Form and Content in Jewish-Hellenistic Historiography*

Joseph Geiger

When Felix Jacoby started planning his monumental collection of the fragments of the Greek historians he had to make certain decisions on research strategy, and among these he had, of course, to provide answers to the questions what is a fragment, who is an historian, and who is a Greek. The first two questions shall not detain us now. As to the third, the answer was simple enough: a Greek is whoever writes in Greek. No doubt this was a pragmatic and correct decision, even though it brought about, as such decisions are bound to, some fairly strange consequences, such as the inclusion of the dictator Sulla among the Greeks.[1]

Thus there is no reason to challenge Jacoby's inclusion in his collection of the fragments of the Jewish historians who wrote Greek. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to ask whether Jewish historians who wrote Greek were Greek historians who were no different from other Greek historians but in their descent and in the contents of their works, or whether they were Jewish historians who resorted to Greek rather than to one of the Jewish languages because of the specific historical circumstances of their times. Some time ago I investigated this problem with special application to the structure and contents of *II Maccabees* and its source, the work in five books of Jason of Cyrene.[2] It is a generally recognized truth that *II Maccabees* is Hellenistic in form and Jewish in content:[3] this Hellenistic form is best demonstrated by drawing attention to the numerous parallels between the structure of that

* Expanded version of a paper read at the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem 1985.

1 F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* (Berlin 1923–) (=*FGrH*).

2 'The History of Judas Maccabaeus: On One Aspect of Hellenistic Historiography', *Zion* 49 (1984–85), 1ff. (Hebrew).

3 See, e.g., Ch. Habicht, *2.Makkabäerbuch,*[2] *Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit* I.3 (Gütersloh 1979) 185.

book and that of other Hellenistic historical works. Among these parallels one should point out that it was fashionable in Hellenistic times to compose epitomes of longer historical works.[4] The title — in all probability "The History of Judas Maccabee" — conforms to a well-known Hellenistic schema[5] and the work is composed in accordance with some of the requirements expected from the specific genre of the historical monograph which focuses on the figure and deeds of a king, statesman or general.[6] A main conclusion from the enquiry into *II Maccabees* held that the Greek form had indeed influenced the contents to a considerable degree: thus, for example, the focus on the figure and achievements of Judas is of paramount importance for the contents of the book; but this decision regarding the contents was deeply influenced by the requirements of the literary genre.[7]

4 See, in general, P. Brunt, 'On Historical Fragments and Epitomes', *CQ* 30 (1980) 477ff.; he ignores, however, Jason and *II Maccabees*. Zonaras and Xiphilinus displaced Dio Cassius as did the various epitomes the monumental 142 books of Livy; Justin's epitome replaced Pompeius Trogus and Diodorus Siculus was no doubt an important factor in the loss of Ephorus. On the way epitomators worked see, e.g., C.M. Begbie, 'The Epitome of Livy', *CQ* 17 (1967) 333ff. For recent finds of historical epitomes see R.A. Pack, *The Greek and Latin Literary Texts from Greco-Roman Egypt*[2] (Ann Arbor 1967) Nos. 1503, 484, 2192, 2193; *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* No. 1367.

5 Leon of Byzantium composed both *The History of Philip and Byzantium* and a *History of Alexander* (*FGrH* 132). Menaechmus of Sycion wrote a *History of Alexander the Macedonian* (*FGrH* 132); a certain Varro an *Epitome of the History of Alexander the Macedonian* (*FGrH* 149); Phylarchus of Athens composed a *History of Antiochus and Eumenes of Pergamum* (*FGrH* 81). From the parallels it should be clear that Arrian of Nicomedia wrote a *History of Timoleon* rather than biographies (*FGrH* 156). From the later Empire one may quote the *History of the Emperor Constans* by Eustochius of Cappadocia (*FGrH* 738).

6 On this genre see J. Geiger, *Cornelius Nepos and Ancient Political Biography*, Historia Einzelschriften 47 (Stuttgart 1985) 46ff.

7 One of the most controversial points concerning *II Maccabees* is the fact, that the story is not continued to the death of the hero, but stops a short time before it with the victory over Nicanor. This may be explained by the conventions of the "Kriegsmonographie" (Jacoby's term); such were the works on Pyrrhus' Italian and Sicilian expedition by one Zeno (*FGrH* 158 T 1) and Proxenus' *Pyrrhus' Sicilian History* (*FGrH* 703 F 4) as well as Phylarchus' *Pyrrhus' Expedition from Epirus to the Peloponnesus* (*FGrH* 81 T 1); Simonides of Magnesia wrote a *History of Antiochus and the War against the Galatians* (*FGrH* 114 T 1); somewhat different are Sallust's historical monographs and the various works on the Mithridatic wars which presumably had a villain for their central figure. For other monographs on wars without a hero see Geiger, *op. cit.* (n. 2 above) n. 26.

The literary genre and the way it defines works are of considerable interest and may serve to guide us in investigating the scattered remains of some works of Jewish historians who wrote in Greek.

It is a well-known characteristic of ancient literature, often repeated, that it was divided into a number of genres, each with its particular set of rules, though it is true — and elsewhere I have argued this at greater length[8] — that, on the one hand, the rules of the genres are strictly applicable only to the various types of poetry and that, on the other hand, in the Hellenistic, and even more in the Roman period, these rules were increasingly disregarded. Nevertheless it is not possible to ignore the literary genres completely. Once a writer made up his mind to write a book, inevitably he had to think in terms of literary genres, and had to make a decision as to the genre to which his work was to belong. For him to make such a decision, he has to be more or less intimately acquainted with the various relevant literary genres. In its turn, his decision would influence, to some degree at least, the structure and contents of the work. Moreover, since the requirements of Greek literary genres did not correspond to the requirements of biblical and post-biblical Hebrew and Aramaic literature, a Jewish writer could not, even if he wished to do so, compose a Greek work whose essential characteristics were those of Hebrew literature.

Thus a rift was created in Jewish literature, most easily demonstrated by the differences between *I Maccabees* and *II Maccabees*: the former a Hebrew or Aramaic work, by chance preserved only in Greek translation, written by a conscious adherent to biblical historiography; the latter a Greek work, though one that displays the ideals and beliefs of contemporary Judaism.[9] In fact it is quite possible that Jason of Cyrene (for the time being let us ignore the epitomator and the redactor, if there was one) did not even have a choice between composing a Hebrew or a Greek work. Once he decided to write a Greek work he chose a well-known and popular literary genre, that of an historical monograph focusing on the figure of Judas the Maccabee. It is well worth repeating, that the very title he chose, in all probability τὰ κατὰ τὸν Ιουδαν τὸν Μακκαβαῖον, was a declaration of intent with important consequences for the whole composition.[10] These and similar phenomena may be

8 *Op. cit.* (n. 6 above), 11ff.

9 See now E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ,* ed. G. Vermes, F. Millar and M. Goodman, III. 1 (Edinburgh 1986); M.E. Stone, ed., *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period (Comp. Rer. Jud. ad NT* II. 2) (Assen-Philadelphia 1984).

10 See n. 7 above; this is also the most likely explanation for the all but complete

observed also in the meagre fragments of other Jewish Hellenistic historians. It is to these that I hope to draw attention in what follows.

Closely related to the historical monograph focusing on the achievements of a king, statesman or general were compositions describing the history of a given country by recounting the history of a series of rulers. It is possible that such works had their beginnings in polemical pamphlets, like Idomeneus of Lampsacus' "On Athenian Demagogues" (*FGrH* 338), influenced, no doubt, by Theopompus' excursus on Athenian Demagogues (*FGrH* 115 F 85–100) which came from one end of the political spectrum, and by Pha(e)neas of Eresus, on the Sicilian Tyrants, which came from the other.[11] Baton of Sinope wrote "On the Tyrants of Ephesus" (*FGrH* 268) and Charon of Carthage "On the Tyrants in Europe and Asia" (*FHG* IV.360). Athenaeus of Naucratis, better known as the author of the *Deipnosophists*, also wrote "On the Kings of Syria," probably pursuing the story as far as Pompey's establishment of the province (*FGrH* 166), while Timagenes of Alexandria wrote, in all probability, a more general work "On Kings" (*FGrH* 88). Menander of Ephesus composed "The Deeds of All the Kings of the Hellenes and Barbarians who Ruled in Tyre," or, as Jacoby would have it, "Deeds of Kings" (*FGrH* 783). Euagoras of Lindus, perhaps a pupil of Timagenes, wrote, *inter alia,* a history of the kings of Egypt (*FGrH* 619); he also was the author of Thucydidean ζητήσεις, a subject to which we shall return in the following. Lastly, Nicander of Chalcedon wrote in all probability about the kings of Bithynia (*FGrH* 700).

The available evidence, as in the case of all Greek literature, is fragmentary and to a certain extent random. A Jew of Greek education who wanted to write the history of his country, whether for the edification of his own compatriots or that of the Gentiles, found a rich and widespread literary form well suited, as it seemed, to the narration of the history of his own people. Thus it comes as no surprise that the earliest Jewish Hellenistic work of literature known to us is the work of Demetrius "the Chronograph," "On the Kings of Judaea"(*FGrH* 722). The title is known from Clement of Alexandria; the specific fragment in which it occurs deals with the expulsions in the time of Sennacherib and again of Nebuchadnezzar. Freudenthal thought[12] that this

omission of Judas' father and brothers from the narrative.

11 F. Wehrli, *Die Schule des Aristoteles* IX (Zurich 1969). The attitude may be observed in frg. 14–16 *On the Murder of Tyrants from Revenge.*

12 J. Freudenthal, *Alexander Polyhistor* (Breslau 1875) 223.

was the only surviving fragment from that work, but we shall see that Jacoby must have been right in attributing all the known fragments of Demetrius to this work.

We reach somewhat more solid ground with the work of Eupolemus. The title of his work is identical with that of Demetrius, and is again attested by Clement (*FGrH* 723). According to this first fragment Moses was the first wise man, the first to teach the Jews letters and the first legislator. Moses--in a book on the kings of Judaea? Indeed Eupolemus is so well known and so often referred to, that sometimes one forgets to ask the most obvious and basic questions pertaining to his work.[13] But let us proceed to the next fragment. In this passage, preserved by Eusebius , we read: "And Eupolemus says in his work on the prophecy of Elijah, that Moses prophesied for forty years, and Joshua the son of Nun twenty years..." Is this another work, and if so what is its place in Hellenistic literature and how are we to explain the quotation? It is possible, I think, to find a solution to these questions in the general framework of the present discussion.

Any doubts one may entertain regarding the titles of Demetrius and Eupolemus will disappear when considering our next example. Demetrius is the earliest Jewish Hellenistic writer known to us; Justus of Tiberias, together with his contemporary and foe Josephus, is the last.[14] One of Justus' works has as its title "On the Kings of Judaea according to their Genealogies." This title is expressly confirmed by Photius, and while we shall not be detained by the problem of the exact meaning of the στέμματα, it is worth considering the chronological limits of the work, from Moses to Agrippa II — the last of the Jewish kings and a contemporary of the historian. It may be assumed that Justus, like other Greek historians before him, followed his predecessors in structure and subject matter while aiming to improve on them in literary accomplishment and style.[15] We should also keep in mind for what follows, that Justus carried the narrative down to his own days.

But let us turn now to the title of these works. It is still pertinent to ask whether the titles were indeed given by the authors or whether they were

13 See the exhaustive monograph of B.Z. Wacholder, *Eupolemus. A Study in Judaeo-Greek Literature* (Cincinnati 1974); N. Walter, *Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit* I. 2 (Gütersloh 1980). I do not think that Moses being referred to as 'king' in Midrashic Literature centuries later is relevant to the argument.

14 See T. Rajak, 'Justus of Tiberias', *CQ* 23 (1973) 345.

15 For the controversy on this point see S.J.D. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome: His Vita and Development as a Historian* (Leiden 1979) 114ff.

generic, descriptive titles given by our later authorities who allocated the works in question to the correct, or at least closest, Greek literary genre, viz., for example, was it Justus who called his work "On the Kings of Judaea," or does the name perhaps derive from Photius who catalogued the work according to what he knew about Greek historiography? A few remarks on book titles are in order. First, as far as Hebrew literature is concerned there can be no doubt that at the time under discussion the Jews had not yet discovered how to give books proper titles. The grandson of Jesus Sirachides did not find a title attached to his grandfather's work and so had to describe it generically.[16] In the same way, the other translator from Hebrew into Greek in this period whom we happen to know by name, Lysimachus the son of Ptolemy, who composed the Greek version of the book of Esther (or at least authored the colophon of that book), did not know of a title for the work and described it with a phrase from the Hebrew original (9.26,29), "Purim epistle."[17] No surprise this, of course, keeping in mind that the festival connected with the events narrated in the book did not have a generally accepted name: the author of *II Maccabees* refers to it as "the Day of Mardocai" (15.36). Evidently the lack of titles continues biblical practice, and it is safe to conclude that Hebrew literature at that time did not know proper book-titles.

Not so in Jewish Hellenistic literature. "The History of Judas Maccabee" was, it may be assumed with confidence, the title of the five books of Jason of Cyrene (*II Macc.* 2.19). The many parallels vividly testify how Jason came to choose his. This was a decision of great importance, for it prescribed the course the author was to follow. No doubt this decision was closely connected with that about the literary genre: structural implications of some importance were to follow from such a decision.

But let us return now to the three authors under consideration, Demetrius, Eupolemus and Justus of Tiberias, and to the processes of thought that guided them to write their works, now lost. To start with Demetrius, the earliest of the three, who may have set an example for the others, in some respects he is closely connected to the circle of the LXX: the consistent translation of Hebrew terms by the same Greek word and the total absence of literary or stylistic pretensions (for example, the failure to employ poetic or rare words) mark him as an author whose aim it was to follow a well-trodden path rather than to pioneer new ways. Doubts and controversies surrounding Demetrius' work stem from the basic contradiction inherent in it — the fact

16 *Ecclesiasticus* 51:31–32.

17 E. Bickerman, 'The Colophon of the Greek Book of Esther,' *JBL* 63 (1944), 339 (=*Studies in Jewish and Christian History* I [Leiden 1975] 225).

that although Demetrius aimed to follow in the footsteps of his Greek predecessors, his own path did not fit well the track laid before him. This is our first encounter with the phenomenon that was to characterize much of Jewish Hellenistic literature — the inevitable discrepancy between the Greek form and Jewish contents. This discrepancy easily explains the inclusion of Moses in a work on the kings of Judaea. Already Schürer, and others following him, have pointed out[18] that Philo, too, calls Moses a king. This however, is but a feeble attempt at saving our author, as it is clear that other Jewish leaders after Moses were also included in the work. The solution to the problem is far more simple. Once the Greek mould was decided on one had to pour the Jewish history into it, whatever the consequences. It was the Greek literary genre, expressed in the title of the work, which provided the Procrustean bed into which Jewish history had to fit. Yet it is a peculiarity of Jewish history that, contrary to the traditional history of most Greeks and barbarians, it did not start with monarchy, which was, in fact, a comparatively late development. This basic difference between the Jews and most other peoples known to the Greeks was thus to have a profound influence on works such as Demetrius'. The repercussions of this state of affairs may well be seen in one example.

A recent writer dealing with Eupolemus affirms,[19] that his history from Moses to Saul was short, in effect only an introduction to his "eigentliche Königsgeschichte." Such a reconstruction, based on no factual evidence, should be dismissed unreservedly. It is, of course, quite possible that, as in so many Greek and Roman historical writings, here, too, the narrative expanded the nearer the writer approached to his own times, but there exists absolutely no evidence to support the view that there was any structural difference between the "eigentliche Königsgeschichte" and the history of the age of Moses and the Judges and Prophets before Saul.

We may turn now to yet another problem connected with the titles of the Jewish historians whose writings we know only from fragments. As we have seen, Eusebius quotes Eupolemus, known to him through Alexander Polyhistor, in a long passage "On the Prophecy of Elijah." There exist a number of opinions as to the meaning of this. Some thought it referred to a chapter-heading in the framework of the longer opus;[20] some held that somebody, most probably Alexander Polyhistor, must have made a mistake,[21] while yet

18 E.g., Rajak, *op. cit.* (n. 14 above) 361.
19 Walter, *op. cit.* (n. 13 above) 94.
20 Schürer, *Geschichte* III,[4] 475; *FGrH* 723 F 2b.
21 Walter, *op. cit.* (n. 13 above) 93.

others maintained,[22] that the reference is to the title of a separate work dedicated to Elijah. It is best to deal with this problem, too, in the context of comparative material available from Greek literature. Fairly early, the Greeks referred to well-defined parts of longer works by special titles. Thus, the twelfth book of the Iliad is called τειχομαχία by Plato[23] already, probably in agreement with well-established usage. On the other hand, the custom of giving separate titles to parts or chapters of works, was a comparatively late development,[24] certainly later than giving titles to works. Once chapter headings became fairly widespread, it was only natural for later writers to refer to their predecessors' works as if these, too, contained chapter-headings or titles of parts. For this I shall discuss here one of the very many examples.

Athenaeus quotes a number of passages from Satyrus, apparently from the latter's long biographical series. Among these passages was one, according to Athenaeus, "On the Beauty of Alcibiades," another "On the Luxury of Philip." These were late chapter-headings or descriptive titles of the passage in question,[25] as were, in my view, such headings as Eupolemus' "On the Prophecy of Elijah." This brings us back to the subject of the title of the whole work. Apparently late writers could describe a part of Eupolemus' history as "On the Prophecy of Elijah" because the work "On the Kings of Judaea" had not only kings for its subject matter, but also judges and prophets who were active before the establishment of monarchy as well as prophets of the royal period.

Let us contemplate another question concerning the Jewish Hellenistic historians discussed here. It was noticed long ago that among the fragments of Demetrius there appear some questions which are strongly reminiscent of a special genre of Greek writing, such as the question: Where did the Israelites

22 Wacholder, *op. cit.* (n. 13 above), 22; Y. Gutman, *The Beginnings of Jewish-Hellenistic Literature* II (Jerusalem 1963) 78 (Hebrew) cannot decide between the various alternatives.

23 *Ion* 539b.

24 An up-to-date investigation of the subject is a desideratum; see R. Friderici, *De librorum antiquorum divisione atque summariis* (diss. Marburg 1911); H. Mutschmann, 'Inhaltsangabe und Kapitelüberschrift im antiken Buch', *Hermes* 46 (1911) 93ff. I understand as a chapter-heading a title that is syntactically detached from its context. Thus the study of B.S. Childs, 'Anticipatory Titles in Hebrew Narrative,' in: *I.L. Seeligmann Volume, Essays on the Bible and the Ancient World* III (Jerusalem 1983) 57 is irrelevant to my discussion.

25 Cf. my discussion, *op. cit.* (n. 6 above) 40ff.

get their arms from after they had left Egypt and crossed the Red Sea?[26] A thorough treatment of λύσεις, προβλήματα, ἀπορίαι, or the like is still an important desideratum of classical philology. Though the existence of the genre seems to be generally accepted, no serious attempt has been made to describe its development and history and to analyse its structure. The present discussion aims to fill a tiny part of that void. The origins of προβλήματα are philological, both in content and in method. They essentially consist of questions about a text with answers provided to them. Of course, from the very beginning Homer was by far the most popular hunting ground for these προβλήματα. A famous example is the questions put by the Emperor Tiberius to the grammatici: "Who was Hecuba's mother? What was Achilles' name among the maidens? What were the Sirens in the habit of singing?"[27] It seems that in later times questions were more historical in nature, viz. problems that demanded consultation of a number of sources and their analysis. Possibly Satyrus' interest in Alcibiades' beauty and Philip's dissipation took the form of such questions. At any rate, among extant texts a good example is provided in the discussion of Alexander's heavy drinking in Plutarch's *Symposiaca*, a collection of questions on sundry matters.[28] Demetrius' questions too seem to bear witness to his adherence to the accepted forms of Greek literature.[29]

The last characteristic of traditional Greek forms of literature in Jewish Hellenistic historiography which I wish to discuss is the phenomenon of writers who continue their narratives to their own times. There are, of course, very many examples for this in Greek and Roman historiography, emphasized by the often recurring decisions of historians — initiated perhaps by Xenophon — to take as their own point of departure the terminal point of a previous writer who was in some ways exemplary. Titles such as "a fine Aufidii Bassi" clearly testify to the formation of this convention.[30] Now, it seems that both Demetrius and Eupolemus continued their narratives down to their own days; for Justus of Tiberias this is certain. This feature of Jewish Hellenistic historiography is far from being marginal or unimportant. Its structural centrality is clear when we reflect that a writer could hardly

26 On Demetrius and this literature see P.M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (Oxford 1972) 690.

27 Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 70.

28 Plutarch, *Symp.* I. 6, 623D.

29 Cf. also E. Bickerman, 'The Jewish Historian Demetrius,' *Christianity, Judaism...: Studies Morton Smith* (Leiden 1975), 72ff. (=*Studies* II. 347ff.).

30 On the Elder Pliny's *a fine Aufidii Bassi* see H. Peter, *Historicorum Romanorum Reliquiae* II (Stuttgart 1967), CXXXXVIIII ff., 110ff.

continue an historical narrative to his own days without assigning himself some role in that narrative.[31] This is a regular feature of Greek historiography. Jewish historiography of the traditional sort, where the narrator is always anonymous and devoid of a personality of his own, an objective mouthpiece, as it were, of events ordained in heaven, could never accommodate such a feature.

It is time to sum up now. The extent of Greek influence on the various aspects of Jewish life and literature can be estimated only by means of detailed investigations of specific issues.[32] As elsewhere here, too, God lives in the detail. This survey of certain points of Jewish Hellenistic historiography strongly supports the view that the influence of Greek literary forms on Jewish writings was great indeed.

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

31 This is well-known for Justus: see Josephus' polemic in his *Vita*.

32 For a recent summary of the controversy see F. Millar, 'The Background to the Maccabean Revolution: Reflections on Martin Hengel's "Judaism and Hellenism",' *Journal of Jewish Studies* 29 (1978) 1ff.
R. Doran, 'The Jewish Hellenistic Historian before Josephus,' *ANRW* II. 20. 1 (1987) 246 appeared too late to be taken into account in the present paper.