.

The short description in *AJ* XV 364 is both similar to and different from that in *BJ* I 405-406. Since all its essential elements are found also in *BJ* I, it seems to have been based on this earlier description; however, the text has been significantly shortened, reorganised and rephrased. Thus, the 'overgrown (συνηρηφές) cavern' becomes 'a very beautiful' one (περικαλλές), while the mountain which 'rears its summit to an immense height aloft' becomes 'a very high mountain' (ὄρος παμμέγεθες) and the mention of this mountain is moved from its logical place at the beginning of the description to its end. The ἄντρον of *BJ* is also twice changed to σπήλαιον in *AJ*. As a result of this reworking, some of the dramatic and graphic qualities that characterised the original description in *BJ* I have been lost. Notably, the description of *BJ* I 405-406 contains a number of words which are unique in Josephus: ἀσάλευτος, βαραθρώδης, συνηρηφής, ὑπανοίγω, while all the words used in *AJ* XV 364 are fairly common. This might be yet another hint at Josephus' using an external source for his description in *BJ* I 405-406.

It has been suggested that books XV and XVI of *AJ* include a revision of Josephus' main source on Herod, Nicolaus of Damascus, together with some occasional borrowings from *BJ*.<sup>7</sup> The full extent of these borrowings has not yet been determined. Since the description in *BJ* I 405-406 was originally part of a larger *excursus* and the latter mentions Agrippa and the tetrarch Philip, it obviously could not have been taken over from Nicolaus. Consequently, if the description of Paneion in *AJ* XV 364 was based on *BJ* I 405-406, this would be yet another example of Josephus paraphrasing from his earlier book rather than from his main original source on Herod.

Tel Aviv University

<sup>7</sup> S.J.D. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome. His Vita and development as a historian*, (Leiden 1979), 57.