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Mason, Steve

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Steve Mason

Vespasian's Rise from Civil War in Josephus's *Bellum Judaicum*

scriptores temporum, qui potiente rerum Flauia domo monimenta belli huiusce composuerunt, curam pacis et amorem rei publicae, corruptas in adulationem causas, tradidere. nobis ... aemulatione etiam inuidiaque, ne ab aliis apud Vitellium anteirentur, peruertisse ipsum Vitellium uidentur.

Writers of the times, who composed their accounts of this war while the Flavian house was in power, have handed down the motives—perverted on account of obsequiousness—of “concern for peace” and “love of the republic.” But in our view ... it was from rivalry and a jealous fear that they would be outdone by others in Vitellius’s favor that they overthrew Vitellius himself.

Tac. *Hist.* 2.101.1

With Josephus’s *Bellum Judaicum* we are probably getting as close as we ever can to the “official version” (or one of the “official versions”) of the Flavian accession.

Beard 2003, 556

Between these two reflections, by an ancient and a modern historian of the early Empire, we have the germ of a problem worth exploring: To what extent did Titus Flavius Josephus promote the Flavian myth of origins disdained by Tacitus? As it happens, his *Judaean War* and *Antiquities* are the only surviving histories from Flavian Rome, and *War* was more or less ready for presentation to Vespasian before his death in June of 79 CE.¹ For that reason alone we might assume that Tacitus, who implies that historians could not avoid flattery before Nerva and Trajan (Tac. *Ag.* 2–3; *Hist.* 1.2), included Josephus in the group. Josephus was undeniably a Flavian protégé, having arrived as a new citizen alongside Titus in 71 CE, after the latter’s destruction of his home *polis*, Jerusalem. It is even possible, though not widely agreed upon, that Tacitus knew Josephus’s *War*.²

1 J. *Vit.* 361; *Ap.* 1.50–53. Scholars have often proposed that at least *BJ* 7 came under Titus or Domitian, but the recent trend is to accept Josephus’s plain statements: Jones 2002; Brighton 2009, 33–41; Siggelkow-Berner 2011, 25–33. A neglected point is that *BJ* 1.8 and 1.16 seem to assume that Vespasian and Titus are both alive as Josephus writes.

2 So Rajak 1983, 193. This possibility is doubted because Tac. *Hist.* 5.1–9 (on Judaean origins) differs markedly from Josephus. But ancient historians were never bound to follow a given source, and Tac. *Hist.* 5.10–13 has conspicuous overlaps with *BJ* 5–6; compare especially *Hist.* 5.13 with *BJ* 6.287–315. Tacitus’s friend Suetonius (*Ves.* 4.5–6; 5.6) knew of Josephus. Why not Tacitus?

Although Josephus's thirty surviving volumes deal mainly with Judaeen history, scholars have tended to regard the seven-volume *Judaeen War*, which includes much material on Vespasian and Titus, as the work of their *Gefolgsmann*. The idea is that Josephus was lifted from destroyed Judaea because of his skills in dissimulation and a willingness to concoct omens for rulers who had staked their claim to power on events in his patch.³ How could he, given his circumstances, have been anything other than a court historian? Beard's effort to make lemonade from this lemon—"if we want to understand how any political regime wants itself to be seen, where better to go than to the writings of one of its lackeys?"—would be a sensible way of using Josephus's works if this picture were valid.⁴ But how valid is it?

Our question is about the extent to which this lone surviving Flavian historian, whose fealty has become a byword, lives up to Tacitus's description of a Flavian press corps, so to speak. The jaded senator's own account of Vespasian's motives goes in a different direction. Using his customary palette, Tacitus depicts a tragic psychological drama, a struggle in Vespasian's very soul between his desire for power and his fear of its dangers. Between the regime's image of a heroic rise propelled by love of country and Tacitus's deep skepticism and humanism, where does Josephus's portrait of the conflict between Vespasian and Vitellius fall? The outcome of such an investigation may affect our understanding of both the nature of Josephus's writing (how sophisticated was it?) and the literary life of Flavian Rome in its varied social layers and two languages. After a brief consideration of Josephus's *Judaeen War* and Vespasian's place in it overall, we shall explore the account in Book 4 of the civil war that brought Vespasian to power.

1 Josephus's *Judaeen War*: Aims and Interests

Characterization of Josephus's *Judaeen War* as Flavian propaganda was nearly universal from the early twentieth century until the 1970s or 80s. In those decades Josephus's works were studied chiefly for what lay beneath the text: events, data, and sources, the last of which many hoped to recover bodily. His works were not yet read as coherent compositions, in the way that the "linguistic turn" following

³ Cf. Künzl 1988, 9 (he stood "auf der Seite der Römer und nicht mehr auf der seines Volkes"); Beard 2003, 558 ("besotted with the Flavians"); Itgenshorst 2005, 28–29 (a member of the *Kaiserhaus*); Curran 2007, 77 ("His depiction of Vespasian is adulatory and that of Titus little short of sycophantic").

⁴ Beard 2003, 543.

the Hippie era would recommend. The decisive *data* for understanding Josephus seemed to be: the circumstances in which he wrote, under the gaze of his Flavian masters; his assumed incompetence in Greek learning, hence dependence on regime-supplied literary assistants; a few mildly flattering notices about Vespasian and Titus in the latter half of *Judaeae War*; and mention in its proem of an Aramaic precursor to the Greek work, which Josephus claims to have sent to locales in the Parthian empire (J. *BJ* 1.3, 6). This lost forerunner was then vividly imagined as commissioned propaganda, written from Rome at Flavian direction to warn the Parthians against making trouble—given Jerusalem's fate as an example. If the Greek *War* was more or less a *translation* of this effort, made by the assistants provided, it needed little further explanation: it was simply a translation of the same regime propaganda.⁵

The gradual crumbling of this picture over the past generation and more, in specialist circles, has been due to three factors: re-examination of the supposed data on which it rested, a new interest in Josephus's Greek *Judaeae War* as a composition worth trying to understand, and a parallel concern to make sense of its place in the corpus. Scrutiny of external conditions has rendered it unlikely that Parthia was a threat in the 70s; that it would, in any case, have been dissuaded by the fate of provincial Jerusalem; or that the Flavians would have commissioned an Aramaic history for Parthian rulers well versed in Greek, to make such an obvious (after Corbulo) and lapidary point.⁶

Compositional study of Josephus's *Judaeae War* has fed these doubts. It turns out to be a rich contribution to Greek literature, saturated with classical allusions. It devotes its first and only double-length volume to a tragic history of King Herod, a century before the war or the Flavians. It cannot be the translation of an Aramaic narrative, something Josephus seems to forget about in later accounts of his writing process (*Vit.* 364–67; *Ap.* 1.50–51)—and so that formerly crucial precursor has nearly disappeared from recent research. The Greek work claims instead to be motivated by Josephus's immediate concerns in Flavian Rome and the need to restore Judaea's post-war reputation (*BJ* 1.1–16). His distinctive portraits of Vespasian and Titus, late in the work, are hard to read even as boosterism for the regime, let alone as some kind of deterrent for Parthia.⁷

5 Fundamental were Laqueur 1920, 245–78; Weber 1921, 246 (“prophet of the new Caesar”), 283–84; Thackeray 1929, 3, 15–16, 37–39, 42, 52–53.

6 Rajak 1983, 174–84.

7 Lindner 1972; Rajak 1983; Bilde 1988; Mason 1991; Mason 1994; Rajak 1998; Mason 2003; Mason 2005b; McLaren 2005; Eberhardt 2005, 274–75, 277; Goodman 2007, 445, 452; den Hollander 2014 esp. 188–99.

Finally, a *Judaeen War* written in Flavian service would not explain how Josephus turned so abruptly to writing the *Judaeen Antiquities* and its sequel *Against Apion*, which extol the laws and constitution of his ancient *ethnos*. They have nothing Flavian about them, even though the *magnum opus* was completed under Domitian (*AJ* 20.267; *Vit.* 429). Josephus claims that he had prepared this material for *Judaeen War* but thought better of including it there (*AJ* 1.6–7). Whatever we make of that reflection, research has exposed marked continuities of theme and language from his first work to his last, as well as gaps between Josephus’s *War* and Flavian claims.⁸ Certainly early Christian readers considered Josephus’s *Judaeen War* a thoroughly Jewish work.⁹ Taken together, these kinds of considerations now incline specialists in Josephus to regard his work as part of a coherent literary program from a Judaeen perspective, rather than as commissioned propaganda.

What were Josephus’s aims and themes, then? Given the limited space available here, a glance at the structure and most prominent motifs of his *Judaeen War*, then at the work’s proem, must suffice as context for our passage. As for structure, the passage describing the bloody Roman civil war that brought Vespasian to power (*BJ* 4.491–663) comes just past the half-way point of the work. I have argued elsewhere that *Judaeen War*’s dramatic plot, which obviously reaches a climax with Jerusalem’s destruction in Book 6, is interwoven with a different sort of aesthetic structure, which we might call periodic, concentric, or ring-compositional.¹⁰ That is, the narrative coils itself toward the middle of the work as events tragically align in Jerusalem, and the spindle occupies the middle of the middle volume (*BJ* 4.314–44). There, Jerusalem’s revered aristocratic leaders, the chief priests Ananus II and Jesus, are brutally murdered by politically uncouth, power-seeking interlopers (“tyrants”) who have overrun Jerusalem from regions north and south. With the loss of the city’s virtuous and public-spirited aristocrats, things quickly unravel into the *stasis oikeia* and tyranny anticipated in the preface (*BJ* 1.10). These moves by the “freedom”-spouting men of violence will lead to Jerusalem’s tragic fall.

In that dense middle section, Josephus juxtaposes Rome’s own would-be tyrants after Nero’s death and Galba’s murder—Otho and Vitellius—with the Judaeen strong men. It is worth noting again that the Flavians do not appear in this

⁸ Bilde 1988, 121–22; Rajak 1998.

⁹ Theoph. *Ad Autol.* 3.23; Tert. *Apol.* 19.6 (“champion/vindicator of the Judaeans’ antiquities”); Min. Fel. *Oct.* 33; Clem.Al. *Strom.* 1.21; Origenes, in *Ev.Matt.* 10.17; *Cels.* 1.47; 2.13; Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 3.9.2; Heges. *praef.*

¹⁰ Mason 2016, 94–100.

profoundly Judaeian account until near the halfway point (by word count), in Book 3, where they serve first as foils to Josephus's remarkable generalship, the dominant subject of that volume.

Judaeian War's unifying themes, running from the preface through the end of Book 7, likewise serve Josephus's interests and do not overlap noticeably with imaginable Flavian concerns. Different readers would cluster these currents differently, but I reckon that four can be distinguished, though they often mingle and mix.¹¹ The first stream, flagged in Josephus's promise to counter the humiliation of Judaeians, concerns the character of his people, which is embodied in himself. This interest prompts his frequent references to Judaeian masculine virtue, martial prowess, dogged endurance, resourcefulness, cheerfulness in adversity, and contempt for death. Second is a large array of themes, familiar to any cultured reader, having to do with *polis* management and its challenges: keeping the populace quiescent in the face of outside threats and internal demagoguery, relations between the mother-*polis* and compatriots on the *chōra*, and those between *polis* leaders and unreliable partners in imperial administration. Third, interwoven with these are themes of a markedly tragic hue, as abrupt reversals of fortune bring *tyrannoi* and overweening ambition into play, and the atmosphere becomes heavy with pity, fear, lament, and the language of classical tragedy. Equally inseparable but still distinguishable are, fourth, potent themes related to the holy temple of Jerusalem, its pollution by compatriot bloodshed, and the necessary purgation. The Flavians, their legions, and supporting forces play assigned roles, certainly, but this is hardly a regime product.

Finally, the proem. Our supposed *Rōmīng* opens his *War* with a frontal attack on the jingoistic histories of the conflict currently being composed in the capital. He knows their substance, perhaps by hearing parts of them recited,¹² and implies that his own efforts have already faced harsh criticism, again suggesting the give and take of an oral literary culture (*BJ* 1.1–8, 13–16). Josephus's characterization of those one-sided Roman accounts, by authors who either lacked first-hand knowledge of the Judaeian conflict or were willing to suppress the truth for political advantage, suggests that they propounded the simple Flavian messaging we know from the triumph, coins, and monuments. Namely, under Vespasian and Titus Rome's brave legions justly conquered a hostile nation (*gens*). Josephus charges (*BJ* 1.7):¹³

¹¹ For elaboration of what follows, with references, see Mason 2016, 101–21.

¹² Cf. Lucianus, *Hist. Conscr.* 5–6, 14–15, 19, 23, 24, 29.

¹³ Hart 1952; Mason 2016, 3–59.

They dare to entitle those books “histories,” in which there is nothing sound. ... Although they want to portray the Romans as great, they are always putting down and humiliating the Judaeans side (καταβάλλουσιν δὲ αἰεὶ τὰ Ἰουδαίων καὶ ταπεινοῦσιν).

Although those other accounts are lost, the scene he describes is plausible enough, partly because it reflects human experience across the ages (cf. Allied portraits of a supposedly contemptible Japanese army in World War II) and partly because we have a near-contemporary parallel in the Syrian Lucian’s attack on the ill-informed, regime-flattering nonsense making the rounds in connection with Lucius Verus’s eastern war of the 160s (Lucianus, *Hist. Conscr.* 2, 7, 13, 24). Josephus counters anti-Judaeans misinformation in part by punctuating his narrative with stories of Judaeans courage and contempt for death, often at the expense of the storied legionaries.¹⁴ What, then, does he have to say about Vespasian’s accession?

The old image of a Flavian apparatchik has yielded, as one might expect in the course of scholarly development, to something much more textured. Josephus emerges as a proud Judaeans spokesman, seeking above all to enhance his own status as a master historian and public moralist, whose identity is all tied up with a correct understanding of his ancient *ethnos*. To explore the implications of this for Josephus’s position in relation to the Flavians, scholars have invoked post-colonial theory, Frederick Ahl’s “safe criticism,”¹⁵ double-speak, and irony.¹⁶ A survey of Vespasian’s whole presence in Josephus’s *Judaeans War* will show why these approaches commend themselves. It is not the paean one would expect from the traditional billing.¹⁷

2 Vespasian in Josephus’s *Judaeans War*

Vespasian does not appear in *Judaeans War* until Book 3, and by the end of Book 4 he is leaving for Berytus, Antioch, and Alexandria before finally crossing to Rome (*BJ* 4.620, 630, 656). Whatever we make of his character, then, it hardly dominates the story. The basic narrative of Book 3 is that, upon Vespasian’s arrival at the coastal Roman colony of Ptolemais, just west of Galilee (Nero having dispatched

¹⁴ Mason 2016, 101–6.

¹⁵ Ahl 1984a.

¹⁶ Spilsbury 2003; Barclay 2005; Mason 2005a; Mason 2005b; Barclay 2006. For the often complex positions of proud Greek writers under Roman rule, see Swain 1996.

¹⁷ For the other Flavians see Mason 2016, 121–30.

him from Greece), the region's *polis* leaders rush to welcome him and the Judaeen King Agrippa II, even before Titus has reached him with the Fifteenth Legion from the south (*BJ* 3.1–8, 65). The northern Judaeen capital Sepphoris is prominent in the welcoming committee, and it requests a Roman garrison to supplement the small one left by Cestius Gallus (*BJ* 3.29–30). Even before the Flavians advance into Galilee, therefore, the region has demonstrated a tranquil posture. And as soon as the Flavians move their menacing 60,000-strong army into the area, the army that Josephus claims to have trained for protection of the Galileans instantly vanishes. Vespasian immediately enjoys theater dominance, while Josephus—who has reportedly always known that war with Rome was hopeless, but has done his duty regardless—makes a beeline for King Agrippa's lakeside resort of Tiberias, far from danger, as he says (*BJ* 3.29–34, 59–69, 127–34).

Josephus is able to make himself the star of his Book 3 only because of Vespasian's massive army. In Tiberias he hears that the small town of Iotapata, where he has friends, is in the sights of Vespasian and his marauding soldiers, after their vicious destruction of nearby Gabara in retaliation for the event that had triggered the war: the Judaeen ambush of Cestius's legion as it left the Jerusalem area. Josephus rushes to join the endangered central-Galilean town, apparently in the hope of mediating terms (*BJ* 3.132–34, 141–43). After all, he has recently led a successful diplomatic mission to Nero's court in Rome (*Vit.* 13–16). But when his efforts in Iotapata prove fruitless, he finds himself trapped and unable to flee. Book 3 will now become the story of a contest between two giant generals: Josephus, with nothing but raw resourcefulness, must face down the mighty Vespasian at the head of the world's finest army. Vespasian needs no aggrandizement; everyone in Rome knows of his power. The narrative serves rather to enhance Josephus's image in having the sheer courage and skill to confront him.

The elaborate story of Josephus's surrender to Vespasian continues the battle of wits. In the ways that matter most to his image, Josephus wins—under divine protection. When the legions finally overrun Iotapata, Vespasian sends two tribunes to pledge safety if he will leave his cave (*BJ* 3.344). Certain that this is a lie aimed at exposing him for death, Josephus refuses (*BJ* 3.345). Frustrated that he will not take the bait, Vespasian tries again with the tribune Nicanor, who somehow knows Josephus. Nicanor expatiates on the Romans' innate kindness, while insisting that Vespasian is a huge fan of Josephus's work and can hardly wait to meet him. As he thus lies through his teeth, it is all Nicanor can do to restrain his soldiers from burning the cave with Josephus in it (*BJ* 3.346–51). Josephus, who is obviously right not to trust Vespasian's ploys, still refuses to budge (*BJ* 3.350).

When he finally does move it is not because he thinks that Vespasian will spare him but because God has promised him protection (*BJ* 3.351–54). When he arrives in the Roman camp, his assumptions about Vespasian’s intentions are validated. The Roman commander has not the slightest interest in him, while the enraged legionaries want to lynch the man who has kept them outside Iotapata for over a month. Only a sudden change of heart on the part of Titus inspires others to take pity on the young Judaeen: “Indeed, he [Titus] became the greatest factor with his father in his preservation” (πλείστη δ’ αὐτῷ καὶ παρὰ τῷ πατρὶ μοῖρα σωτηρίας ἐγένετο, *BJ* 3.397).

The surrender story confirms the *Judaeen War*’s picture of Vespasian as a wily and tough commander—and congenital dissembler. This last may be no bad thing for a general, whose success depends on deceit,¹⁸ and in his autobiography, Josephus happily recounts his own tricks, lies, and deceptions.¹⁹ But such concessions to military necessity do not constitute flattery, especially when it comes to casually violating pledges of safety, as Vespasian expects to do at Iotapata. Later in Book 3, Vespasian promises anti-Agrippa rebels in lakeside Taricheae that he will spare their lives if they leave town unarmed. Believing him, they put down their weapons. They are then directed through a cordon of soldiers along the road southward, an hour’s walk to the stadium of Tiberias. There Vespasian orders many of them killed, others sent to Nero for hard labor, in violation of his pledge (*BJ* 3.532–42). Josephus blames Vespasian’s advisors, who in a nod to Thucydides insist that he choose advantage over propriety (λέγοντες καὶ χρῆναι τὸ συμφέρον αἰρεῖσθαι πρὸ τοῦ πρόποντος, *BJ* 3.536). Given that Vespasian elsewhere overrules his advisors with commanding wisdom (e.g., *BJ* 4.366–77), this apparent mitigation may make things worse for the impression made by Josephus’s Vespasian.

Episodes involving Vespasian in Book 4 do nothing to lighten these dark hues. First, he leads his soldiers to “unprecedented disaster” in a rash assault on nature’s fortress-town, Gamala, a situation that Titus must salvage after the loss of many legionaries (*BJ* 4.20–53, 39, 70). Later, on a trip to the famed Dead Sea (Lake Asphaltites), Vespasian orders certain men who cannot swim to be dropped in its deepest part, with their hands cuffed, to test the lake’s reputed buoyancy (*BJ* 4.476–77). They float, happily, although the reader has the feeling that Vespasian would have enjoyed himself as much either way. The story of his bid for imperial power, our focus below, concludes this volume and marks his departure from the Judaeen theater.

¹⁸ Cf. the Flavian work on *Stratagems* by Frontinus, with König in this volume.

¹⁹ E.g., *Vit.* 22, 39, 71, 128–30, 141, 148, 163, 168–69, 175–76, 263, 273–74, 282, 287–91, 377–80.

Vespasian is thus used to enhance the image of Josephus and the Judaeans. This becomes clear in *BJ* 4.87–91, as Vespasian sends his legions to winter quarters for several months, between subduing Galilee and invading Judaea. He recognizes the need for intensive athletic training because “He reckoned the high spirits and daring of the [Judaeans] men difficult to overcome even without the walls [of Jerusalem]” (*BJ* 4.91). Second, after deciding to bid for imperial power and moving up to Berytus, Vespasian finally releases his prisoner Josephus from chains (*BJ* 4.622–29). Our man has been manacled for two years because Vespasian had spared him only at Titus’s insistence and never trusted him, as Josephus repeats (*BJ* 4.625). Now that Vespasian is planning to seize power, however, he sees the wisdom in rewarding all his omen-producers and so decides to release Josephus. Josephus makes it clear that this is only a long-delayed recognition of Josephus’s courage (in giving Vespasian such a hard time outside Iotapata, then predicting his rise while Nero was still emperor), his “trustworthy knowledge of things to come,” and his status as “minister of the voice of God.” The passage is about the virtues of Josephus, not Vespasian.

Vespasian will appear again in the *Judaeans War*, as emperor but still displaying his familiar character traits. He will decline the separate triumph offered him by the Senate in order to take first position in Titus’s event for the destruction of Jerusalem. This is a more spectacular achievement than anything Vespasian accomplished in southern Syria, and their joint parade (as Domitian’s later Arch of Titus) will feature the temple furnishings as the war’s foreign spoils. These too, from Titus’s victory, Vespasian covets. After the triumph, he will divide them between his palace and, after 75 CE, the new Flavian Forum and Temple to Pax (*BJ* 7.121, 148, 152, 158, 161–62).

Josephus thus presents Vespasian overall as a tough, shrewd, and usually effective general. His odder behavior passes without overt criticism, any potential for censure being left between the lines. It is nevertheless difficult to find anything approaching adulation. Vespasian looks realistically human and unique: certainly a great man favored by fortune, but hardly the object of panegyric.

3 Josephus on the Civil War and Vespasian’s Rise

As we turn now to Josephus’s account of Vespasian’s rise, my proposal *in nuce* is that Josephus’s account is much closer to Tacitus’s cool analysis than to a regime-coddling historiography. Although not hostile to Vespasian, of course, Josephus’s narrative serves his interests. Why the Flavians found Josephus’s *Judaeans War* valuable is a question worth exploring elsewhere, but the reason cannot be

that he disseminated their self-image.²⁰ I wish to highlight Josephus's independence from the Flavian program by considering four aspects of his account: its possible implication that Vespasian's victory in civil war—one initiated by him—was his decisive military achievement; Josephus's assimilation of Vespasian's story to the civil strife among Judaeen tyrants; his redating of crucial events in the Flavian calendar; and, coming full circle, his analysis of Vespasian's motives for initiating the war with Vitellius.

3.1 Vespasian as Initiator of—and Victor in—*Bellum Ciuile*

The mere fact that Josephus includes the pre-Flavian civil war, while downplaying any threat to Rome from Judaea, seems an index of his independence. Classical literature everywhere laments the blight of civil or compatriot discord.²¹ This is the principle adduced by Dionysius to justify his preference for Herodotus as master historian over the lauded Thucydides: Thucydides, he grumbles, chose shameful inner-Greek warfare as his subject (D.H. *Pomp.* 3).

In Rome, everyone knew that civil strife had plagued the late Republic and early Empire, but the public preferred to hear about victories over foreigners.²² Carsten Lange has effectively challenged the perception that Romans programmatically excluded hints of civil strife from memorializations of successful wars.²³ But he does not deny the odium that attached to initiating a civil war, as distinct from ending one, or the general desirability of harnessing civil strife to a nobler foreign conflict.²⁴ Near the end of his life Augustus mentioned his suppression of domestic conflicts to illustrate his justice and clemency, albeit in oblique terms

²⁰ See Mason 2016, 129–30.

²¹ On στάσις οἰκεία see Pl. *R.* 5.470c–d; similar phrases are in App. *Mith.* 83.4; *BC* 4.3.14; D.C. 53.8.2. The classic narrative is Th. 3.82–84 (at Corcyra), but the theme is also prominent in Herodotus (Hdt. 1.59.3, 60.2, 150.1; 3.82.3; 5.28.1; 6.109.5); Isoc. *Paneg.* 4.79, 114, 174; Pl. *Lg.* 1.628c, 629c–d; Arist. *Ath.* 5.2–3, 13.1; *Pol.* 1265b; D.S. 9.11.1; 11.72.2, 76.6, 86.3, 87.5; Plu. *Mor.* 16.813a, 32.823f–825b; D.Chr. 1.82; Paus. 3.2.7; 4.18.3. Salient literature includes Lintott 1982; Keitel 1984; Gehrke 1985; Henderson 1998; Price 2001; and on Josephus's usage, Rajak 1983, 91–94; Feldman 1998, 140–48; Mader 2000, 55–103; Mason 2012.

²² See the previous note and Lange 2009, 73–93.

²³ Lange 2009, 73, 79, 93.

²⁴ Lange 2009, 68. Note the careful formulation (my emphasis) concerning Octavian's war, 49: "There can be no doubt that the war, when it finally came, was represented as a foreign war; Octavian successfully avoided starting a civil war. But looking at the chronology and the context of events from 36–32 BC, even if there was an official stress on Cleopatra as the formal enemy, this did not conceal that Actium was at the same time a civil war."

except concerning the murderers of his father Julius Caesar (*RG* 2–3.1, 34.1). His tone in recounting his many salutations as *imperator*, triumphs, and additions of territories to Rome's *imperium*, symbolized by foreign kings humbled before him in triumph, was different altogether (*RG* 4, 15, 21.2–3, 26–33).

The political benefits of using a foreign conflict to distract from suffering at home are obvious. Concerning Octavian's behavior on returning to Rome after defeating Antony and Cleopatra, Cassius Dio says that with all the money he splashed around, “the Romans forgot all their conflicts and viewed his triumph with pleasure—as though the defeated were foreigners all” (ὡς καὶ ἀλλοφύλων ἀπάντων τῶν ἡττηθέντων ὄντων εἶδον, D.C. 51.21.4). Claudius used his invasion of Britain and ensuing triumph (44 CE) to expunge memories of the crisis that had led to Gaius Caligula's recent murder, which had potentially dire implications for his own rule: the remaining consul of 41 CE, Cn. Sentius Saturninus, had demanded a change in the form of government (e.g., Suet. *Cl.* 11). According to Eutropius, Claudius's British campaign allowed him to give Sentius high honors from an easy foreign conquest (Eutr. 7.13.2).

The Flavian situation was clear in this respect. The really devastating war(s) for Romans had begun with the revolts of the ex-consuls Julius Vindex and Sulpicius Galba, early in 68 CE, with the citizen armies under their command. The former was violently blocked by the legions under Verginius Rufus, legate in Germania Superior. Galba succeeded, but his victory attracted the ire of two other senators commanding citizen armies: Vitellius and Otho. The toll of those internal conflicts was so devastating that ancient writers attributed Otho's suicide, following the Battle of Bedriacum, not to irrecoverable defeat but to his refusal to countenance the deaths of more Roman soldiers—more than the alleged 80,000 already taken.²⁵ The six-month struggle that would ensue between Vitellius and Vespasian claimed many thousands more. This internecine war reached the streets of Rome itself, finally setting ablaze the ancient temple to Jupiter Optimus Maximus. The civil wars that brought Vespasian to power obviously mattered more immediately to Romans than whatever was happening in southern Syria.

As everyone knows, nevertheless, the Flavians managed to take their suppression of unrest in the 130-year-old province of Syria, which had dubious claims to meriting a triumph at all,²⁶ and represent it as one of the greatest foreign

²⁵ Suet. *Otho* 9.3; D.C. 64.10.2–3.

²⁶ Judaea had been conquered by Pompey in 64/63 BCE and been under continuous Roman administration since. Even if the period of the revolt (66–70 CE) marked a notional interval of independence, that could hold only for walled Jerusalem. The rest of the region, including all Judaeian centers in Galilee and Peraea, had welcomed Vespasian's arrival and sought peace.

conquests ever, over the whole Eastern Menace.²⁷ The triumph, the Flavians' ambitious building program, and their empire-wide production of celebratory coins grounded their ruling legitimacy in alleged conquest of a foreign *gens*.

What was our Judaeon author up to, then, pulling the skeletons of civil war out of the Flavian closet, during the high season of this jubilation over foreign victory in the seventies? The question is all the more interesting when we recall that Josephus structures his work such that Book 1 gives full attention to Judaea's real Roman conquest by Pompey, in 64–63 BCE. The great general had refrained from seizing temple furnishings, in contrast to the Flavians, who depended on them. Moreover, Pompey's conquest had laid the foundation for 130 years of successful Roman administration, which Josephus's *Judaeon War* describes over successive generations. If I am correct in proposing that Josephus's account of the Flavian triumph has an ironic tone, since the author cannot take seriously the claim that Vespasian and Titus conquered Judaea,²⁸ we must be curious about his handling of Vespasian's conflict with Vitellius in Book 4.

This question becomes yet more interesting if Josephus portrays Vespasian as initiating a civil war against Vitellius. Modern historians tend to think of one civil war after Nero, running continuously from the revolt in spring 68 CE, which Vespasian finally ended. But could we be falling into the classic historian's fallacy of hindsight (or teleological) compression? One problem is how to know when a civil war is truly over. A foreign war is clearly finished when a Carthage, Corinth, or Jerusalem is reduced to rubble and ash, foreign fighters are dead or enslaved, and their leaders have been killed or captured for display. Such definitive endings are not possible in internal conflicts. The homeland cannot be destroyed, and killing some number of internal opponents might only energize those who have been quietly sympathetic. The insidious nature of civil war helps to explain why it is considered such a curse.

That said, Vitellius had good reasons to consider Rome's civil war over, after Otho took his own life on 16 April 69 CE, or at least when the Senate recognized him as sole ruler days later. Vitellius had set out to topple Galba and then the new rival Otho. Since he had prevailed in April 69 and there were no giants left to slay,

Exceptions were smaller sites endangered by Vespasian's marauders that showed resistance (Iotapata and Iapha) or towns recently given to King Agrippa II that opposed him (Tiberias, Taricheae, hence Gamala). The Flavians had encircled Jerusalem by the spring of 68 CE (Vespasian was able to ride up to its walls, even after Simon's forces had entered, in spring 69 CE: *BJ* 4.550–55), though Titus would not besiege the city until after a nearly two-year suspension of the campaign, in 70 CE. See Mason 2016, 292–93.

²⁷ See Mason 2016, 4–43.

²⁸ See Mason 2017.

he had every reason to think it finished. He could begin the task of uniting the empire's legions and their commanders under his leadership. That is what his beautiful coins proclaim: "the concord of the Roman People," "the consensus of all the armies," and even—taking presumptive ownership of Vespasian's campaign—"victory" in the east.²⁹ The tales of his lewd conduct after Otho's demise, whatever their historical merits, incidentally confirm that he no longer considered his army at war. During the three months it took him to reach Rome, he must have believed Rome's internal wars to be over.

He was wrong, of course. Soon after his arrival in Rome he learned of Vespasian's challenge, with the sole support of the eastern armies. But what does this challenge mean? Tacitus describes the period in his *Histories*, beginning from Galba, as including three civil wars (*trina bella ciuilia*), with more external conflicts and most sharing elements of both (*Hist.* 1.2). The first two civil wars appear to be those of Vitellius against Otho and Vespasian against Vitellius. He portrays Vespasian weighing up the prospects of initiating a *bellum* against Vitellius (*Hist.* 2.74), which can mean nothing other than civil war. Suetonius likewise remarks with insouciance that Vespasian, "initiating a civil war" (*suscepto ... ciuili bello*, *Ves.* 7.1), sent commanders and armies to Italy as he seized control of Alexandria. But those authors wrote a generation after the events. More surprising is that it seems impossible to read Josephus's account, composed while Vespasian ruled, any differently. Josephus does not pretend that Vespasian thought there was an existing civil war, in which he should intervene to end. Rather, the upsetting news that Vitellius has risen to supreme power leads him to ponder whether to use his knowledge of how to be governed or of how to govern (καίπερ ἄρχεσθαι καθάπερ ἄρχειν καλῶς ἐπιστάμενον, *BJ* 4.589). Unable to accept Vitellius as master, he launches a civil war against a ruler with no other rivals, duly recognized by the Senate.

It seems no great leap to imagine that Vespasian and Titus maintained such a disciplined focus on Jerusalem for a decade and more, as we see in their constructions and coins, precisely because it was so obvious that Vespasian had come to power by initiating a *bellum ciuile*. Blackening the character of Vitellius, as our sources unanimously do, could only go so far. The safer way to get past the stigma of civil war was to change the conversation, redirecting attention to Vespasian's other role as commander of a proper war against foreigners, in which he personally faced hazards and personal injury on behalf of all Romans.

²⁹ Respectively, from British Museum examples: BM R.6585 (aureus), BM 2011,4133.1 (silver), and BM 1872,0709.466, 1950,1006.972, 1964,0401.4, R.10275 (bronzes).

Interest in Rome's internal power struggles turns out to be characteristic of Josephus. As a matter of principle he favors government by hereditary aristocracy and views monarchy as latent tyranny, even if a given king rules justly, because of the inevitable succession problem.³⁰ Further, the *Judaean War's* opening sentence highlights the disease of Roman domestic strife that followed Nero's demise. It refers explicitly to civil war, which induced "many" to contend for monarchical rule (πολλοὺς μὲν βασιλείᾳν ὁ καιρὸς ἀνέπειθεν), even as soldiers were looking to maximize their profits (*BJ* 1.4–5). The only occurrence of βασιλείᾳν ("contend for sovereignty") outside of this prologue passage is in *BJ* 4.546, describing Vitellius's war against Otho. So we have a programmatic entrée to the civil war after Nero as a matrix for power-seeking among strong men in both Rome and Judaea. *War's* long first volume arrays the powerful men of the late Republic—Pompey, Crassus, Caesar, Cassius, Mark Antony, Octavian—as they cross the Judaean stage in turn, each enjoying his moment in the sun before the next one topples him. Judaea's leaders, notably the wily Antipater and his son King Herod, constantly adapt to this unstable Roman background.

Book 2 devotes a surprising amount of space, in a work on Judaeen history, to affairs in Rome following Gaius's assassination (*BJ* 2.204–14). The standoff between the Praetorian Guard, supporting their chosen monarch Claudius, and the Senate, who demand a return to aristocratic rule, anticipates the volume Josephus will devote to this crisis in *Antiquities* (*AJ* 19). But the *Judaean War's* language already shows that he includes this material with thoughtful purpose, as part of the Rome-Jerusalem dialectic. For he remarks that the Senate, led by the consuls, intended either to re-establish their aristocratic government or to choose a worthy *princeps*. Either way, they "voted to make war on Claudius," though the force at their disposal was negligible (*BJ* 2.204). Claudius replies from the Praetorian camp (*BJ* 2.210):

An area must be pre-arranged outside the *polis* for the *polemos*, for it would not be holy for the sacred precincts of our native land to be polluted by compatriot murder—on account of their bad decision (οὐ γὰρ ὅσιον διὰ τὴν αὐτῶν κακοβουλίαν ὁμοφύλῳ φόνῳ μαινεσθαι τὰ τεμένη τῆς πατρίδος).

Since compatriot slaughter and the pollution of sacred precincts are central themes of Josephus's Judaeen story,³¹ this is no mere filler, nor is its diction arbitrary. An important effect of this dialectic is to puncture the popular post-war

³⁰ Mason 2012.

³¹ Mason 2016, 101–21.

image of the Judaeans as primitives congenitally opposed to Rome.³² Rather, the Judaeans have capable leaders who have long worked with Roman partners, but both nations have faced the scourge of civil conflict.

Near the end of the work, Josephus concludes this thread with his final remark on the triumph, an event ostentatiously about a foreign war. He calmly intrudes on this picture with his reflection: “For on this day the city of Rome held a festival for the victory of its army over [foreign] enemies, the cessation of its internal ills (πέρας δὲ τῶν ἐμφυλίων κακῶν), and the beginning of hopes for happiness” (*BJ* 7.157).

Josephus's *Judaeen War* thus maintains a dialectic between Roman and Jerusalemite internal conflict. Each side has its public-spirited leaders, fickle masses, and self-serving strong men. In place of the Flavian portrait of a rebellious (even previously unconquered) *gens* in the East receiving its just deserts, Josephus presents a complex account of productive amity between the two great nations, tried and tested since the days of Pompey, Augustus, and Herod. In ways understandable to anyone familiar with the sweep of Greek literature, however, our statesman-author charts the tragic internal conflicts that arose in Nero's last days, when established government collapsed and fateful collisions put tyrants at the helm in both centers.

3.2 Judaeen and Roman Civil War—and Their Tyrants

The narrative of particular interest to us, concerning the civil war that brought Vespasian to power, is part of this thematic dialectic. Table 1 shows the constant movement between Rome and Jerusalem. This is not merely for a change of scene. Explicit connectors and transitional passages compel Josephus's audience to bring the two locations into conversation.

³² E.g., “This man, in the bloom of youth, will put an end to fierce war with the nation of Palestine (*fera gentis | bella Palaestinae*)” (*Sil.* 3.605–6).

Tab. 1: *BJ* 4.492–663. Josephus Interweaves Judaeian and Roman Civil War

Rome	Rome/Judaea fused	Judaea
4.492–96: surveys ἐμφύλιος πόλεμος from Nero's death to defeat of Vitellius's legions		
	4.497–501: Vespasian's concern for <i>Rome's</i> civil war; abortive mission of Titus to Galba; Judaeian campaign suspended	
		4.502–44: non-Flavian war in Judaea; rise of Simon bar Giora—at Masada, Judaeian hills, opposition to John and Disciples, devastates Acrabatene and Idumaea, rescues wife from kidnap by Disciples, threatens Jerusalem
4.544–49: <i>stasis</i> and civil war in Rome: struggle between Othonian and Vitellian forces; Otho's suicide; Vitellius enters Rome in force (μετὰ τῆς δυνάμεως)		
		4.550–84: “Meanwhile” Vespasian consolidates hold on Judaea. Simon returns to Jerusalem's walls. Idumaeans mutiny from John's army and join surviving elite, invite Simon, who enters in April 69 CE.
4.585–87: “At about this very time heavy sufferings engulfed Rome.” Galba arrives and turns the capital into an armed camp. His soldiers plunder and kill from unchecked avarice.		
	4.588–629: Vespasian wants to attack wretched Vitellius but is aware of the perils;	

Rome	Rome/Judaea fused	Judaea
	arguments of soldiers; Vespasian feels entitled but balks at risks; is forced by soldiers with swords drawn. Writes to Tiberius Julius Alexander, who secures Alexandria's legions. In Berytus Vespasian frees Josephus.	
4.630–55: Flavian forces in Italy defeat Vitellians; defection of Aelius Caecina; murder of Vespasian's brother; elevation of his son Titus.		4.656–63: Vespasian, in Alexandria, dispatches Titus to Judaea "to take out/destroy Jerusalem" (ἐξαίρησοντα τὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα).

In the large block *BJ* 4.502–44, for example, Josephus connects Roman and Judaean events both chronologically and thematically. At the beginning, he says of Vespasian and Titus (*BJ* 4.502–3):

Being in suspense about the larger events, as Rome's *imperium* was shaken to the core, they looked away from the campaign against Judaeans. Given their fear for their homeland, they considered it the wrong moment for an assault on foreign peoples. But *another war* loomed over Jerusalem. There was a certain Simon son of Giora, a Gerasene by origin: a young man unequal to John (who already controlled the city) in craftiness, but surpassing him in strength of body and audacity.

After elaborating this conflict in Jerusalem between "the tyrants" John and Simon, he opens the next block (in Table 1) with a bridge back to sedition and tyranny in Rome. Whether or not Josephus's audience should have noticed parallels between the older-and-shrewd Galba and more vigorous Otho, on the Roman side, and older-but-cunning John and younger Simon in Judaea, Josephus connects the two conflicts with language such as this (*BJ* 4.545–46):

Stasis and civil war were not only in Judaea but had also come upon Italy. For Galba had been done away with in the middle of the Roman Forum, and as Otho was designated *imperator* he was at war with Vitellius, who was contending for royal power, for the legions in Germany had elevated him.

Josephus does not spell out the chronology that supports his narrative moves, though the Roman side was presumably fresh in his audience's mind. After describing the contest between Otho and Vitellius (January–April 69 CE), he gives the lunar month of Xanthicus (March/April) of 69 CE as the time of Simon bar Giora's entry into Jerusalem and the onset of extreme violence there. Greek-speaking audiences might have noticed that this coincided with the victory of Vitellius and his nervous-making approach to Rome.³³ In each capital, the arrival of the usurper with unruly forces from elsewhere brings turmoil and pollution to the sacred *polis*.

I am not suggesting that Josephus matches the two sides, person for person, in any precise or allegorical way. It is a matter of atmosphere and evocation: such tyrants all share certain traits and behaviors. Most striking are their indulgence, lack of masculine self-control, and effeminacy.³⁴ For example, Vitellius attracts the only two occurrences of the noun *λαγνεία* in Josephus, a graphic word (“semen”) used metonymically here for power-lust (*BJ* 4.596, 652). Josephus remarks of this Roman: “If he had survived to a full life-span, I reckon that the Empire itself would have failed to satisfy his *λαγνεία*” (*BJ* 4.652). Consider also these passages:

BJ 4.586–87:

Vitellius was now present from Germany, dragging along with his army a different sort of vast rabble. Being unable to accommodate them in the area marked off for soldiers, he made the whole of Rome into a military camp and filled every house with armed fighters. Seeing the wealth of the Romans with such impressionable eyes, with silver and gold glittering everywhere they looked, these fellows could hardly restrain their desires (τὰς ἐπιθυμίας μόλις κατεῖχον). The result was that they could not be turned from plunder, while they did away with all those who obstructed them.

BJ 4.592–93 [Vespasian's men in Judaea talk amongst themselves]:

Those soldiers in Rome, who are indulging themselves and unable to bear even hearing a rumor of war (τρυφῶντες καὶ μηδ' ἀκούειν πολέμου φήμην ὑπομένοντες), are voting in those whom they want in power and appointing emperors in the hope of profits, whereas we, who have come through so many hardships and are ageing under these helmets, yield

³³ Morgan 2006, 139, 152–53.

³⁴ Cf. Tac. *Hist.* 2.73.1: “Both he himself [Vitellius] and the army, as if they had no rival to fear, with savagery, lust, and rapine indulged fully in foreign behaviors (*saevitia libidine raptu in externos mores proruperant*).”

this authority to those guys. And we do this even though we have someone here among us who is much more worthy of ruling!

BJ 4.651:

Then Vitellius comes out of the palace, drunk and stuffed, having gorged himself from a table for the doomed, as happens in extreme circumstances.

Or compare these remarks about Vitellius and the wild Rhine army with Josephus's picture of John of Gischala and his rustic fighters, newly arrived from Galilee in Jerusalem (*BJ* 4.560–63):

Their longing for plunder was indefatigable, as was their searching of rich people's homes; murder of men and violation of women was their sport. They washed down what they had robbed with blood, and when full they insolently behaved like women: styling their hair and putting on women's clothes, soaking themselves in perfumes and, for a fetching look, applying eyeliner. It was not only the makeup they imitated, however, but also women's passions. With extraordinary wantonness they dreamed up illicit sexual modes. They wallowed about the *polis* as though in a brothel and polluted everything with their impure actions. But while feminizing their faces, they murdered with their right hands. Adopting an unmanly gait, they fell upon men suddenly and became warriors. Bringing out swords from their fancy dyed gowns, they ran through the fellow they happened to meet.

What unites the two civil wars most conspicuously, of course, is that the Flavians end both—Vespasian defeating Vitellius, Titus handling John and Simon.

Gwyn Morgan highlights a chronological problem with Josephus's *BJ* 4.586–87, which is quoted above: namely, Josephus makes the reported actions of Vitellius and his soldiers *in Rome* the cause of Vespasian's decision to enter the fray. But Vitellius could not have reached Rome before Vespasian's acclamation on 1 July 69 CE, which means that Vespasian and his supporters could not have been inspired by reports about Vitellius's behavior in Rome.³⁵

Plainly, Josephus has fused Vespasian's disgust for Vitellius with the man's alleged later behavior in the capital itself. But it is still plausible that Vespasian made his bid for power because of his hatred for Vitellius, in power from mid-April, influenced by reports about him. Vitellius was recognized by the Senate as soon as word of Otho's death in mid-April reached Rome (*Tac. Hist.* 2.50–55). Tacitus claims that his forces, once relieved of war against Otho, began behaving atrociously toward local populations throughout Italy: “robbing and plundering and polluting with violence and lust,” they “plunged with foreign manners into cruelty, sexual crime, and plunder” (*Hist.* 2.56, 73). In Tacitus, this reported

³⁵ Morgan 2006, 182.

behavior frames Vespasian's consideration of his options (*Hist.* 2.74–79) well before Vitellius arrives in Rome (*Hist.* 2.89). Josephus's claim that Vespasian is enraged when he "hears about the troubles in Rome *and* that Vitellius was emperor" (*BJ* 4.588) is not very different, in spite of the chronological error. His audience in Flavian Rome would presumably have overlooked such a compression, although indeed Vespasian's actual motives (now lost to us) may have sprung from older and colder political calculations.

3.3 When and How Did Things Begin?

A different sort of chronological problem is much more consequential. Not only does Josephus inconveniently portray Judaea as a longstanding ally of Rome, against the simple claims of the triumph, and not only does he draw attention to Vespasian's initiation of civil war against Vitellius. Even the basic sequence of events he provides for Vespasian's acclamation differs awkwardly from the authorized version. The Flavians and their pliant Senate antedated Vespasian's *dies imperii* to the calends of July 69 CE, because that was the day on which Egypt's Prefect, Tiberius Julius Alexander, led his two legions in an oath of allegiance to Vespasian, nearly six months before the issue with Vitellius was actually settled in Rome (Suet. *Ves.* 6.3). As always in political fights, early support is remembered and treasured. As Tacitus puts it (*Hist.* 2.79):

initium ferendi ad Vespasianum imperii Alexandriae coeptum, festinante Tiberio Alexandro, qui kalendis Iuliis sacramento eius legiones adedit.

The first step in transferring the *imperium* to Vespasian occurred in Alexandria, where Tiberius Alexander moved quickly and administered the oath of allegiance to his legions on the calends of July.

The official story cherished the Egyptian Prefect's independence of political judgement. Suetonius claims that he was influenced by a straw poll taken among a large detachment of Moesia's legionaries (Suet. *Ves.* 6.3). Looking for a strong leader of consular rank after Otho's death, that force had chosen Vespasian over Vitellius, in turn influenced by comrades who had come from Syria. Tiberius Alexander saw which way the wind was blowing and made the first open declaration for Vespasian, with some confidence of broader legionary support in the East against Vitellius's forces from the West.

However he came to his decision, it was important that Tiberius Alexander be understood to have acted independently, setting off a chain reaction that strengthened Vespasian to confront Vitellius. The convergence of his decision

with the support of Syria's legate Mucianus, the Danubian provinces, and soon Vespasian's own three legions in Judaea,³⁶ distinguished this bid for power from a *coup d'état*. The need for action against Vitellius was supposedly recognized by many independent commanders and senators with armies, and Vespasian humbly accepted the duty thrust upon him. That story would be more or less wrecked if people thought that Vespasian's plan sprang from his personal desires and a conspiracy among his intimates in Judaea.

Enter Josephus. Most inconveniently, his story has Vespasian first acclaimed by the commanders and troops around him in Caesarea (*BJ* 4.588).³⁷ They act from mixed motives, among which their indignation and hopes for personal status and power figure largely (*BJ* 4.602–4, 616–21). This greatly complicates the Flavian story, even as it anticipates the Judaeian author's later assertions about mysterious ancient oracles that had predicted all this even though most of his people did not see it.³⁸ In those later passages, he connects Vespasian's rise with ambiguous ancient scriptures which no scholar has been able to identify, predicting that "someone from their [Judaeian] land would come to rule the inhabited earth" (ἀπὸ τῆς χώρας αὐτῶν τις ἄρξει τῆς οἰκουμένης, *BJ* 6.312–13; cf. 3.352–53).

The alleged prediction is ambiguous indeed. Does it mean that someone from their land will rule or that, from their land, someone will begin his rule? With the great advantage that the oracle does not exist now and perhaps did not then, Josephus insists on the latter reading, "he received the imperium in Judaea" (ἀποδειχθέντος ἐπὶ Ἰουδαίας αὐτοκράτορος, *BJ* 6.313). Although mysterious oracles play no role in the accession story itself, it is reasonable to imagine that, in

36 The legions of Judaea acclaimed Vespasian on 11 July according to Suetonius (*Ves.* 6.3) and on 3 July according to Tacitus (*Hist.* 2.79).

37 Morgan 2006, 178, 182, places Vespasian on Mt. Carmel in May–June of 69 CE, apparently assuming Tacitus's support, for Mucianus's speech and the fateful decision. Tacitus only mentions Carmel, however, in the paragraph following Mucianus's speech, as Vespasian recalls omens in his favor, including one on Mt. Carmel. Tacitus does have them disperse from their meeting place, Mucianus to Antioch and Vespasian to Caesarea (*Hist.* 2.79), but since he does not say where they were, the colony of Berytus (cf. *Hist.* 2.81) seems a more likely meeting place for Vespasian and Mucianus; indeed, that is where Josephus has them meet shortly after Vespasian's acclamation in Caesarea (*BJ* 4.620–21).

38 Nicols 1978, 72–73, with most others who considered Josephus a Flavian mouthpiece, did not explain this departure from crucial Flavian chronology. Weber 1921, 168–69 n. 1, consigned it to a lengthy footnote, suggesting that there was no real problem if one considered the complexity of events in both Caesarea and Alexandria, which must have overlapped. His interest was in the underlying realities and sources rather than in what the text implies, though he conceded that foregrounding the Caesarean acclamation suited Josephus's narrative. Lindner 1972, 65, may have been the first to highlight this important index of Josephus's independence from the Flavians.

having Vespasian acclaimed first in territory the vicinity of Judaea, Josephus was laying the ground for the scriptural link—if he was not also declaring a reality he knew, in spite of Flavian claims.

Whatever Josephus's precise train of thought was, he shatters the official scheme completely when he adds that Vespasian, once he reluctantly yielded to his soldiers' demand that he accept power, immediately understood the strategic importance of Egypt and therefore wrote to Tiberius Alexander to solicit his support, explaining that his army's zeal had forced him to assume the burden of power (*BJ* 4.616–19). When Alexander duly administers the oath of allegiance to Vespasian, therefore, in Josephus's account he does so as the obliging equestrian prefect of a province neighboring the province of a senator who commanded a large army. Any independence of mind or originality has vanished. Vespasian has conscripted him, making him an offer he cannot easily refuse.

3.4 Personal Animus as Motive

The motives that Josephus attributes to Vespasian, finally, suit his dramatic tendencies and “realistic” portrait of the Roman better than does the reported Flavian story of simple virtue saving the Republic from civil war. After Nero's death, Josephus and Tacitus agree, Vespasian and Titus had no reservations about serving the septuagenarian blueblood Galba (*Hist.* 1.10).³⁹ When Galba was murdered in mid-January of 69 CE, however, Vitellius (one cause of his demise) and brash young Otho seemed to the Flavians equally repugnant successors.⁴⁰ Both historians describe Titus's immediate termination of his journey to greet Galba, somewhere around Corinth, when he learned of Galba's lynching; but only Tacitus mentions a popular rumor that Titus had actually been going to Rome in the hope of being adopted by Galba, and only he discloses Titus's internal dialogue on hearing that Galba was dead (*Hist.* 2.1). The young Flavian weighs the

³⁹ Morgan 2006, 177–79, plausibly suggests that Vespasian became unsettled by the lack of communication from Galba, including fear for his position as Nero's man, and that his dispatch of Titus in late 68 CE was calculated to settle the matter. Then again, since Galba only reached Rome in October and Vespasian had to hear that news and respond, Titus's trip (with King Agrippa II, for which see below) is sufficiently explained without deep speculation about Vespasian's worries until then.

⁴⁰ All classes united in thinking that *utrasque impias preces, utraque detestanda uota inter duos, quorum bello solum id scires, deteriorem fore qui uicisset* (“prayers for either would be ungodly, vows for either of these two abominable; in their war, you knew only that the winner would be the worse one,” Tac. *Hist.* 1.50.3).

pros and cons of continuing to greet the new man (who would not thank him for honors he had intended for Galba, and who might turn hostile) or instead turning back (risking offense to the new man, but secure with his father in Caesarea). And although Tacitus mentions that Vespasian had dutifully administered oaths of loyalty in Judaea to Otho and Vitellius, in turn (*Hist.* 1.76; 2.6, 73), in his account Vespasian begins weighing his prospects already from the time of Galba's murder (15 January 69 CE). Titus's decision to return rather than meet Otho or Vitellius, which opens Book 2 of the *Histories*, is a turning point in these calculations, which creates its own momentum (*Hist.* 2.1–7).

Josephus agrees on the basic story. He, however, in having Titus accompanied by the key Flavian ally King Agrippa II, strengthens the impression that their shared purpose was to honor old Galba and receive his orders for Judaea (*BJ* 4.498). The Judaeian king's presence, unmentioned by Tacitus, would undermine popular speculation about Titus's hidden purpose (*Hist.* 2.1). When the pair hear the news of Galba's death, according to Josephus, Agrippa realizes that he must continue to Rome in any case, for he can be nothing other than a loyal allied king, whoever should take power, whereas Titus abruptly turns back to confer with his father (*BJ* 4.501–2). Josephus attributes Titus's decision to an “otherworldly impulse” (κατὰ δαιμόνιον ὄρην), the cause of many fateful developments in this work.⁴¹ Their different choices, and Josephus's notice that both Flavians were “in suspense” given the empire's instability, show that Titus and his father are in a position to influence events, whereas Agrippa is not. Even in Josephus, the Flavians are players in high Roman politics long before Vespasian hears of Vitellius's offensive behavior.

Once Vitellius emerges victorious from the struggle with Otho, however, both historians portray Vespasian as deeply conflicted. According to Tacitus, Vespasian was “at one moment buoyed by hope, at the next pondering the consequences of failure”—death for himself and his two sons, if a bid for power should fail (*Hist.* 2.74). Josephus explores a similar psychological drama, which is all the more vivid here because it is driven by potent personal animosity. He uses a variety of terms to make Vespasian's outrage palpable: the indignation (ἀγανάκτησις, *BJ* 4.589), the overwhelming distress and unbearable torment (περιαλήσας δὲ τῷ πάθει καρτερεῖν τὴν βάσανον, *BJ* 4.590), the anger (θυμός, *BJ* 4.591), the rage (ὄργή, *BJ* 4.591) he experienced in thinking about Vitellius as emperor. Although he would like nothing more than to cross the sea and deal

⁴¹ Aside from our passage (*BJ* 4.501), see *BJ* 1.69, 82, 84, 331, 347, 370, 373, 376, 613; 2.455, 457; 3.341, 485; 4.34, 76, 217, 622, 649; 5.377, 502; 6.59, 252, 296, 303, 429; 7.82, 120, 159, 185, 318. Underlined references are other turning points attributed to uncanny (δαιμόνιος) forces.

with the impudent wretch Vitellius, however, Josephus's Vespasian is paralyzed by three considerations: the distance involved, the supposed winter weather, and the unpredictability of fortune (*BJ* 4.591). These are enough to immobilize him, boiling though his rage is.

Of all the models of the great commander one could imagine, from Achilles to Alexander, Hadrian, or Marcus Aurelius, it would be difficult to find a place for what we today might label a passive-aggressive, tortured soul who rages so impotently, constrained by manifold fears—and practical inconvenience. It is difficult to spot in Josephus's account any hint of transcendent justice, virtue, or self-sacrificing courage for the good of the Republic among Vespasian's motives.

The winter-travel problem is conspicuous because Vespasian could not have heard of Vitellius's April accession before May, after which winter travel was not an issue. He would have sailed and his army would have marched in the most favorable season possible. As for fortune, Josephus's model Polybius had made it a central theme of his work that Rome succeeded because its great leaders were never cowed by fortune's reversals. Virtue and discipline, embodied in the Roman constitution and army, had enabled Romans to overcome fortune's reversals.⁴² Why, then, does Josephus portray Vespasian as such a worry-wart?

Josephus turns his audience's attention to Vespasian's officers and soldiers. They have plans of their own, which serve their interests. They base their claim as much on *their* superiority to Vitellius's Rhine legions as on their commander's advantages over Vitellius. To be sure, they contrast Vespasian's virtue with Vitellius's notorious character, but they quickly turn to practical matters and political calculations. It seems that they think more strategically than their commander. Whereas Vitellius is childless, they reason, Vespasian has both an heir and a spare. His older brother, Flavius Sabinus, is an ex-consul well positioned in Rome, and Vespasian's younger son, Domitian, is on the scene also. If Vespasian does not delay, he will surely swing the many eastern legions, including those in Egypt under Tiberius Alexander (still to act), behind him.

With such considerations, Vespasian's officers convince themselves that they are objectively the best ones to secure imperial rule, under this commander, and that the Senate and people will agree (*BJ* 4.592–600). Without bothering to hear Vespasian's views, right there in Caesarea they proclaim him emperor and demand that he save the endangered empire (καὶ σώζειν τὴν κινδυνεύουσαν ἡγεμονίαν παρεκάλουν, *BJ* 4.601). There are echoes here of the Praetorian Guard's earlier choice of the terrified Claudius, irrespective of his wishes (*BJ* 2.204; *AJ* 19.216–20).

⁴² Plb. 1.1.2, 35.2, 63.9, 64.2; 2.7.1–2, 20.7–8; 3.2.6; 6.2.5–8; 16.28.1; 18.28.4–5; 38.2.1–2.

Tacitus pictures Vespasian calculating his chances and expressing doubts, but the sharp edge of personal animosity toward Vitellius is missing.⁴³ There Vespasian is more calculating. He counts on the support of Mucianus and Syria, the Danubian legions, and Tiberius Alexander, already declared, but still he vacillates between hope and fear because he realizes that failure would be terminal (*Hist.* 2.74). In Tacitus's account, Mucianus speaks for the officers in persuading Vespasian that his prominence and eastern support have already made him a target for Vitellius and so his only option is to try for supreme power (*Hist.* 2.76.2):

torpere ultra et polluendam perdendamque rem publicam relinquere sopor et ignavia uideretur, etiam si tibi quam inhonesta, tam tuta seruitus esset. abiit iam et transuectum est tempus quo posses uideri non cupisse: confugiendum est ad imperium.

Remaining sluggish to the end and abandoning the Republic to violation and ruin seems like laziness and timidity, even if slavery [i.e., submission to Vitellius] could protect you—at the cost of disgrace. The time has already passed when you could still be seen as lacking ambition: *imperium* is your only refuge now.

This is not a million miles from Josephus's treatment of the same events, but the Judean historian brings Vespasian's interests into sharper conflict with those of his soldiers. Josephus has Mucianus speak only later, after the decisive event (*BJ* 4.605, 621), which goes as follows (*BJ* 4.602–4):

His [Vespasian's] mind had certainly been on general affairs for a long time, though definitely without intending that he himself should rule. Although he certainly considered himself worthy by virtue of his accomplishments, he preferred the security that comes with private life to the dangers that attend eminence (προκρίνων δὲ τῶν ἐν λαμπρότητι κινδύνων τὴν ἐν ιδιώταις ἀσφάλειαν). But when he refused, the commanders became all the more insistent, and the soldiers, sword in hand, threatened to do away with him if he should not be willing to live in a worthy manner (ἀναρπεῖν αὐτὸν ἠπέλουν, εἰ μὴ βούλοιτο ζῆν ἀξίως). After expounding to them the many reasons why he was resisting the rule, finally, as he could not persuade them, he yields to the titles.

Josephus's Vespasian is confident that he *deserves* supreme power, then. He is in every way a better man than Vitellius. His reasons for eschewing the throne have little to do with modesty and everything to do with fear. Given the fate of recent holders of supreme power, he unashamedly prefers personal safety. In the end, only his more immediate fear of the blades next to his face makes him abandon

43 Morgan 2006, 182: "There is not one word about the excesses of Vitellius." That is literally true, but surely *polluendam perdendamque* in *Hist.* 2.76.2 glosses Vitellius's regime, while 2.74.1 has Vespasian counting on the eastern army's revulsion at Vitellius's insolent troops.

his preferred inertia. “Forced to shoulder the burden of empire” (*BJ* 4.616), Josephus’s Vespasian might seem like a noble Cincinnatus-like Roman, drafted into public service—an admiring trope. But the accompanying details, supplied by Josephus, of a deeply frustrated, angry man, steaming against Vitellius and yet crippled by fear, do not straightforwardly support the noble image.

Josephus’s audience could not but recall, from near the end of the preceding volume in *War*, a strikingly similar scene. There, it is the author’s own character, as Judaeen general in Galilee, who has been opposing and embarrassing Vespasian and who faces the existential question. At Iotapata, after heroically exhausting all possible avenues of defense for the poor townfolk, Josephus resolves to surrender, now confident of divine support for his admittedly unheroic finale (*BJ* 3.350–54).⁴⁴ His officers, however, draw their swords and demand that he do what is right, alongside them, which by their lights means collective suicide. He can join them voluntarily or their blades will take the decision out of his hands: “they brandished their swords at him and threatened to do away with him, if he should give himself up to the Romans” (*BJ* 3.360). But Josephus’s resolve, unlike Vespasian’s, never wavers. Utterly confident of his purpose, he remains master of the situation and prevails: first by bamboozling them with a philosophical disquisition against suicide (*BJ* 3.361–82), then by using the sheer force of his personality to unman his assailants (*BJ* 3.383–86), and in the last extremity by a cunning deception—“ἐπίνοια did not abandon him” (*BJ* 3.387)—involving the casting of lots to determine the order of death.⁴⁵

I am not suggesting that Josephus intends an overt contrast between himself and Vespasian, to the latter’s detriment. A volume separates the incidents, and one could conceivably justify both men by supposing that in Josephus’s case the soldiers wanted something bad (even if they saw it as virtue), which he rightly refused, whereas Vespasian’s men wanted something virtuous, which he nobly came to accept. Still, Josephus’s account of Vespasian’s decision is not one of undiluted virtue and courage. Vespasian’s hatred of Vitellius is the furnace of rage, but he overcomes his debilitating fear only with the more proximate fear of his officers’ blades. The regime’s image of Vespasian as a supremely tough and fortune-blessed conqueror, motivated solely by heroic love of country and a desire for

⁴⁴ On the episode at Iotapata, see also Hulls in this volume.

⁴⁵ How he rigged this has come down to modern mathematicians as the Josephus Problem (<http://mathworld.wolfram.com/JosephusProblem.html>). Given a circle of 41 persons (*BJ* 3.342) and the rule that every n th must die, where should one stand to be among the last two? Josephus’s description gives no such order, however. One must imagine rather some sleight of hand with the lots (if not actual divine protection).

peace, is at least greatly nuanced by the realistic human portrait painted by their client Josephus.

4 Conclusion

As an external control on the question of how closely Josephus's account of Vespasian's rise to power reflects Flavian interests, I have asked how well it matches Tacitus's characterization of the Flavian historians he knew who had treated the subject. My conclusion is that Josephus's account of this crucial episode in the Flavian story, though obviously different from that of the senator Tacitus in scope and level of detail, resembles it to a surprising degree—surprising, if we consider their very different backgrounds and circumstances, and given that Josephus wrote while Vespasian still lived rather than in the post-Flavian safety enjoyed by Tacitus. Neither of these canny political historians explains Vespasian's bid as motivated by simple love of peace and country. Both write as worldly-wise statesmen, thoroughly familiar with the grubbier hopes and fears that always attend power. Both accounts are skeptical, deeply human, psychologically oriented, and plausible-seeming. Both are therefore quite at odds with the simple images disseminated in the Flavian triumph, coins, and monuments, and the flood of pseudo-historical literature that both writers decry.

