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PART II

Josephus's Literary Context

CHAPTER 5

Josephus as a Roman Historian

Steve Mason

5.1 Introduction

Was Josephus a Roman historian? Until the late 1990s (e.g., Marincola 1997), he rarely appeared in surveys of Roman writers, or Greek ones for that matter. He had the consolation prize, to be sure, of occupying the category ‘ancient Jewish historian’ alone by acclamation. Some recent studies tend to support the traditional view by finding in Josephus an essentially provincial historian, tainted by the miasma shared by his compatriots after the Great Revolt, possibly embarrassed about his Greek speech, anyway on the outer social margins of the world capital: “in all likelihood extremely lonely and extremely isolated in Rome—at least from the social-political elite” (Cotton and Eck 2005, 52; cf. Price 2005). He writes from a profoundly Judean ethos, scholars have argued, mainly concerning himself with the post-70 concerns of other Judeans throughout the Mediterranean (Rajak 2005). He was thus in the world capital but not of it, there by necessity but spending Saturday nights at home with the doors locked.

Now every scholar would concede that at least in certain respects Josephus was a Roman historian. He was a Roman citizen. He lived most of his adult life in Rome. And he wrote all of his known works—thirty volumes survive intact—there (*Life* 422–429). From this perspective, he was not merely *a* Roman historian but the most prolific first-century Roman author whose work has endured. The mere fact that he was personally known to the imperial father and son would have meant that he had a better social position than the vast majority of Romans.

In this connection, Josephus claims something that would have been hazardous to lie about: that Titus, after he had dispatched 700 Judean captives from Alexandria to Rome for display in the triumph (*War* 7.118), invited Josephus to travel as his own shipmate (*Life* 422). Once we remember that the ship in question was not a modern floating hotel, with

Titus in VIP class and Josephus bunked in the engine room, we can imagine the honor felt by Josephus from a prolonged stay in the great man's presence. No wonder he recalls it with delight. In a passage that does not mention his presence, he remarks on the pleasantness of the crossing and the exuberant welcome that greeted Titus in port (*War* 7.119). Did he assume his audience's knowledge of his life story (cf. 1.22), without needing to yell: "I was there!"?

We do not know what role Josephus played in the triumph that soon followed (June 71 C.E.), which was of fundamental importance to the new regime (Millar 2005). But since he describes it with a vividness that makes the passage uniquely valuable for the study of triumphs (*War* 7.123–157), we should conclude that he was present. If so, it seems unimaginable that such an omen-producer for the regime could have been left in the cheap seats and not exhibited in some way—even if in a role that he hoped people would forget. This beginning to his life in Rome, by itself, would have made Josephus a conspicuous foreigner, even if he functioned only as a human mascot for the regime. No one seems to doubt that he had sufficient access to Vespasian and Titus that he could personally present them with copies of his finished *Judean War* (*Life* 361–363; *Apion* 1.50–51).

He may have had closer connections yet with Judea's power couple in the 70s, Agrippa II and Berenice. They spent as much time as they could in Rome. Although *Judean War* artfully keeps his activities hidden until he bursts on the scene as the Jerusalem leaders' choice for the crucial defence of Galilee (2.568), his earlier narration—like that of the triumph at the end—assumes his presence in his mother-city Jerusalem. Given the small size of the city and its elite, he would surely have known the royal brother and sister already in those days. Agrippa and Berenice returned to Rome four years after Josephus arrived: she to reassume her position as Titus's lover and a figure to be reckoned with for as long as the relationship lasted; her loyal brother to receive the high honor of a Roman praetor's *ornamenta* (Cassius Dio 65/66.15; cf. Tacitus, *Hist.* 2.2; Suetonius, *Tit.* 7.2; Crook 1951). This much is enough to invite further probing.

Reasons for imagining Josephus as an *isolado* in Rome boil down to the observation that he did not leave much of an impression on surviving literary or material remains, for example, in what can be reconstructed of elite prosopography (Cotton and Eck 2005). Some scholars find no evidence that he was socially active in Rome's literary salons (Price 2005). The only extant historians of the Flavian period do name Josephus, as it happens, both citing his prediction (in Galilee) of Vespasian's accession as a major omen (Suetonius, *Vesp.* 5.6; Cassius Dio in epitome, 65/66.1.4), and it is possible that Tacitus used his *Judean War* in some similar passages of the *Historiae* a generation later (5.1, 13). Eusebius claims that he was "the most famous Judaeon" in Rome, and honored by a statue (*Hist. eccl.* 3.9.2), though this may be doubted on its merits—coming two centuries after Josephus's death, from an author who needs to rely on Josephus's testimony. None of this testimony establishes Josephus as a player in Rome, it is true, and the modest benefits that he claims to have received from the Flavians (*Life* 422–429) confirm that he was not among their top advisors (Mason 1998).

This chapter attempts two things. First, I offer reasons for supposing that Josephus was engaged with his Roman environment in ways that were normal for writers of that time and place. Second, I highlight what seem to be Roman features of both his historiographical perspective and his treatment of imperial themes. Taken together, this all confirms that he had a Roman public in the first instance, without precluding his writing for posterity and unknowable others, and certainly without displacing his self-conscious role as Judea's elite spokesman.

5.2 Location and First Audiences

Looking for evidence of Josephus's involvement with his environment, given that he would not have spelled out what was obvious at the time, will only be productive if we know what to look for. To gain some perspective, we begin with the mechanics of book production in the early empire. This is not a matter of seeking ironclad rules, but a good deal of research—much of it happily focused on Rome at the end of the first century because of the valuable material in the Flavian poets, the Younger Pliny, and Tacitus—has generated a picture of common practices (van Groningen 1963; White 1975, 1978; Ogilvie 1980, 12–14; Saller 1983; Starr 1987; Harris 1989, 222–229; Salles and Martin 1992; Fantham 1996; Marincola 1997, 19–33; Potter 1999, 23–44; Pelling 2000, 1–17; Nauta 2002, 328–335; 2004, 87–119; Johnson 2010).

To understand the *general* picture produced by this research—there are disagreements on various points, and poetry is different from history—we need to jettison assumptions about modern publication, which are only possible because of technological developments and socio-economic conditions since the printing press and the industrial and digital revolutions. As soon as I finish writing this chapter I shall dispatch it electronically to my editors, who live in different countries from each other and from me. In due course they will send the book to the publishers in New Jersey. Until that point it will not have reached the public that any of us writers envisions: it will not have been published or ‘made public’ in the modern sense. To reach our intended audiences, a tiny fraction of the world’s seven billion persons, we rely on publishers whose reason for being is to match authors and audiences to mutual benefit. Until they receive a book that is ready for printing, they cannot undertake that effort for us. That interdependence explains why publishers become exasperated by delinquent authors, and why we fume if we arrive at our major annual conference and our book has not made it to their book stall. We rely on their marketing for us to find our target readers. The publisher’s handling of our work, from refereeing procedures to editing, proofreading, and page layout, gives it the credibility that our public requires. Anyone who leased a private bookstall to promote their own work would not be taken seriously, no matter how good their ideas might be.

Since publishing is so closely connected in our minds with these procedures, it is best to avoid the term when speaking of ancient Rome. Innocent of the technologies that have made our practices possible, the ancient evidence paints a completely different picture—though a perfectly understandable one in a world that knew nothing of printing, mass copying, or global marketing. Bringing out a book, which is to say an unwieldy set of papyrus or parchment rolls painstakingly handwritten, was inevitably a local and social affair: “The book aborning generated a considerable society of its own” (White 1975, 299; cf. 1978, 85). Even Herodotus, Thucydides, and Polybius had written for specific moments and audiences in the first instance. In later Rome, both Greek and Latin literature was regularly being produced and made public. How did an author meet his public?

In keeping with the rhetorical values in which everyone was educated, ancient literature was composed to be heard in some way, also to assist visualization by creating word pictures (Chapman 1998). Authors would typically recite their work before audiences, first among small groups of friends and then possibly larger groups; or they might give significant friends partial drafts (each one hand-copied) to be read—aloud, by a slave perhaps (cf. Pliny, *Ep.* 7.17). It is unlikely that many men in public life spent their time poring over long rolls of text written by others—in continuous script without punctuation—and reading in silence, as we read much more convenient books. Peter Wiseman puts it succinctly, in speaking of

Julius Caesar's publication of his *Gallic War* in the 50s B.C.E. (see further below): "Publication [i.e., reaching one's crucial public] was the public performance; the written text was for 'consultation by the educated'" (Wiseman 1998, 5, quoting from Lucian, *Apol.* 3).

The social nature of book production explains why ancient authors' claims to "truth" referred in the first instance to lack of partisanship, secondarily at best to any concern with what we would consider a rigorous investigation of events. The most salient kind of truth came into view when an author bravely refused to show fear or favor in the circles of living persons connected with his work—not out of sight hundreds of miles away (Woodman 1988, 70–116; cf. Sallust below; Josephus, *War* 1.1–12). A couple of generations after Josephus, Lucian advised historians: "Keep your gaze not on *those who are hearing you now*, but on those who will encounter your work in later times" (*Hist. conscr.* 40). This was the acid test of truthfulness: that the historian avoid pandering to his immediate audiences and write a work that would stand the test of time by dealing with issues of interest to serious men (they were virtually all men) across the generations. But this criterion assumed that the immediate audience was unavoidable, and of course the writer had first to communicate with them. The secret was not to write for them only—an ephemeral work without staying power (cf. Lucian, *Apol.* 3).

Pliny relates how some unnamed historian abandoned a schedule of planned performances because the friends of "a certain person" had been disturbed by his first outing. Horrified by the exposure of their friend's actions, in which they felt implicated, they succeeded in stopping the series (*Ep.* 9.27). We have no idea whether this intriguing work ever found a public. But the episode illustrates how difficult it was in reality to make nostrums about speaking fearless truth—a problem familiar to grown-ups of any community, including academia—real in practice.

With our short attention spans we might doubt that long and complex histories could be recited, but evidently they were, in a series of readings such as Pliny mentions. Lucian reports a number of occasions on which he, while traveling through Greek cities, entered a hall to hear someone present a new history. Often enough our grumpy critic showed his disdain by walking out (*Hist. conscr.* 5–6, 14–15, 19, 23, 24, 29). His descriptions evoke both the popularity of historical performances in various *poleis* and the ever-present risk of criticism by visiting cognoscenti.

Consider Peter Wiseman's argument about Julius Caesar's unique method in "publishing" the *Gallic War* two centuries before Lucian. Because of Caesar's belief in the greatness of his subject (himself), Wiseman proposes, he engaged in mass public recitations, breaking out of the "literary" environs in which such presentations normally occurred, to the forum of Rome and other Italian cities. With his enormous wealth, Caesar may even have had copies produced for the provinces, to be read aloud in each *polis* by the man judged by each local council to have the finest voice (1998, 5–7). Whether or not Wiseman is right about Caesar's methods, his reconstruction highlights the practical constraints on ancient writers. The natural environment for a new book was local and social. In extraordinary cases such as this, the logical solution was to use larger venues to replicate that unavoidably local scenario on a larger scale, in other cities.

Since each copy of a book was handwritten, there was no equivalent of our "going to press." It was up to the author how long he wished to continue presenting his work to his targeted public. Naturally, some books created such a "buzz" that copies of them, including those by students recording their teachers' words, found their way into the modest book-seller trade. This trade is best attested in Rome itself, however, where residents of the capital could secure copies of a hot property by having slaves copy it. In this sense, the book trade

itself was part of the social and local system of book production (Starr 1987, 221). We should not imagine stockpiled copies of the multi-scroll works being trucked around to provincial warehouses. Pliny expresses or affects surprise that his works are even being read in Lugdunum (Lyons), where he had not imagined there was a bookseller, though that capital of the three Gauls was not terribly far from Rome. Anyway, he is pleased to learn from a friend (note the social connection) that his compositions are making the same impression there as they had when he had presented them to his own public in Rome (*Ep.* 9.11).

The second-century physician Galen says that he intended his Roman works exclusively for students and not for a wider public. He too is surprised to find them being copied and distributed. Because he has no control over such dissemination outside his circle, he worries about forgeries going out under his good name. In the absence of a publishing industry or copyright, the multiplication of texts was driven solely by the interest of potential readers; it had nothing to do with the author's initiative or wishes (*De ord. libr.* 19.49–50 [Kühn]; van Groningen 1963, 1–3). If a later copyist or forger used the screen of a famous author's name to attack powerful persons, the consequences could be dire. The named writer needed friends to vouch for his innocence (cf. Martial 7.72.12–16; Saller 1983, 247).

For an author to recite or share drafts of his work, obviously it had to have achieved a degree of completion, though he could still adjust and rewrite as he chose. When he had truly finished with it and had no desire to change it further, he could either leave matters there (as Galen preferred) or have some copies prepared as gifts for friends or patrons, for wider circulation. He might deposit one with a library or bookseller, though there was no guarantee that it would remain authoritative, since copies of other exemplars were made *ad hoc*.

This is where we need to be especially careful with terminology, for this “handing over” (*ekdosis, edere, emittere*) or “making public” (*dêmosioô, publicare*) had a very different meaning from our “publishing,” in spite of the literal similarity. The Preface and opening paragraphs of a work on oratory by Josephus's Roman contemporary Quintilian invite us to excavate the stages. First, Quintilian taught rhetoric for more than twenty years. Like Galen, he discovered that unauthorized copies of his lessons, made by students, had gone into circulation (*Inst.* pr. 7). Partly for that reason, but also because some friends asked him, and especially because in retirement from teaching he wanted to offer his friend Marcellus a manual for his young son, he decided to write his own version for his social circle (*Inst.* pr. 1, 6). When he had done this, however, another friend begged him to give the work over (*emittere*) for wider copying, because of the great interest in it. Quintilian agreed reluctantly, explaining that he had only had it in his possession for a couple of years, and had hoped to keep it longer before letting it out into the world. He worried about the changes it would suffer when it fell “into the hands of people generally” (*Ep. ad Tryph.* 3: *in manus hominum*; for the phrase cf. Cicero, *De orat.* 1.94 [on a book that slipped out of his control]; Pliny, *Ep.* 7.17.15).

For us, by contrast, publishing is the moment when *we begin* to meet our intended public. We write a book precisely to get it past that threshold. Academics may test a chapter or two along the way, but that is discretionary and not the main event. For ancient authors, by contrast, the final “making public” was feared by some, at least not necessarily desired, since they had already reached the public *they* cared about, with versions and interpretations that *they* controlled (van Groningen 1963, 5). Quintilian invokes the image of putting his book out to sea, raising the sail-canvas to the winds and praying fervently that it would fare well as it left for who-knows-where (*Inst.* pr. 3).

When we interpret an ancient text, we must remember that the writer could not have written to communicate with all readers everywhere, indiscriminately, in some sort of neutral or universal prose. Still today, we all have target audiences in view when we write, and our

image of them guides us in deciding on both register and content: what we can assume and what we need to be spelled out. The difference, again, is that whereas we rely on publishers to find our audience for us after we are finished with the book, ancient writers normally found their audiences, unavoidably and organically, in their immediate social circles.

Against this rough background, our question is whether we can find evidence that Josephus produced his works in approximately normal ways, or whether he was atypically isolated in Rome—and so had some unusual means of directing his soon-to-be-famous works only to targeted audiences abroad (to the Judean diaspora and perhaps the homeland itself), or indeed whether he wrote in splendid isolation for purely personal satisfaction. In the case of the *Judean War*, his later self-justifying comments suggest the end of a process that looks approximately normal. That is, he gives or sells a few copies of the finished work to close associates with a stake in the events: the emperors Vespasian and Titus, Roman commanders who had served in the war, and such elite Judeans as the surviving Herodians (*Life* 361–363; *Apion* 1.50–51). Apparently these men were within easy reach, to receive their copies, thus in Rome. He claims that one of the two key recipients, Titus, ordered his *Judean War* to be made available to a wider public (*ta biblia dêmosiôsai prosetaxen*, *Life* 363). This language evidently refers to the kind of shift we have observed, here from Josephus's controlled, personal dissemination among his personal public (if such there were) to access by others who might have the interest and resources to secure a copy. The substance of Titus's action may be embodied in Eusebius's claim that Josephus's volumes were deemed worthy of inclusion in "the library" (*Hist. eccl.* 3.9.2); perhaps Titus also ordered some number of exemplars for booksellers.

Given that unsurprising *conclusion* to the process, when he was finished with his work and could change it no more, is there evidence of the standard earlier situation: that Josephus also had his own social public, to whom he disseminated his work in partial drafts and oral recitations, in local coteries of some sort? From the side of such coteries themselves, the answer is that we have no clear evidence (above). But this is only to say that Pliny and Tacitus, a generation later, do not mention him; outside of them, we have little evidence of such groups' meetings in the late first century. Pliny boasts that most men of literary ability in Rome (from the late 90s?) were his friends. But he is a late witness (100 C.E.+) for Josephus's main compositions (before 93 C.E.). At any rate, we cannot even recover the audiences and poetic themes that filled Pliny's own calendar in one busy April (*Ep.* 1.13). Much less do we have access to the many Greek authors in Rome or their literary circles during the 70s and 80s, when Josephus was apparently most active.

Concerning the *Judean War*, Josephus relates that, once he found leisure in Rome and had his material ready, he composed the work with the help of "certain collaborators for the sake of the Greek *phōnē*" (*Apion* 1.50). Although the meaning of *phōnē* ("sound," "voice") can shade toward "language" in Josephus (e.g., *Apion* 1.1, 73), he had other words for language in general (e.g., *dialektos*, *glōssa*). In view of his admitted deficiencies in speaking literary Greek (*War* 1.13–16; *Ant.* 20.263) and the rhetorical need to choose words and phrases for their sound, he may have intended this word to signal his challenges with Greek oral *expression*. However that may be, this passage clearly indicates that he had *some* kind of social group (namely, the *synergoi*) as he wrote the *Judean War*.

We know the name of one collaborator, though not one likely to have helped with Greek pronunciation: King Agrippa II. Josephus claims to have received sixty-two letters from Herod's great-grandson, concerning his *Judean War*, which would suggest a flurry of 120 or more letters in both directions. He claims to provide two samples (*Life* 362–367). Many questions surround these exemplars: Did the king really write so many letters? Was Josephus

inflating the count by including letters on other subjects, to enhance royal support for his work? Were some of the unquoted letters longer, and/or less kind? Did Agrippa write the somewhat careless words that Josephus quotes? We might guess that if Josephus had invented the correspondence, he would have had the king write a more fulsome endorsement, which would suggest that these modest examples reflect a real correspondence, but we do not know.

What Josephus offers is intriguing, nevertheless. Both samples are brief, no more than two dozen words each, after the greeting. Both seem hastily, even elliptically composed. Both reflect a stage *during* the composition of the *Judean War* (“I have read through volume X with pleasure; send me the rest also”; “I myself shall inform you of many things”). Both are free of substantive comment, however, beyond a general approval. They thus mark moments in the *social exchange* concerning this work, the second one anticipating their next meeting, when Agrippa would divulge new information. The sheer number of such brief letters flying back and forth would suggest physical proximity, the second assuming either Agrippa’s imminent arrival or current accessibility in Rome.

Now, the king himself was surely no *isolado*. Such powerful men were unavoidably surrounded by hangers-on. Josephus was, or convincingly pretended to be, part of the royal circle. This put him in a tense rivalry with other claimants, as his bitter sniping at Justus of Tiberias over their relative favor with Agrippa, by then deceased, shows (*Life* 355–360). Josephus had known Justus ever since the 60s in Galilee. That he did not mention him in the *Judean War* reminds us how much was going on behind the scenes in that work that is hidden from our view, therefore how futile it is to imagine that whatever ‘the evidence’ does not press upon us could not have happened.

Consider too the case of Tiberius Julius Alexander, who was as highly placed as a foreigner could be. Son of an immensely wealthy Judean in Alexandria, and nephew to Philo, Alexander was on a fast track to equestrian status and the sub-governorship of Judea under Claudius in the mid-40s, a senior military post with Corbulo, and then the prized prefecture of Egypt (highest equestrian post) under Nero. When Vespasian’s unique qualification for supreme power became clear to him during the Roman civil war of 68–69, Alexander took a chance and declared himself and his legions for Vespasian, months before the issue was settled militarily. That move assured his position: first, as commander of all Roman forces in the final phase of the Judean War, under Titus, and then apparently (not certainly) as Titus’s partner as Praetorian Prefect in Rome (Turner 1954). Given the close connections between Alexander and Judea and the Herodians—his brother had been the teenaged Berenice’s first husband (*Ant.* 19.276–277)—this extraordinarily powerful man should at least have been interested in Josephus’s work. That Alexander’s presence in Rome as Praetorian Prefect is less than certain, inferred only from the easiest reading of *P. Hibeh* 215, does not matter much for our purposes. Either way, he illustrates how little we know about most social circles in Flavian Rome, and how many possibilities there were for Josephus to be engaged with those around him.

Most important and least discussed: Josephus’s participation in Roman literary life is clear anyway from *Judean War*’s prologue. There he describes just the sort of give and take among budding historians that we find in Lucian’s later tract on history writing. On the one hand, Josephus disparages the many who *are presently writing up* the recent war, whom he assigns to two groups: those who lack eyewitness knowledge and merely rewrite hearsay in a “sophistical” manner, and those with first-hand knowledge who nevertheless write to flatter powerful Romans and denigrate Judeans (*War* 1.1–8). Even if he exaggerates the number of such literary rivals, for these words to have any sense, he must have known of some other

accounts in preparation as he was writing. How? The simplest explanation is that he had either heard them himself or heard about them through members of his social network.

On the other hand, Josephus devotes a significant section of the prologue to ridiculing certain Greek experts who have been criticizing histories of this recent war—chiefly his, it seems, given the uniqueness he claims for his work and the issue of defective Greek language. The judges themselves, he charges, waste their vaunted eloquence retelling old Greek glories (1.13–16). But again, how could Josephus be aware of such criticism of his *Judean War* as he writes its prologue? Whatever this passage refers to concretely, the mutual knowledge and criticism indicate that he was a full participant in his literary environment. This is put beyond doubt by a comment near the end of the prologue: “I shall not conceal any of my own calamities, since *I am about to speak to those who know* [my life]” (*War* 1.22). Unless we credit him with an extraordinary fantasy life, there is no way to interpret these words that does not involve a local, social context for Josephus’s dissemination of his first major work.

It seems relevant for understanding Josephus’s position in Rome that, in the two brief passages describing his life there, much space is given to serious charges brought against him. *Judean War* 7.442–450 details a scheme by the Roman governor of Libya to implicate the “most wealthy and powerful Judeans” of Cyrene, Alexandria, and Rome itself in the crimes of a Judean assassin (*sicarius*), a weaver whom he had captured (*War* 7.447). Josephus claims, however, that when the governor came to Rome and suborned his prisoner to accuse Josephus, Vespasian not only dismissed the charges but had the Judean accuser burned alive, and severely scolded the governor (*War* 7.450–451). That is remarkable enough given the status of the players: Josephus I, Roman Ex-Praetor and Proconsul, 0.

The *Life* mentions this incident (424–425) and also others in which Josephus was accused *because of his prominence* (“those who were envious fabricated charges”). These include an episode in which one of Josephus’s trusted slaves, a tutor to his son, brought a charge of treason (*Life* 429; Schwartz 1990, 18). It would be difficult to make sense of either the accusations or the imperial favor shown in response, no matter how much Josephus exaggerates or distorts, on a hypothesis that he lived on the extreme, isolated margins of social life in Flavian Rome. He simply assumes audience knowledge of his notoriety, which is unsurprising if he had accompanied Titus to Rome and featured in the Flavian triumph, the event of the century (one hundred years after Augustus’s).

Although his modest list of benefactions indicates that he was not at the top table of politicians and advisors (but why should he be?), there were many other tables around, of which we know nothing. We know *that* they existed because elite Roman and prominent Greek names from the period turn up with little or no information about their circles and activities, which they must have had. Peter White counts fifty literary friends for Pliny and more than thirty for the poet Martial, with negligible overlap (White 1975). Many or most of these men were politically undistinguished, and left little trace elsewhere. Statius’s literary friends likewise left few tracks. The patron he shared with Josephus’s eminent contemporary, Quintilian—himself consul under Vespasian and teacher of the imperial family—was Vitorius Marcellus (Statius, *Silv.* 4.4; Quintilian, *Inst.* pr. 6). Although Marcellus would reach the suffect consulship in 105 C.E., he appears to have been a young and minor figure, possibly an equestrian who had recently married into a patrician family, at the time of Statius’s and Quintilian’s dedications (Mommsen 1878; White 1973).

Or take Epaphroditus. This was a common name among slaves and freedmen, and we hear of several prominent Epaphroditoi in the Flavian period, including: several freedmen of the imperial family, Nero’s notorious freedman later executed by Domitian, the philosopher

Epictetus's former master, a wealthy grammarian, the sponsor of a park, and the subject of a large inscription (Weaver 1994, 475; Cotton and Eck 2005, 49–52). Their connections and possible identifications are uncertain, and we know nothing about their varied social circles, though they did have such circles. As it happens, Josephus's later works are all dedicated to a certain Epaphroditus *and his group*. The prologue to *Judean Antiquities* describes most fully this honoree's involvement in great affairs and reversals of fortune (*Ant.* 1.8–9), also crediting him and his coterie with tirelessly encouraging Josephus to finish his twenty-volume work. Josephus will continue to acknowledge him with gratitude and praise as “the most excellent of men” and “the most honoured” (*Life* 430; *Apion* 1.1; 2.1, 296). This fellow was not nobody, then. But alas there were many somebodies of the same name in Josephus's world. Inconclusive debates about the identity of Josephus's patron should not obscure the undeniable point that, whoever Epaphroditus and his friends were, they did provide a social context for Josephus's literary life in Rome. Josephus was no hermit.

And how are we to imagine this group's motive for staying with Josephus over so many years? Did they hear his name at random and begin hounding him until he produced a twenty-volume history, ready-made for them to read from start to finish? It is much more likely, more realistic in the ancient context, that they knew Josephus long before he completed the *Judean Antiquities* because he was famous as “the Judean historian.” It is possible that they were already part of the public for his *Judean War*, and/or that they were captivated by hearing or reading parts of his *Judean Antiquities* in the early years of its preparation. The great work *is* a great story, after all. They pressed him to persevere and finish it, and he duly thanked them. That it was a literary commonplace to say that one had been drafted to write (e.g., Pliny, *Ep.* 1.1; Quintilian, *Inst.* pr. 1) takes nothing away from the vivid sense Josephus conveys of a real literary context in Rome.

To summarize thus far: we should steer a course in the ample water between viewing Josephus as a key advisor and close confidante of the Flavians, on the one side, and casting him into outer darkness (agreeing with Schwartz 1990, 210). We take this course not for diplomatic or Aristotelian reasons of compromise, but because the evidence could hardly be explained otherwise. The easier part is to see what is not there, and to agree with recent scholars that there is no support for an old picture of Josephus as the Flavians' favorite and Minister of Propaganda. Much harder is to remember that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. We find sufficient reason, if we interrogate Josephus's narrative in light of the conditions of ancient book production, to conclude that he was actively engaged, as any historian would have been, in what are, for us now, little-known pockets of Rome's literary life. Clearly he was well known to the ruling family, which is something, and neither the humbler nature of his day-to-day contacts nor their obscurity *to us now* should be surprising.

5.3 Roman Aspects of Josephus's Compositions

Much could be said about the substance of Josephus's *Judean War* as a work written first for certain circles in Rome: about the emphases of the prologue's prospectus (1.17–30) in contrast to what the later narrative actually includes, the contrast between assumed knowledge of Roman realia and the need to explain Judean affairs, and the programmatic comparison between Roman and Judean civil war with their respective tyrants (1.4, esp. 585–663; 7.157). Lacking the space to explore all that (see Mason 2003, 2005a, 2005b), we shall briefly take up his historiography in general and his observations relevant to the Principate.

On the former, we must acknowledge immediately that it is impossible to draw a bright line between Greek and Roman historiography, not least because many historians of Rome (e.g., Polybius, Fabius Pictor, Dionysius, Cassius Dio) wrote in Greek. Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon exerted a profound influence on educated Romans. And since there is considerable diversity among even those Greek and Roman historical works that survive in significant part, we must posit still greater variation among the many lost works.

That said, scholars broadly agree that Roman historians introduced new concerns and emphases, which give their works a shared coloring or family resemblance. It was an old tradition that the College of Pontiffs would chronicle significant events in Rome annually, under the names of the year's consuls. When Roman authors began to absorb Greek literary traditions, from the early second century B.C.E., they enlivened this annalistic framework with the potent arsenal of Greek rhetoric (Cicero, *De or.* 3.35–36; Mellor 1999, 10–11), now energized by intense personal competition among aristocrats of the late Republic. Roman history would largely be written by, and serve the interests of, society's most powerful men, as another extension of their claims to glory and moral standing (Wiseman 1985).

Roman interest in the personal character of great men was balanced by a new openness to exploring the ancient past (cf. Livy and Dionysius), something that Thucydides and Polybius had eschewed. Antiquity was not a field for investigation by rigorous critical methods, however. The distant past was delivered ready-made in the works of writers now safely acceptable as authorities (Kraus and Woodman 1997, 1–9). This past generated a fund of moral examples for political life, and Rome's ancient values (*mos maiorum*) furnished the standard for judging contemporary actions, which were typically seen as entropic, falling off steadily from the virtuous past (Hölkeskamp 1996; Comber 1997; Yardley and Heckel 2001, 6–12; Timpe 2011; cf. Sallust, *Cat.* 5.9–13.5; Livy 1.pref. 6–9). Under the Principate, the Roman taste for history as serial biography was quickly turned to serve the towering dominance of one life: that of the *princeps*. His character, achievements (*res gestae*), and glory became the point of reference for everything (Kraus 2005). We return to this below.

Given limited space, the issue of Roman historiography might best be approached by looking at a specimen. Although it was only one man's effort in the peculiar environment of the 50s and 40s B.C.E., the values it assumes and the language it employs invite comparison with Josephus more than a century later.

C. Sallustius Crispus (86–ca. 35 B.C.E.), a controversial “new man” in the Senate, turned to history in early retirement from a political life of doubtful moral quality. Of Sallust's *History of Rome* (78 to 67 B.C.E.) we have only fragments, though enough to make clear his approach (see McGushin 1992, 1994). Although he structures his account by consular years in the old way, after asserting that Rome's problems arose from failings of human character (1.8) he focuses on the individual characters who moved events forward. Sometimes he allows key players to speak forcefully against each other, so that the audience/reader experiences, as it were, the real person. Speeches by such figures are largely about the character of others. For example, L. Marcius Philippus discounts the speech of fellow-Senator M. Aemilius Lepidus on the ground that the man is “the lowest of all criminals” (1.67.3) and “a bandit with a few goons and cutthroats” (*latro cum calonibus et paucis sicariis*, 1.67.7; cf. Habinek 1998). Indignant that Sulla has accused him of being “fond of sedition” and “a lover of war” (1.48.16), Lepidus replies by labelling Sulla a criminal and a tyrant, and his adherents mere slaves and minions. Another distinguished Senator is a “contemptible female slave, the corruption of all honors” (1.48.7–25 [21]). Note that two centuries later, the Greek physician Galen would complain of his Roman colleagues, with their intensely personal rivalry and greed, that they were “bandits” (Eichholz 1951, 64). Readers of Josephus will certainly be familiar with “bandit leaders,” thugs, and *sicarii*.

Sallust's two fully surviving works make this fusion of history and intense personal moralizing even clearer because they work within biographical frameworks. Proposing that writing the history of a people (*res gestae scribere*) is a demanding and honorable pursuit for the soul/mind, and given that his own retired soul is now free of hope, fear, or political partiality, he will write up aspects of the deeds (*res gestae*) of the Roman people that he considers memorable. Anticipating modern historicists, however, he will not try to represent the whole chaotic past. The conspiracy led by the patrician Senator L. Sergius Catilina (64–62 B.C.E.) begs for treatment because of “the [magnitude of the] crime” and “the unprecedented danger” to Rome (*Cat.* 4.4). Compare Josephus's first prologue (*War* 1.1–8).

Sallust frames this personal story with his authoritative sketch of the protagonist's character (*moribus*, *Cat.* 4.5):

Lucius Catiline, born of a distinguished family, had great powers of mind and body alike—but an evil and perverse nature. Right from his youth, civil wars, murder, plunder, and political strife were pleasant pursuits to him, and after that they consumed his early adulthood. His body could tolerate absence of food, cold, and lack of sleep to an unbelievable degree. But his soul/mind was brazen, crafty, shifty, capable of faking or concealing whatever he liked, greedy for what belonged to others while squandering what was his own, consumed by desire (*animus audax, subdolos, varius, cuius rei lubet simulator ac dissimulator, alieni appetens, sui profusus, ardens in cupiditatibus*); sufficient eloquence but insufficient wisdom. His desolate soul/mind always craved what was immoderate, incredible, and unattainable. After the tyranny of L. Sulla, an extraordinary desire to seize the government possessed him (*hunc ... libido maxuma invaserat rei publicae capiundae*). The manner in which he should achieve this did not worry him in the slightest, as long as it gave him the rule. His fierce soul/mind was spurred on more and more each day by a lack of resources at home, and by a guilty conscience. (*Cat.* 5.1–7)

Here we find many characteristics of Roman Republican historiography: severe discord among the powerful, vivid rhetoric applied to individual moral assessment, claims to truth based on freedom from partisanship, an effort at balance (admitting the enemy's virtues), and the welfare of the body politic as the ultimate criterion.

Henry St. John Thackeray (1929, 119–120; cf. Villalba i Varneda 1986, 70–71) long ago observed the striking verbal similarity between this passage and Josephus's description of his arch-enemy in Galilee, John of Gischala, one of the two men the Flavians had since punished as principal culprits (*War* 2.585–590):

As Josephus was thus administering the affairs of Galilee, there stood up against him a certain schemer of a man from Gischala, a son of Leius, John by name: the slipperiest and craftiest of all those distinguishing themselves in wretched behaviors during these times; nevertheless, being poor at the beginning, for a long while he faced a lack of means as an impediment to his evil. Though ready to lie, he was formidable at conveying trustworthiness for the things he had lied about, regarding as a virtue his trickery—and the use of this against those dearest to him; a pretender to kindness, and extremely bloodthirsty when there was hope of gain; though having always yearned for great things, nourishing these hopes by his pathetic wrongdoings. He was a solitary bandit, but later he found a crew of brazenness—though small at first, cutting an ever-larger swathe ... He selected those who excelled in condition of body, determination of soul, and expertise in wars. (trans. adapted from Mason 2008)

In spite of this portrayal, Josephus elsewhere allows that John was a wealthy and prominent figure with close connections among Jerusalem's elite, and a reluctant warrior like himself (*Life* 43–44, 189–192). It is difficult to imagine that Josephus could have written such political invective independently of Sallust's model. Not only in specific diction (schemer,

slippery, crafty, brazen) but also in sentence structure and the focus on of poverty and its moral implications, the two accounts look similar. Josephus will also claim that John's men behaved as women (4.561–562; 5.565)—like Sulla's cronies, according to Sallust's Lepidus.

Although Thackeray noted another echo of Sallust in Josephus's description of John at *Judean War* 4.85, his focus on parallel words alone led him to attribute the allusion to a clever literary "assistant" (1929, 119–120). In the twenty-first century, this explanation will no longer do. A wide range of tools for studying Josephus's language requires us to estimate his control over his writing differently today, and Thackeray's picture of interventionist "literary assistants" has crumbled in the meantime (Rajak 1983, 233–236). If the *Judean War* as a whole is replete with debts to classical authors (e.g., Villalba i Varneda 1986; Eckstein 1990; Chapman 1998; Mader 2000; Shahar 2004), we should conclude that Josephus was also familiar, directly or otherwise, with Sallust's work. His contemporary Quintilian considered Sallust a model historian (*Inst.* 2.5.19; 4.2.45), and the chilling description of Catiline seems to have been recycled by many: by Livy for Hannibal (21.4.5–9) and by Tacitus for Sejanus (*Ann.* 4.1.3; Ramsey 1984, 69). Why should Josephus not have recycled the same admired gem for the "arch-bandit" of the Judean War, who was notorious in Rome? His admittedly likely inability to compose literary Latin says nothing about his ability, after years spent among Romans, to make sense of someone else's. Or he might have known Greek notes on Sallust.

More important for our discussion than particular items of vocabulary is the set of values and interests shared by Sallust and Josephus. Both are indebted to Thucydides (cf. Seneca, *Contr.* 9.1.13) and yet both focus on individual characters and motives: in Josephus, the various Hasmonians and Seleucids, Antipater and Herod, then individuals among Jerusalem's elite (Agrippa II and certain chief priests), himself, and the Judean tyrants against Vespasian and Titus, all strong personalities in the story. His interest in personal character also appears in *Judean War*'s references to soldiers on both sides who distinguished themselves on the battlefield (3.229–330; 6.54–92, 147–148). Josephus exploits the duelling-speech technique of Thucydides and Sallust, both to convey balance and to draw the reader into the conflicts: to re-enact the thoughts and emotions of various characters (e.g., *War* 2.26–37; 4.238–283; *Ant.* 4.12–34). Josephus's *Judean Antiquities* and appended autobiography push farthest the conception of history as serial biography, grounded in the characters of great individuals (including the author's) and appealing to ancient ancestral tradition as the unwavering measuring stick (*Ant.* 1.14, 20). Josephus crowns everything with an admiring study of his own character (*Life* 430).

If we glance elsewhere in the Roman tradition, a comparison suggests itself between Josephus's seven-volume *Judean War* and the original seven volumes of Caesar's *Gallic War* (on the latter: Welch and Powell 1998). Both commanders appear as brave and resourceful, describing their exploits and "generals' tricks" in the third person. Josephus is familiar with the kind of stratagems compiled by his Roman contemporary, Frontinus, for whom Caesar provided the largest fund of *exempla* after Hannibal. Josephus's portraits of both Titus and himself as generals—especially in their forethought, personal courage, and clemency—may well be influenced by the Caesarean tradition. He dates Pompey's capture of Jerusalem in (63 B.C.E.) to the consulship of Cicero and Marcus Antonius, citing as witness "Titus Livius, the author of the Roman history" (*Ant.* 14.66–68). And the *magnum opus* displays many parallels with both Cicero's *Republic* and *Laws* and Dionysius of Halicarnassus's twenty-volume *Roman Antiquities* (Villalba i Varneda 1986, 69–88; detailed notes in Feldman 2000; cf. Mason 2001). We have no grounds for thinking of Josephus as a Latinist, again, but nor can we imagine that he was barred from the most famous literature in Rome.

A small but intriguing issue is Josephus's use of the Latin term *sicarii*, which he transliterates (rather than translating) into Greek, for a range of concealed-knife assassins. This usage is paralleled in no surviving Greek text before Christian authors began to exploit and cite Josephus—Acts 21:38 *possibly* being the first case. (In the third century, Origen [*C. Cels.* 2.13] uses the term independently, of Samaritans, in relation to Roman law.) But Josephus has the transliterated word fifteen times in *Judean War*, four in *Judean Antiquities*. Without exploring all the problems and possibilities (see Brighton 2009), we may still register our curiosity that Josephus should have favored this Latin shock-word when writing in Greek. Why? One might suppose that he was only using the actual name of a particular Judean militant group, but the difficult proposition that such a rebel group should have chosen this or any Latin name (were they such keen ironists?) is compounded by the fact that he does not reserve the term for one group (e.g., *War* 2.254–257; 7.437–453).

The simplest solution is that he employed *sicarii* to elicit a fear-response, contributing to the tragic ethos of his narratives, but this would only have its full effect with Latin-aware audiences. The *sicarius* phenomenon had been declared reprehensible in the famed Sullan law against *sicarii* and poisoners of 81 B.C.E. (Justin, *Dig.* 48.8), when a standing court was established to try such murderers (*inter sicarios*). The twenty-seven-year-old Cicero had made his mark by courageously and successfully defending an accused *sicarius*—in fact, a wealthy target of Sulla's regime—in the first public trial on that charge (*Pro Sex. Roscio Amerino*). The great orator often employs the word *sicarius*, which he glosses as “a brazen man frequently involved in murder” (*Pro Rosc.* 39), sometimes to characterize his elite adversaries (*Verr.* 2.1.9). The long shadow of Cicero and the late Republic (e.g., Suetonius, *Iul.* 72: “low-life and *sicarii*”) naturally suggests that Josephus's preference for this alarming word had something to do with his Roman environment.

Another feature of Josephus's historiographical perspective points to an accommodation with his Roman context: his treatment of “the Greeks.” Although he writes in Greek and has deeply absorbed Greek literature, values, and categories, in some programmatic passages he takes a stance toward Greek culture that hovers between pity and contempt. We have seen that *War*'s prologue attacks Greek pedants preoccupied with their faded ancient glories, who have the gall to criticize him for linguistic shortcomings, though he is writing a work of unparalleled importance. This leads him to a summary statement about Greeks in general: they love to talk but care little about historical truth (*War* 1.13–16). In the closing sections of the *Judean Antiquities*, after sniping at Greek cultural domination (1.121; cf. 2.3; 16.160; 18.141; 19.278, 239), he makes a positive virtue of his linguistic deficiencies on the ground that his people value truth and fidelity to ancestral law over fancy talk (20.262–265). Then in *Life* 40, he accuses his rival Justus of being “well trained in the Greek sort of education,” which is to say that he knows how to lie convincingly. And *Against Apion* makes relentless fun of Greek cultural pride (e.g., 1.15–72). When we consider that Josephus was writing in Rome, and that his attacks on Greek pretension highlight their love of rhetoric at the expense of truth, as well as their ignorance of non-sea faring nations (such as Judea and Rome), and that these happened to be familiar sore points in Roman-Greek cultural relations (e.g., Dionysius, *Ant. rom.* 9.5.1; Cicero, *De orat.* 1.102; Pliny, *NH* pr. 24–28; 3.2; Wardman 2002, 110–134), it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Josephus bonds his laconic Judean compatriots with the citizens of his adopted home city, over against the prevailing Greek culture (*Apion* 1.60–66 with Barclay 2007 *ad loc.*).

Our final topic, Josephus on the Principate, must be treated briefly. His narratives reveal from beginning to end the looming presence of imperial power. *Judean War*'s prologue features the labours of the ruling family outside the Jerusalem that Titus reluctantly destroyed (1.4–12), and *Life* closes with Josephus's expressions of gratitude to each Flavian

ruler in succession (422–429). Because even the most congenial autocrats had lethal power in their command, the wisest course for those near them was to flatter and dissemble in whatever way the situation required (Cassius Dio 53.19; Bartsch 1994). A few philosophers and others attempted something like honest speech, but this might well lead to exile or even termination with extreme prejudice (Tacitus, *Agr.* 1–3). A third possibility required considerable art: an ironic flattery that masked at least winking sarcasm if not implicit (and vague) criticism (Ahl 1984). Josephus adopted all three modes. The flattery typical of Flavian authors (Martial, *Ep.* 9.1; Valerius Flaccus 1–21) was so closely connected with Josephus in older scholarship that his *Judean War* was thought to be the reworking of an official source (Weber 1921). He undeniably does flatter Vespasian and Titus personally, though this by no means extends to all things Roman. Less obvious by design are the mines he laid beneath the narrative surface, which might explode to the delight of the audience with ears to hear (Mason 2005b). Least noticed of all are Josephus's rather forceful critiques of monarchy and its crucial prerequisite in the first century: hereditary succession.

In this connection I wish to make three points. First, Josephus as both narrator and character-creator is a vocal advocate of aristocracy, who favors collegial 'senatorial' government under ultimate divine authority (*Ant.* 4.186, 218, 220, 222, 255, 324; 5.15, etc.). Only God has the perfection needed to be absolute monarch. Josephus does not present this as merely his own view, but fathers it on Moses (4.223) and the prophet Samuel, skilfully massaging the biblical story (6.36; cf. 6.84, 268; 11.111; 20.229). Although he is speaking of the Judean constitution, the fact that he invites his Roman audience to consider whether this is not the best constitution of all, modelled on the very laws of nature (1.14–25), suggests that he is not speaking parochially.

Second, one of the two problems that Josephus, reflecting a long history of Greek political reflection (cf. Herodotus 3.80.3–4), identifies as fatal to human monarchy is the inevitable descent of kingship into tyranny—the ultimate scare-word of Hellenistic-Roman politics. Cognates of *tyranny* appear 130 times in his narratives. The tyrant prototype is Noah's great-grandson Nimrod, who tries to make the people dependent on him rather than God (*Ant.* 1.114). But *all* kings, Samuel warns, eventually enslave their populations and consider everyone's property their own (*Ant.* 6.40–44). Other tyrants appear along the way, but Saul as first king becomes the prime exhibit: with no curbs on his power, Saul acts with "brazenness, recklessness, and contempt for things human and even divine" (*Ant.* 6.264–268).

Two thirds of the tyranny words in *Judean Antiquities* are reserved for Books 14 through 19, which intertwine the reign of King Herod (e.g., 14.165; 16.1–4, 395–404) and his successors in Judea with Roman politics, especially in the person of Gaius Caligula (*Ant.* 18–19). It is characteristic of Herod, Tiberius, and Gaius alike that they terrorize the nobility in order to seize property (*Ant.* 17.307–308; 18.226; 19.2). Most impressive is the speech that Josephus writes for Cn. Sentius Saturninus, consul in 41 C.E., following the assassination of Gaius (*Ant.* 19.167–184). Roman nobleman and Judean narrator agree that the tyranny from which they have just been delivered did not begin with Gaius; it stretches back to Julius Caesar and *all the regimes since* (*Ant.* 19.172–173, 187). The distinguished Senator also agrees with his script-writer in appealing for a restored aristocracy with collegial senatorial power, as the only viable constitution (*Ant.* 19.178).

This extraordinary treatment of the entire Principate as a tyranny *in principle*, with no exemption even for Augustus, is complemented by Josephus's handling of the other problem with monarchy: succession. Through the examples of Gideon's, Eli's, Samuel's, and John Hyrcanus's sons (*Ant.* 5.234, 338–339; 6.33–36; 13.300–301), *Judean Antiquities* makes the point that heirs rarely match their virtuous fathers. Again on this

issue, Josephus blends the story of Herod with that of Rome's rulers to devastating effect. Herod obsesses over his personal succession, changing his will repeatedly and leaving such a mess at his death that his rival heirs (*Ant.* 17.188–189)—unworthy youths grasping after a diadem—must employ orators to make their cases before Augustus and his *consilium* (*Ant.* 17.219–320; cf. *War* 2.14–100).

The space that Josephus devotes to the Herodian succession hearing in Rome, all but displacing any account of Archelaus's actual reign and including the otherwise pointless information that Augustus's ill-fated daughter Julia, son-in-law Agrippa, and grandson (and adopted heir) Gaius were all present (*Ant.* 17.229; *War* 2.25), could not but remind a Roman audience of the model emperor's own progeny woes. Precisely this problem would eventually put the reluctant Tiberius (another husband of Julia) in power. The debacle of Gaius Caligula's tyranny likewise comes about because of Tiberius's succession problem, which leads him into a superstitious blunder and the elevation of the ghastly young fellow. When Tiberius sees what he has done, with tragic irony he can only warn Gaius in futility about the perils of absolute power (*Ant.* 18.205–223).

When we consider that succession had become the glaring defect of the whole Julio-Claudian line, a flaw that poor Galba tried vainly to remedy (Tacitus, *Hist.* 1.15–16), whereas Vespasian's appeal rested largely on his having a proven heir and a spare (*War* 4.596; Tacitus, *Hist.* 2.77); that Domitian would turn out to be the bad seed of this lot, as Josephus was writing the *Judean Antiquities*; and that it was common practice to criticize current regimes under the guise of other times and persons, it becomes nearly impossible to believe that Josephus and his audiences would not have joined the dots to find in his account of Judean and Roman high politics material for a critique of the Principate.

5.4 Conclusion

There is much that we do not know about Flavian Rome and Josephus's place within it. We have no reason to think that he was an advisor or close friend of the ruling family. Still, if we proceed from what can be reconstructed of Roman book production and look for relevant clues in Josephus's works, we find coherent indications that he produced his work in the normal sort of way. Josephus envisaged and had a local public in Rome, and he wrote for them in the first instance. He expected such audiences not only to get past, but to savour, *Judean War's* opening 264-word period (1.1–6). He wrote for those interested in war, and more generally in *polis* leadership, civil strife, tragedy, cultic pollution and purification, political constitutions, ethnography, laws, and moral philosophy. Although we know little about his first audiences, we may be confident that he had a public in Flavian Rome.

Does it make any difference? Confirming Josephus's Roman literary environment in no way detracts, I must stress, from his importance as a *Judean* historian. On the contrary, from the beginning to the end of his *œuvre*, he wrote self-consciously as Judea's spokesman in Rome, and he nowhere flaunts Roman credentials. Even in asserting his moral standing as a nobleman, he turns to the criteria of his own culture: priestly ancestry and education. Especially because no competing accounts have survived, we shall always need Josephus above all for his account of Judean history. But in order to use evidence, historians need first to understand its nature, form and language. When we seek to understand Josephus's work, to use it for Judean history, it matters that he wrote neither some kind of neutral facts in a vacuum nor in free suspension above the Mediterranean. He chose his material and language first of all as a communicative bridge between his Judean values and those of his Greek-educated public in Flavian Rome.

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