

REVIEW

Zuleika Rodgers (ed.), *Making History. Josephus and Historical Method (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, vol. 110)*, Brill: Leiden – Boston 2007, 471 pp.; ISSN 1384-2161; ISBN 10: 90 04 15008 0; ISBN 13: 978 90 04 15008 9.

For some time now, we have been witnessing a great interest in the work of Josephus Flavius. One expression of this is the series of conferences organized in the past two decades in different academic centers on both sides of the Atlantic. One of them was held in Dublin in September 2004. Its topic was “the methodological encounter between interpretation and history” (p. 2). Participants included philologists, researchers of Judaism, historians, and archaeologists. This diversity in scholarly disciplines represented is reflected in the structure of the published proceedings of the conference which appeared recently released by Brill. The articles in the volume are divided into four thematic groups: 1. *Conceptual frameworks: Ancient and modern* (pp. 25–122); 2. *Josephus’ use of Sources* (pp. 125–191); 3. *Josephus as a Source* (pp. 195–346); 4. *Josephus and Archaeology* (pp. 349–414).

The five contributions included in the first thematic group concentrate on methodological discussions of Josephus’ description and understanding of history and efforts to establish his motives, including emotional ones, in selecting historical material for his works. Although some of those issues have already been the subject of separate analyses, the sheer variety of presented arguments implies that they still attract scholarly attention since a deeper insight into the figure of Josephus Flavius offers a chance for a better understanding and appreciation of his output.

Much space and attention is given to verifying the credibility and reliability of Josephus’ narrative. Not only are respective accounts compared with the knowledge we possess, but efforts are made to define the list of sources used by the Jewish historian and the ways in which he used them for material. This important question is addressed by three contributions: D. R. Schwartz, *Composition and Sources in Antiquities 18: The Case of Pontius Pilate* (pp. 125–146); A. Galimberti, *Josephus and Strabo: The Reasons of Choice* (pp. 147–167); N. Förster, *Geschichtsforschung als Apologie: Josephus und die nicht-griechischen Historiker in Contra Apionem* (pp. 168–191). They clearly suggest that Josephus skillfully used works of other authors especially to corroborate his own point of view. All the same, this peculiar treatment of sources, particularly in the case of now-lost works, foils our attempts to reconstruct their actual content.

To assess the credibility of Josephus’ works and their usefulness to a historian, what matters is not just the origin of the information he cites. Just as important is determining the value of his works as a historical source in its own right. This is attempted by as many as six other contributors who analyze Josephus’ writings for his narrative

language, choice of described social, political, and economic events and religious occurrences: J. W. van Henten, *Noble Death in Josephus: Just Rhetoric?* (pp. 195–218); S. Mason, *Essenes and Lurking Spartans in Josephus' Judean War: from Story to History* (pp. 219–261); G. Haaland, *What Difference does Philosophy Make? The Three Schools as a Rhetorical Device in Josephus* (pp. 262–288); M. H. Jensen, *Josephus and Antipas: A Case Study of Josephus' Narratives on Herod Antipas* (pp. 289–312); S. Rocca, *Josephus and the Psalms of Salomon on Herod's Messianic Aspirations: An Interpretation* (pp. 313–346).

However, the most important test for Josephus' reliability as a historian are archaeological discoveries which allow the most objective verification of the information he provides. For this reason, the articles that make up the part titled *Josephus and Archaeology* are of much interest. K. Atkinson (*Noble Deaths at Gamla and Masada? A Critical Assessment of Josephus' Accounts of Jewish Resistance in Light of Archaeological Discoveries*, pp. 349–371) uses archaeological data to analyze Josephus' story of struggles for Gamla and Masada. The outcome is unfavorable to the Jewish historian; the author argues that the account served propaganda purposes and little else (“... based on the archaeological discoveries from Gamla and Masada, we should not only question the accuracy of Josephus' accounts of noble deaths, but also read his War with a greater degree of skepticism than we have become accustomed. It is clearly a work of historical propaganda that was intended to praise both Jew and Roman alike, as well as its author”) (p. 367). A different perspective at Josephus' account of fighting at Yodfat and Gamla (cf. BJ 3, 145–288, 316–339; 4, 11–53, 62–88) is adopted by M. Aviam (*The Archaeological Illumination of Josephus' Narrative of the Battles at Yodfat and Gamla*, pp. 372–384). He has analyzed information on the geography of both places, descriptions of their fortifications, Roman military technology, and the sequence of events during combat. The archaeological data, the author believes, indicate that Josephus included in his account many details the knowledge of which only befitted a participating witness of the events in question (“... I think that the excavations of Gamla and Yodfat, as well as the survey of Josephus' fortified sites, prove that Josephus was an eye-witness and took some part in the actual organizing of the Galilee. (...) [H]is very detailed narrative of the battle at Yodfat, illuminated by the archaeological finds, strongly suggests that he was there, and probably commanded that battle”) (p. 384). The contribution by Z. Weiss (*Josephus and Archaeology on the Cities of the Galilee*, pp. 385–414) aims at confronting Josephus' description of two cities: Tiberias and Sepphoris prior to the outbreak of the Jewish rebellion against Rome in 66 A.D. with archaeological findings on those sites. Contrary to earlier opinions by different scholars as based on Josephus' description, excavations suggest big differences in the appearance of the two cities. Before 66 A.D., Tiberias owed to Herod Antipas its monumental architecture. In contrast, the urban development of Sepphoris only came after the rebellion.

The volume concludes with an *Appendix* on the reception of Josephus' writings in modern Ireland (G. Hata, *Robert Trail: the First Irish Critic of William Whiston's Translation of Josephus*, pp. 417–435).

All the contributions in the volume focus on evaluating Josephus Flavius as a historian. For this reason, the publication is certain to be interesting to specialists in

ancient Judea as well as in antique historiography in general. In the end, the reader is led to conclude that even a sternly critical opinion of Josephus' credibility is not in any way a denial of his usefulness to historians. Nonetheless, use of his works requires scholars to exercise great caution and to be abreast of findings in a range of disciplines to verify the information provided in them.

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