

Sources on the Politics of Judaea in the Fifties CE – A Response to Martin Goodman

At a conference on ‘2 Corinthians and Late Second Temple Judaism’ held in 2009, Martin Goodman criticized the description of Judaeian politics in the decade from 50 to 60 CE – when presumably 2 Corinthians was written – in the standard historical works.¹ Basing themselves on Josephus, they describe the 50s as a time of increasing tension. Goodman cited Emil Schürer’s *History of the Jewish People* as one example, but other important works could be added such as those of Martin Hengel, Mary Smallwood, or Menahem Stern.² For Goodman, Josephus’ description in *Jewish War* is not supported by the events he cites; it is in fact based on his model, Thucydides. Even the more detailed account of *Antiquities* looks like a ‘prelude to destruction’ only in retrospect. Goodman finds this assessment confirmed in Tacitus who in his *Histories* also has little to say on the period, while his *Annals* mention a conflict between Galileans and Samaritans as the only event of political consequence. Otherwise we have no sources to check Josephus, although 2 Corinthians might come in as a suitable source. A similar assessment is given in Goodman’s *Rome and Jerusalem*.³

The ambition of the following study is to address Goodman’s argument on different levels. First, we shall make a comparison between the introductory parts of Thucydides’ *History* and that of his Jewish follower. We shall then study Josephus’ presentation of the decades preceding the revolt in *Jewish War* as compared with *Antiquities*. Next, we shall address some New Testament sources that do in fact illuminate the pre-war period in Judaea and that help us assess Josephus’ description. After that, we put the evidence from the various sources together, offering elements for a sketch of 50–60 CE Judaea including the politics of circumcision. A conclusion will round up this response to Martin Goodman.⁴

¹ M. Goodman, ‘The Politics of the Fifties: Jewish Leadership and the Jews of Corinth in the Time of 2 Corinthians’, in R. Bieringer, E. Nathan, D. Pollefeyt, and P.J. Tomson (eds.), *Second Corinthians in the Perspective of Late Second Temple Judaism* (Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum [CRINT] 14; Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 25–35.

² E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (A new English version revised and edited by G. Vermes, F. Millar, M. Black, and M. Goodman; Edinburgh: Clark, 1973–87), vol. 1 pp. 455–70. E.M. Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule; from Pompey to Diocletian; A Study in Political Relations* (SJLA 20; repr. Leiden: Brill, 1981), pp. 257–84. M. Hengel, *Die Zeloten: Untersuchungen zur jüdischen Freiheitsbewegung in der Zeit von Herodes I bis 70 n. Chr.* (1961, 1976², re-ed. by R. Deines and C.J. Thornton, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), pp. 342–57 = *The Zealots: Investigations into the Jewish Freedom Movement in the Period from Herod I until 70 A.D.* (trans. of the 1976 ed. by D. Smith, Edinburgh: Clark, 1989 and repr.), pp. 343–55. M. Stern, ‘The Period of the Second Temple’, in H.H. Ben-Sasson (ed.), *A History of the Jewish People* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), pp. 185–303, esp. 258–60. M. Sartre, *The Middle East under Rome* (trans. C. Porter and E. Rawlings; Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 113–7.

³ M. Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations* (2007; Penguin, 2008), pp. 412–3. On 1 Cor. see Goodman, ‘Politics of the Fifties’, p. 27.

⁴ I am indebted to the anonymous reviewers of this journal for saving me from various errors and giving me the opportunity to improve my argument considerably. Thanks also to Profs. Jonathan Price and Joshua Schwartz for their helpful advice. Any remaining misjudgments and errors are mine. [This is an accepted manuscript of an article published by the *Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. 68/2, Autumn 2017, pp. 234–59, available from DOI 10.18647/3324/JJSJSJS-2017.]

Thucydides and Josephus' Jewish War

The point for Goodman is that Josephus, writing in post-war hindsight, 'refers quite frequently to matters going from bad to worse',⁵ although the incidents he cites do not support such an interpretation. In this, Goodman thinks, Josephus merely follows the historical rhetoric of Thucydides' introduction to the *History of the Peloponnesian War*:

The teleological thrust of Josephus' narrative in the *Bellum* of events in Judaea was cast very clearly in the mould of Thucydides' history ... Josephus' first line ... echoed directly Thucydides' claims for his own subject. Josephus followed the same master in seeking to delineate those events in the years preceding the war which might help to explain its outbreak – but in place of the fifty years (*pentêkontaetia*) of Thucydides, Josephus substituted the sixty years since the beginning of direct Roman rule over the province. A problem for the historian, however, seems to have been a severe shortage of sources for that history.⁶

What is implied here? In his introduction, Thucydides inserts a description of the period between the defeat of the Persians by the allied forces of Athens and Sparta in 479 BCE and the outbreak of war between the same cities in 431, summing it up as 'spanning about fifty years (ἐν ἔτεσι πεντήκοντα μάλιστα) between the retreat of Xerxes and the beginning of the present war'.⁷ During this episode, called by scholars *pentêkonta-etia* or 50-year period, the power of Athens grew steadily through a series of incidents, until finally Sparta took this as a reason for war. Imitating Thucydides, Goodman means, Josephus presents the 60 years after Judaea became part of the Roman Empire in 6 CE as a period of increasing social tension that finally led to war in 66 CE, although he does not cite the facts to warrant that presentation.

One can only agree that a critical take on Josephus' rhetoric is essential, the more so where he follows existing conventions. The question is what this must imply for his credibility, and how we can assess this. Martin Hengel, while sharply criticizing Josephus' *Tendenz*, did not find his reading of a 'rising tide' inadequate, and neither does Tessa Rajak.⁸ Goodman does, as noted. In a review of earlier scholarship, he attaches particular importance to James McLaren's demonstration of 'the extent to which all histories of Judea in the first century C.E. are trapped into adopting Josephus's historical perspective'.⁹ In McLaren's analysis, Josephus' narrative, our only source, centres on the two axioms 'that Judaea was a place of increasing turmoil and that the revolt was bound to take place'.¹⁰

⁵ Goodman, 'Politics of the Fifties', p. 28; *Rome and Jerusalem*, p. 413 and 612 n. 17. The exact phrase is not found in *J.W.* but in *Ant.* (20:160, 214), where even less of a Thucydidean mould is visible.

⁶ Goodman, 'Politics of the Fifties', p. 27.

⁷ Thucydides, *Hist.* 1.118.2; cf. Thucydides, trans. B. Jowett, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1881), Perseus Digital Library, www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper, accessed 2 July 2017.

⁸ Hengel, *Zealots*, pp. 6–18; cf. his dictum below at n. 20. T. Rajak, *Josephus: The Historian and His Society* (second ed. London: Duckworth, 2004), pp. 9 and 155 on Thucydides as model, pp. 65–103 on the revolt and its causes.

⁹ M. Goodman, 'Current Scholarship on the First Revolt', in A.M. Berlin – J.A. Overman (eds.), *The First Jewish Revolt: Archaeology, History, and Ideology* (2002, repr. London / New York, 2011), pp. 15–24, here 16. References to McLaren also in Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem*, pp. 7–10, 412–3 and 612 n. 18; idem, 'The Politics of the Fifties', 27 n. 18. Nevertheless for M. Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judaea: The Origins of the Jewish revolt against Rome A.D. 66–70* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987 and repr.), p. 19, the likelihood that the castigation of *stasis* in *Jewish War* is 'a reflection of ... Thucydides' is no impediment to treat this as a leading theme in identifying a main cause of the war: the power struggle of the ruling class.

¹⁰ J.S. McLaren, *Turbulent Times? Josephus and Scholarship on Judaea in the First Century C.E.* (Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplements Series 29; Sheffield, 1998), quote p. 18. While noting that 'not one

Recently, a ‘higher scepticism’ has been voiced by Steve Mason. He welcomes the rejection of the rhetoric of ‘a society heading inexorably to its doom’ by historians like Goodman and McLaren, but finds we cannot blame this rhetoric on Josephus either. Rather than describing a steady deterioration of Roman-Jewish relations, Books 1 and 2 of *Jewish War* add up to a ‘chaos of interactions’ under an overlay of ‘tragic irony’ not unlike that of A.J.P. Taylor.¹¹ If that would be all to it – if external sources other than Tacitus do not teach otherwise – we would have to accept this enlightened resignation.

First let us investigate Josephus’ relation to Thucydides. The dependence of *Jewish War* on the ‘father of history’ has long been known; Goodman is among many to note that it is obvious from the first sentence on. Indeed Josephus’ prologue as a whole claims the Thucydidean method, announcing a history that is not based on hearsay (ἄκοή), and that excels not in rhetoric and flattery of the mighty but in ‘historical accuracy’ (τὸ ἀκριβές), and it ends by stating: ‘My work is written for lovers of truth and not to gratify my readers’, thus recalling Thucydides’ famous ambition to have composed his history ‘not as an essay which is to win the applause of the moment, but as a possession for all time’.¹²

In light of that, an interesting exchange with Thucydides occurs when Josephus states in his prologue that narrating the ‘ancient history’ (ἀρχαιολογεῖν) of the Jews would be both out of place and unnecessary, since many already have undertaken this task (*J.W.* 1:17). One hears an allusion to Thucydides, who not only describes the 50 year period leading up to the Peloponnesian war, but preceding that also gives a review of τὰ παλαιά, the ‘ancient history’ of the Greeks, at the very beginning of Book 1. It is a succinct survey which he says he culled from Homer and other poets and chroniclers – sources drifting into the legendary (τὸ μυθῶδες) that the common people will uncritically believe, but from which he has derived conclusions the intelligent reader will find to be sound.¹³ This last clause has often been read as a depreciation of Thucydides’ predecessor Herodotus, who integrated quantities of ‘ethnographic’ material. That view, however, may be seen as based on an idealization of Thucydides’ method.¹⁴ More moderately, intertextual analysis has been found to show that ‘Thucydides offered a creative continuation ... of his predecessor’.¹⁵ In point of fact, having

reconstruction ... is based on ... any other source’ (p. 179), McLaren intends to build his own ‘life raft’ (p. 225 and further) on the very same source. New Testament sources do not come into account (p. 16).

¹¹ S. Mason, ‘Why did Judaeans go to War with Rome in 66-67 CE? Realist-Regional Perspectives’, in P.J. Tomson and J. Schwartz (eds.), *Jews and Christians in the First and Second Centuries: How to write Their History* (CRINT 13; Leiden: Brill, 2014, pp. 126–206) 129 and 163–5.

¹² Josephus, *J.W.* 1:1–2, 30; Thucydides, *Hist.* 1.22. See J.J. Price, ‘Josephus’ First Sentence and the Preface to *J.W.*’, in M. Mor, J. Pastor, I. Ronen, and Y. Ashkenazi (eds.), *For Uriel: Studies in the history of Israel in Antiquity presented to Professor Uriel Rappaport* (Jerusalem, 2005), pp. 131*–44*. Many thanks to Prof. Price for making this study available. G. Mader, *Josephus and the Politics of Historiography: Apologetic and Impression Management in the Bellum Judaicum* (Mnemosyne Sup 205; Leiden, 2000) shows how Josephus uses Thucydidean rhetoric to blame the extremists for the war.

¹³ Thucydides, *Hist.* 1.20–1. In 1.2–20 he explicitly treats τὰ παλαιά (1.3, τὰ ἔτι παλαιότερα), and in 1.89–117, developments immediately preceding the war ἐν ἔτεσι πενήκοντα μάλιστα (118.2).

¹⁴ See A. Momigliano, ‘Some Observations on Causes of War in Ancient Historiography’, (1958) repr. in idem, *Settimo contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico*, vol. 1 (Rome, 1984), pp. 13–27 (also in idem, *Studies in Historiography*, New York, 1966, pp. 112–126); idem, ‘Persian Empire and Greek Freedom’, (1979) repr. in *Settimo contributo*, pp. 61–75. See also the critical analysis of the *pentékontaetia* by E. Badian, ‘Thucydides and the Outbreak of the Peloponnesian War: A Historian’s Brief’, in idem, *From Plataea to Potidaea: Studies in the History and Historiography of the Pentekontaetia* (Baltimore / London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 125–62, 223–36.

¹⁵ Z. Rogkottis, ‘Thucydides and Herodotus, Aspects of Their Intertextual Relationship’, in A. Rengakos and A. Tsakmakis (eds.), *Brill’s Companion to Thucydides* (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2006), pp. 57–86, here 86. Cf. A.

finished his 'ancient history', Thucydides starts the *pentêkontaetia* at the point where Herodotus ended his *Persian War*.

Similarly yet different, Josephus' *Jewish War* picks up where 'ancient' history ends, as is explicit in the prologue (*J.W.* 1:18): 'I shall ... begin my work at the point where the historians of these events and our prophets conclude' – in other words, at the end of biblical history.¹⁶ Thus the *Jewish War* will not contain an 'ancient history' paralleling Thucydides' παλαιά. It will contain something else: 'For the events preceding my lifetime I shall be content with a brief summary,' surveying the immediate prehistory of the Judaeian war. Its outline is given in the continuation of the prologue (*J.W.* 1:19-20): starting with Antiochus Epiphanes and the Maccabean War, 167-164 BCE, it will relate how the Romans were drawn in from 65 BCE on, and finally describe the outbreak of the Jewish war with the defeat of the senatorial legate to the region, Cestius Gallus, in 66 CE. In the extant work, this covers the remainder of Book 1 and all of Book 2. The author himself enters into the narrative at the end of Book 2, when he is appointed commander of the Galilee. This period of actual preparation for war, where Josephus begins to be present as 'Thucydidean' eyewitness, creates an overlap between the summary and the main history (2:568-654). The war effectively begins in Book 3 with the appointment of Vespasian as the Roman commander.

Thus it seems more adequate to see a formal parallel to Thucydides' *pentêkontaetia* in the 233 years covered in *J.W.* 1:31-2:654. To be sure, nowhere is a specific number of years given for this period, nor does it as a whole display a build-up or similar dynamic. Rather, it seems to be a formal demarcation of epochs. On another score, it is interesting that Josephus subsequently decided to compose his *Antiquities*, a veritable 'Archaeology of the Jews' in a much looser and talkative style which has been called 'Herodotean'.¹⁷ The change in genre explains at least part of the differences between *Jewish War* and *Antiquities*. Indeed the distinction between both works will be essential in the analysis that follows.

The years 6–66 CE in Jewish War and Antiquities

If not by way of a formal parallel to Thucydides' *pentêkontaetia*, how does *Jewish War* describe the period from 6 to 66 CE? Doubtless, Goodman and others are correct in stating that it features a rhetoric of growing tension and impending catastrophe.¹⁸ Yet there is something insubstantial and contradictory about it, and Mason does have a good point in speaking of a 'chaos of interactions'. In another respect Goodman, in addition to a lack of supportive evidence, also finds contradiction in Josephus' description, as we shall yet see. The lack of clarity surrounds the main players, Jewish insurgents and Roman administrators, and it appears concentrated right at the beginning of the 60 year period.

Rengakos, 'Thucydides' Narrative: The Epic and Herodotean Heritage', *ibid.* 279-300. See also S. Said, 'Reading Thucydides' *Archaeology* against the Background of Herodotus' Preface', in G. Rechenauer – V. Pothou (eds.), *Thucydides – A Violent Teacher? History and Its Representations* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), pp. 61–77, here 61: 'The model of Herodotus and Thucydides as polar opposites is a thing of the past.'

¹⁶ The interesting implication is that in the tradition Josephus followed, 1 Maccabees was not considered 'biblical history'.

¹⁷ See G.E. Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition; Josephos, Luke, and Apologetic Historiography*, (Suppl NovTest 64; Leiden, 1992), pp. 284–90, referring to Josephus' own clarification in *Ap.* 1:53 and to the mediation of Herodotus' method via Dionysius of Halicarnassus. Cf. discussion by Mader, *Josephus and the Politics of Historiography*, pp. 5–10.

¹⁸ See the summary of the build-up in McLaren, *Turbulent Times?*, pp. 78–107; and the different reading by Mason, 'Why did Judaeans go to War?', pp. 174–90.

Jewish War 2:117 states briefly that in 6 CE, after the deposition of the Herodian king Archelaus, Judaea was brought under direct imperial control when Augustus appointed Coponius as the first prefect of equestrian rank.¹⁹ This is followed (2:118) by an equally succinct statement about Judas the Galilean, ‘a sophist who founded a sect of his own having nothing in common with the others’, and who propagated revolt, refusal of tax to the Emperor, and worship of God alone. These are highly explosive motifs in the perspective of the *War*, but amazingly, Josephus switches to a leisurely explanation about ‘the three sects’ of Jewish ‘philosophy’, leaving it for his readers to guess why all that is necessary if Judas’ sect was such a maverick. After this extremely long digression (2:119–66), he resumes the narrative of events after Archelaus’ deposition, but this time round without a word about Coponius or Judas. Why mention such dangerous motifs in passing, then elaborately expatiate on the three sects, and then continue as though nothing particular has been said?

Martin Hengel has warned us to read Josephus suspiciously, weighing both what he says ‘and what he omits in the light of his own interests’, and similarly Martin Goodman will use Josephus’ own evidence ‘to discover facts that ... he knew well but at which he preferred only to hint’.²⁰ More specifically, Ernst Badian has identified it as one of the tactics of Thucydidean rhetoric when the author mentions facts that contradict his interpretation only when he can either make them serve his aims or cannot omit them because they are too well-known.²¹ In point of fact, ‘Judas the Galilean’ did find mention even in the New Testament, as did the census and the *sicarii* (Luke 2:2; Acts 5:37; 21:38).²² Therefore it seems certain that Judas and his movement figured in Roman military reports,²³ which must have necessitated Josephus to mention it somehow.²⁴

In his commentary on *Jewish War*, Steve Mason observes that the digression on the three sects breathes an ‘exotic demographic atmosphere’, as also that *J. W.* 2:117 – as distinct from *Antiquities* – strangely fails to mention Quirinius, the legate to Syria, which, Mason suggests, may reflect the intention to highlight the incompetence of the prefects ‘as a primary cause of rising tensions’.²⁵ Precisely that suspicion has been pursued by Werner Eck, exposing Josephus’ *Tendenz* to picture the equestrian prefects as incompetent administrators, setting them off from the nobler senatorial legates – doubtless in the interests of the author’s position in Rome vis-à-vis the elite. Especially the suggestion that Florus acted behind the back of the legate, Cestius Gallus, and intentionally ‘fanned the

¹⁹ On administrative organization and nomenclature (including the confusion of *praefectus* and *procurator*) see W. Eck, *Rom und Judaea: Fünf Vorträge zur römischen Herrschaft in Palaestina* (Tria Corda: Jenaer Vorlesungen zu Judentum, Antike und Christentum 2; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007) pp. 24–51; on political and military implications in the early Empire, F. Millar, *The Roman Near East 31 BC – AD 337* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1993) pp. 43–69.

²⁰ Hengel, *Zealots*, p. viii, preface to the second edition. Goodman, *Ruling Class*, p. 20.

²¹ Badian, ‘Thucydides and the Outbreak of the Peloponnesian War’, pp. 128 and 159.

²² On these events, their background, and their dating by Luke see Schürer, *History*, vol. 1, pp. 399–427; Millar, *Roman Near East*, pp. 46–7; J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (Anchor Bible 28; Garden City, 1981–85), pp. 399–417.

²³ Cf. the matter-of-fact report on the crucifixion of Judas’ sons James and Simon by Tiberius Alexander, *Ant.* 20:102; see below. Josephus reveals he had access to *commentarii* of the Roman military in *Life* 342, 358.

²⁴ This likelihood is not considered in Goodman’s suggestion, *Ruling Class*, pp. 95–6 that Josephus could have simply omitted the ‘philosophy’, had he so wished. See below.

²⁵ S. Mason, *Judean War* (vol. 1b of idem, ed., *Flavius Josephus, Translation and Commentary*, Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2008), p. 96: the opening sentence recalls Caesar’s Gallic War; *ibid.* 135, ‘the concluding statement ... consolidates the symmetry of the digression’; *ibid.* 79, Quirinius omitted. These observations seem to find little resonance in Mason’s historical syntheses.

flames of war' (*J.W.* 2:283, 293), violates the political realities of the Empire.²⁶ Similarly, Daniel Schwartz discerns contradictory motives in *Jewish War's* account of Albinus: he was not representative of Rome's actual politics, but neither did the Emperor appoint better prefects. Likewise, the rebels who started the war and brought disaster on all Jews were not representative of Judaism but an outlaw movement beyond the pale of the three legitimate schools.²⁷ In sum, *Jewish War* 'explains' the growth of the conflict by blaming isolated groups and functionaries and obfuscating the involvement of the prime actors.

The less restrained account of *Antiquities* reveals much of what *Jewish War* omits. Curiously, here as well, a digression on the sects is sandwiched between two reports about the change into a province (*Ant.* 18:1–3, 26–9), but it is a much shorter digression (*Ant.* 4–25). It seems as though Josephus is intentionally correcting *Jewish War* at this point. Both reports now contain information on Coponius and on Judas, rather more amply than in *War* at that. And both now present Quirinius, the senatorial legate to Syria also appointed in 6 CE and Coponius' superior, as the chief actor whose first main task was to liquidate Archelaus' estate and organize the census in preparation of the imperial tax levy. Revealingly, we now hear that Judas' movement grew out of the resentment against the census that was widely shared in spite of appeasement efforts by the high priest. Together with a Pharisee called Saddok, Judas founded what Josephus now calls an 'innovative fourth philosophy',²⁸ one that, very different from what we hear in *War*, 'agrees in all other respects with the opinions of the Pharisees', except for its passion for liberty and for serving God alone. And the 'seeds' that Judas and Saddok sowed kept growing and only would need the disastrous policy of Florus (64–66 CE) to bear the fruit of open rebellion (cf. *Ant.* 18:9, 25). Indeed *Ant.* 20:102 registers the crucifixion under Tiberius Alexander (46–48 CE) of James and Simon, two sons of Judas whom Josephus links with their father's revolt against the census of Quirinius.

Thus much more seems to have been going on in the wake of the 6 CE census than Josephus wanted to let on in his *Jewish War*. The direct connection between imperial policy and popular rebellion must have been the last thing he wanted to surprise his Flavian patrons with. Only towards the end, when the last pocket of resistance at Masada remains to be mopped up, does he reveal that the occupants of the fortress belonged to Judas' movement that originated with Quirinius' census and belonged to the core of the revolt (*J.W.* 7:252–255). Such is the contradictory, misleading way in which Josephus handles the rebels, presenting them on the one hand as the real instigators of the war,²⁹ while on the other, sidelining them as insignificant impostors.³⁰

²⁶ W. Eck, 'Die römischen Repräsentanten in Judäa: Provokateure oder Vertreter der römischen Macht?', in M. Popović (ed.), *The Jewish Revolt against Rome: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 154; Leiden: Brill, 2011) pp. 45–68, esp. 62–3.

²⁷ D.R. Schwartz, 'Josephus on Albinus: the Eve of Catastrophe in Changing Retrospect', in Popović, *The Jewish Revolt*, pp. 291–309, here 298–300.

²⁸ On the phrase φιλοσοφία ἐπίσακτος and the political implications of Judas' movement see P.W. van der Horst, 'Philosophia epeisaktos: Some Notes on Josephus, A.J. 18.9', in Popović, *The Jewish Revolt*, pp. 311–22.

²⁹ See especially H.W. Attridge, 'Josephus and His Works', in M.E. Stone (ed.), *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period* (CRINT 2.2; Assen – Philadelphia: Van Gorcum – Fortress, 1984, 185–232), pp. 196–200.

³⁰ Thus also Mader, *Josephus*, esp. p. 12 n. 40. Cf. F. Parente, 'Flavius Josephus' Account of the Anti-Roman Riots Preceding the 66–70 War, and its Relevance for the Reconstruction of Jewish Eschatology during the First Century A.D.', *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 16–17 (1984–85) pp. 183–205, here 191–196. Mason, *Judean War*, p. 81 notes that Josephus elsewhere links Judas' descendants together but does not in *J.W.* 2:118, but concludes that they actually were insignificant. Similarly M.A. Brighton, *The Sicarii in Josephus's Judean War: Rhetorical Analysis and Historical Observations*, (Early Judaism and Its Literature 27; Atlanta: SBL, 2009) maintains on the sole basis of *Jewish War* that the phrase 'sicarii' is a mere rhetorical ploy of Josephus.

The contradictoriness of Josephus' descriptions is duly noted by Martin Goodman in his study on the role of the Judaeen ruling class in the revolt, with the suspicion that Josephus is withholding important information about the movement: 'At times he wants to state that this philosophy had a massive influence..., while at other times he strives to push it to the margins of Jewish beliefs.' Goodman sees two ways to explain this. Either 'Josephus invented the Fourth Philosophy as a device to push to the margins what was in fact a much more widespread tendency among first-century Jews...' Or, Goodman's preferred option, Josephus did not invent the 'philosophy' but greatly exaggerated its significance, while actually it was 'of marginal effect in the increasingly violent confrontations in Judaea'.³¹ The latter interpretation ties in with Goodman's overall view that the revolt was not caused by an increasing deterioration of Jewish-Roman relations, but by a phenomenon Josephus tried to dissimulate at any price: the power struggle within his own class, the ruling elite in Judaea. We have noted that while this dissimulation strategy is evident in *Jewish War*, it is not in *Antiquities*. There, Josephus openly states the fourth philosophy's proximity to the Pharisees, by now his professed affiliation, and he also reveals the philosophy's rise in connection with the census. This suggests a third possible explanation, namely that indeed Josephus did not invent the fourth philosophy, nor that it was marginal, but that on the contrary it had such resonance that the apologetic aims of *Jewish War* required him to marginalize it as much as its notoriety among the Romans would allow,³² dissimulating the implication of his own class at the cost of the 'extremists'. The evidence of sources external to Josephus will help us assess the adequacy of that interpretation.

The Evidence of Galatians, Romans, and Acts

We recall Goodman's remark that lack of external sources makes it impossible to verify Josephus' rhetoric, although 2 Corinthians could be such a possible source. That letter, as it happens, does not contain information on the situation in Judaea. Two other letters of Paul's do, Galatians and Romans. In addition, the narrative of Acts, although certainly post-70 and rather contemporaneous with Josephus' *Antiquities*, is a useful auxiliary source.³³ Analysis of these documents involves much discussion of circumcision, a topic whose political implications will be addressed towards the end of this paper.

Galatians is exceptional among Paul's letters in that the exordium (Gal. 1:6–12), which follows the salutation (1:1–5), skips the usual flattering phrases of thanksgiving and bursts forward with bitter reproach. Thus at the beginning and end of his letter, the apostle denounces those who preach 'a different gospel' insisting on circumcision of non-Jewish believers (1:6; 6:12). His own gospel assumes non-Jews to believe in Jesus *without* keeping the Jewish law and getting circumcised. Circumcision is a possible option, but it involves the obligation 'to keep the whole law' and does not bring one closer to Christ (5:2–3), for 'in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything' (5:6; cf. 3:28; 6:15). Paul affirms that this 'gospel for the uncircumcised' propagated by himself and Barnabas was recognized at a meeting in Jerusalem, along with the 'gospel for the circumcised' entrusted to Peter (2:7). According to the agreement of the apostles, both 'gospels' or

³¹ Goodman, *Ruling Class*, pp. 93–7. Basically the same interpretation is given in Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem*, 414–5.

³² See above nn. 22–4 on the probability that the Romans were aware of the risk of the 'philosophy'.

³³ Hengel, *Zealots*, p. 22 considers the New Testament a modest 'secondary source'. Similarly, without saying so much, Millar, *Roman Near East*, repeatedly draws on Acts and Luke.

‘apostolates’ (cf. 2:8) presupposed mutual respect and refraining from meddling in each other’s business. If we want to understand Paul, it is extremely important to note that he distinguished this apostolically acknowledged ‘gospel for the circumcised’ from the ‘different gospel’ that stressed circumcision of male non-Jewish believers.

But apparently there was confusion, and clarification of Paul’s position vis-à-vis the apostles was called for. This is what the first two chapters of the letter set out to do. In result, Gal. 1:13–2:21 contains rare first-hand information on Paul’s career as apostle travelling between Jerusalem and the diaspora. To be sure, the account spills over into the main argument of the letter (cf. 2:15–21),³⁴ and it must be read critically from that point of view. Just so, Paul’s account features a number of successive episodes that relate to events in Judaea. Judging from its place in the ensemble of Paul’s letters, Galatians was probably written in the mid-50s CE.³⁵ Let us study its different parts taking our departure from Hans-Dieter Betz’s rhetorical analysis of the contents, adding tentative datings.³⁶

- Gal. 1:1–5 *Epistolary prescript*: salutation.
- 1:6–11 *Exordium*: rhetorical statement of the cause of the letter, ‘the present state of the Galatian churches’, and an attack on their change of position or ‘desertion’: the Galatians have given in to ‘a different gospel’ (ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον).
- 1:12–2:14 *Narratio*: ‘statement of facts’: the origin of Paul’s gospel, his career as an apostle, and his relationship with the Jerusalem church. It summarizes five episodes preceding the letter:
- 1:12–4. Paul’s ‘earlier life in Judaism’: ‘I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it; I advanced in Judaism beyond many contemporaries, being exceedingly zealous (περισσοτέρως ζηλωτής ὑπάρχων) for the traditions of my ancestors.’
- 1:15–20. After his conversion (± 32 CE) by the ‘revelation of God’s Son’ and his calling ‘to proclaim Him among the gentiles’, he stays for three years in Arabia and Damascus. After that (± 35 CE), he stays two weeks in Jerusalem, ‘meeting with Cephas’ and only once seeing ‘James, the brother of the Lord’.
- 1:21–4. Then for ‘fourteen years’, Paul preaches and teaches in the churches around Antioch, during which time the churches in Judaea ‘did not see his face’. This work is based on the message that is subsequently approved of in Jerusalem.
- 2:1–10. After that (± 49 CE), Paul goes to Jerusalem with Barnabas to discuss ‘the gospel that I proclaim among the gentiles’. Titus who came along is ‘not compelled to be circumcised’, in spite of the actions of ‘false brothers’ (ψευδαδελφοί). The apostles including James and Cephas (= Peter) see that Paul ‘had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised’; they agree and shake hands. They also ask that Paul and Barnabas ‘remember the poor’ – probably a reference to Paul’s later fund-raising campaign (1 Cor. 16:1–4).

³⁴ See summary of discussion in H.-D. Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches of Galatia* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia, 1979), p. 113–4.

³⁵ An earlier dating is also proposed, see summaries of discussion by Betz, *Galatians*, pp. 9–12 (opting for 50–55 CE) and Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, (Anchor Bible Ref. Libr.; New York, 1997), pp. 474–7 (mid-50s CE).

³⁶ Betz, *Galatians*. Cf. a similar overview in Ze’ev Safrai and Peter J. Tomson, ‘Paul’s “Collection for the Saints” (2 Cor 8–9) and Financial Support of Leaders in Early Christianity and Judaism’, in Bieringer et al., *Second Corinthians*, pp. 132–220, here 141–3.

2:11–4. Some time later (say 51 CE), Cephas visits Antioch, where Paul and Barnabas are staying. Jews and gentiles are eating together in church, but when ‘certain people from James’ come along, Cephas and the other Jews and even Barnabas withdraw ‘for fear of those of the circumcision’. Paul publicly reproaches Cephas, asking sarcastically, ‘If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the gentiles to live as Jews (ιουδαϊζειν)?’ The address that ensues is at once the *propositio* of the letter.

- 2:15-21 *Propositio*, summing up facts stated in the preceding and arguments to be discussed in what follows.³⁷ Materially, it is a statement of the gospel Paul and Peter, ‘Jews by birth’, ought to believe in: ‘We know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.’³⁸
- 3:1-4:31 *Probatio*, proofs. ‘Arguments from Scripture’ against imposing the law on gentile Christians.
- 5:1-6:10 *Exhortatio*. Paraenesis structuring the Christian life of freedom.
- 6:11-18 *Epistolary postscript*, ‘See with what large letters I am writing you now myself.’ This is the authorial present rendered by the epistolary aorist ἔγραψα, Paul summing up the letter he has dictated in his postscript, ± 55 CE: ‘Those who want to compel you to be circumcised (are trying to escape) persecution for the cross of Christ.’ Betz: ‘Seen as a rhetorical figure, the *peroratio* ... should be employed as the hermeneutical key to the intentions of the Apostle.’³⁹

Now if we read the successive episodes of Paul’s life mentioned in the *narratio* plus the authorial present of the letter in relation to events in Judaea, we can distinguish four consecutive stages. (1) In the early 30s CE, Paul’s career began as a young Jew being more ‘zealous’ for the ancestral traditions than many others and persecuting the followers of Jesus. We are not informed about a particular ‘school’ he belonged to, but it is implied that at that time many less radical Jews were also around in Judaea. After his conversion to the Jesus movement, Paul worked for three years in Syria and, after a short visit in Jerusalem, another fourteen years in Asia Minor. Nothing particular is reported about the message he preached. (2) In the late 40s CE Paul makes another visit to Jerusalem to discuss his gospel with the other apostles. Now, an issue about circumcision of gentile believers is stirred up by ‘false brothers’, but this is not forced on Paul’s non-Jewish companion Titus. The apostles agree that the ‘gospel for the circumcised’ ran by Cephas/Peter should co-exist side by side with the one ‘for the uncircumcised’ supervised by Paul and Barnabas. (3) Some years later however, say in the early 50s, Peter is on visit in the Antioch church where Paul and Barnabas are staying; Jews and gentiles are eating together. Then some people come ‘from James’, i.e. from Jerusalem, and all Jews including Cephas and Barnabas start avoiding table-fellowship with non-Jewish believers, evidently giving in to some more radical message. Paul publicly upbraids Cephas, the consequences of which are not registered. (4) Finally, in the authorial present of the letter in the mid-fifties CE, Paul is shocked that the Galatians have given in to ‘a different gospel’ insisting on circumcision of male gentile believers. Those who preach this message are themselves exposed to pressure and even to ‘persecution’. It is not

³⁷ Betz, *Galatians*, p. 114.

³⁸ Betz, *Galatians*, p. 115: Paul ‘sets forth a “self-definition” of Jewish Christians, beginning by considering them, including Paul himself, as Jews.’ Paul continues to consider himself a Jew, see Rom 3:1f.

³⁹ Betz, *Galatians*, p. 313f. For the ancient convention of handwritten postscripts see *ibid.* 312. On the aorist see also Safrai and Tomson, ‘Paul’s Collection’, p. 143f.

clear where they come from, but the frequent mention of Jerusalem along with Peter and James makes that a likely provenance.

In short, the rhetorical structure of Galatians seems to reflect a progressive development in Judaea and the Jerusalem church: from a mixed situation of greater and lesser 'zeal for the law' in the early 30s, via an exacerbation of the debate about circumcision in the late 40s, on to an urge for separation from non-Jews by the early 50s, until we finally reach the situation Paul is facing in Galatia during the mid-fifties, namely, that of Christian emissaries who are pressurized to force circumcision on non-Jewish believers. The pressure most probably also originated from Jerusalem.

The impression of increasing 'zeal for the law' in Jerusalem is reinforced by the end of Romans. Here, Paul writes that he is underway carrying the proceeds of his collection for 'the poor among the saints in Jerusalem', that is, a fundraising campaign for the treasury of the Jerusalem church. Paul beseeches the Christians in Rome to pray 'that I may be rescued from the obstinate (*ἀπειθούντων*) in Judaea, and that my ministry to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints' (Rom. 15:30–1). Thus this letter, written probably around 58 CE, in one breath utters Paul's acute apprehension that non-Christian radicals endanger his life and that his collection, a 'ministry of the gentiles', not be accepted by the leaders of the Jerusalem church. It appears that in Jerusalem, three years on, the trending zeal for the law and separation from gentiles that we have read from Galatians has aggravated still more.

A similar development can be read from Acts. The relationship between Acts and Paul is classically disputed. One of the nagging questions is why the author of Acts never betrays knowledge of the Pauline letters; another concerns the contradictions between the descriptions of the apostles' meeting in Acts 15 and Gal. 2. However, we need not enter in those discussions. On the contrary, they encourage us to treat Acts as a source independent from Paul's letters, even if its Pauline colouring is obvious.

The narrative of Acts has felicitously been described as *dramatische Episodenstil*: instead of a continuous history, it offers successive vignettes.⁴⁰ (a) Paul's activities as an apostle are described from the end of chapter 11 on. He stays in Antioch, teaching for a year along with Barnabas. The only detail added concerns prophets from Jerusalem who announce a famine and financial help raised by the Antiochene church, which is said to have happened 'under Claudius' (Acts 11:28, cf. *Ant.* 20:51–53). There is no impression of problems between Jews and non-Jews. (b) This changes in chapter 15, in the precise formulation of the author: 'Some people coming from Judaea wanted to teach the brethren, "If you do not get circumcised according to the rite of Moses, you cannot be saved"' (Acts 15:1). Paul and Barnabas strongly disagree and go to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the apostles. Again, the author carefully notes that during that discussion, 'some from the sect of Pharisees who had come to believe stood up and said that (the gentiles) must be circumcised and taught to keep the law of Moses' (15:5). The apostles led by Peter and James do not agree, and a compromise is formulated that appears to formalize the status quo: gentile believers must only abstain from foods consecrated to idols, unchastity, and blood (15:29). Clearly, this report of the apostles' meeting differs from Paul's version, but

⁴⁰ E. Plümacher, *Lukas als hellenistischer Schriftsteller, Studien zur Apostelgeschichte* (SUNT 9; Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972). The technique relates to that of 'epitomizing' as defined by C.K. Rothschild, *Luke-Acts and the Rhetoric of History* (WUNT 2.175; Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2004), pp. 231–40, cf. p. 280 (Acts 11:26 certainly qualifies for her definition), 285–6. The narrative analysis by J.D. Garroay, 'The Pharisee Heresy: Circumcision for Gentiles in the Acts of the Apostles', *New Testament Studies* 60 (2014), pp. 20–36 breathes a measure of historical scepticism.

that proves our point: it is based on other sources. (c) The next stage occurs in Acts 21. It is years later when Paul again arrives in Jerusalem. James informs him about ‘the thousands of Jews who have come to believe and who are zealous for the law’ (21:20). At James’ suggestion, Paul partakes in a temple ritual but is arrested by fanatic Jews from Asia Minor accusing him of teaching neglect of the law and polluting the temple by bringing in gentiles (21:28). Paul is imprisoned by the Romans and led first before Felix, then, two years later, before Festus who has succeeded Felix (24:27), which brings us to 60 CE. Significantly, the commander who first interrogates Paul asks him whether he is not ‘the Egyptian who some time ago led four thousand *sicarii* into the desert’ (21:38) – events reported in more detail by Josephus who dates them to the mid-50s under Felix (*J.W.* 2:254-263).

Thus the episodic history of Acts narrates three stages of development in Jerusalem and Antioch: from a situation of unproblematic relations between Jews and non-Jews in the churches during the 40s, via one of exacerbated discussions about the need for gentile Christians to keep the law, likely during the early 50s, to a polarized situation in the late 50s with thousands of Jewish believers who are zealous for the law and oppose Paul’s mission to the non-Jews. In other words, the Acts story roughly parallels Paul’s *narratio* in Galatians supplemented by the details in Romans. In combination, these sources testify to the rise of a movement in Judaea and Jerusalem stressing separation from gentiles and zeal for the law. The phenomenon had been around for some time already, as witnessed by Paul’s early career, but started to gain speed from the late 40s and came in full swing in the late 50s.

The combined sources on Judaea in the 50s CE

The New Testament sources reviewed above agree with scattered information in Josephus’ *Jewish War* about a development in Judaea that increasingly made for tension vis-à-vis non-Jews including Romans from the late 40s on, irrespective of any possible parallels with Thucydides’ history. This development certainly did not mean immediate war, but it does account for fuel that would accelerate the fire of war once it would break out by whatever cause. One can speculate why Tacitus does not mention it in his brief chapter summing up the pre-history of the revolt.⁴¹ In any case there is good reason to compare the above results with Josephus’ account in the *Jewish War*, adding also the information from *Antiquities*.⁴²

Some telling details paralleled in Acts and *Jewish War* draw the attention. First of all there are the names of powerful characters: Felix the procurator; Drusilla, his Jewish wife; Bernice, her sister who became a star in Rome as Titus’ consort; and King Agrippa II, brother of the latter two women, who played an important role before and during the war. Then there is the mention in both sources of the *sicarii* and of the Egyptian prophet. Apparently the partially overlapping accounts of Acts and *Jewish War* use similar contemporary sources about an upsurge of unrest under Felix.⁴³ Most important, the three accounts in Galatians,

⁴¹ Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.9. Smallwood, *The Jews*, p. 172 views Tacitus’ little phrase, *sub Tiberio quies* (*Hist.* 5.9.2), as an expression of Rome-centredness. M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1974–84 and repr.) vol. 2, p. 51 takes it to mean only ‘that there were no open rebellions under Tiberius’.

⁴² I have presented the data of Paul, Acts, and Josephus in a three column synopsis in ‘Jewish-Christian Relations in Roman Judaea Before and After the Revolts 66–135 CE’, forthcoming in the proceedings of the conference on *Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity: A Regional Perspective – The First 300 Years*, organized by J. Verheyden and P. Lanfranchi.

⁴³ Compare Acts 24:1-27 and *J.W.* 2:247–66; Acts 25:13–26:32 and *J.W.* 2:220, 271. The theory of Max Krenkel, *Josephus und Lucas: der schriftstellerische Einfluss des jüdischen Geschichtschreibers (sic) auf den christlichen* (Leipzig: Haessel, 1894) that Luke read Josephus is overstated, see Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition*,

Acts, and *Jewish War* show a parallel dynamic: from a period of relative quiet under Fadus and Tiberius Alexander, via beginning trouble under Cumanus, to open violence and unrest under Felix.

The information contained in the less controlled account of *Antiquities* adds detail. We already have seen that contrary to *War*, it unequivocally links the rise of the radical ‘fourth philosophy’ led by Judas the Galilean to the discontent caused by the census in 6 CE, adding that the movement was to stay alive and would strongly contribute to the revolt.⁴⁴ It also tells us of the crucifixion of ‘James and Simon, the sons of Judas the Galilean’ by Tiberius Alexander (46–48 CE).⁴⁵ The energetic performance of this procurator⁴⁶ should not detract us from the obvious, i.e. that he must have detected live insurgence potential in James and Simon. Indeed two of the later leaders of the revolt were Menahem, a third son of Judas, and Eleazar son of Yair, another relative.⁴⁷ The evidence in *Antiquities* gives the impression of a resistance movement that went underground⁴⁸ after a first showdown but kept breeding and re-surfacing until circumstances in the mid-60s occasioned its full deployment – an impression very different from the one we get from reading *Jewish War* only.

Antiquities also records the episode of the prophet Theudas under Tiberius’ predecessor Fadus, 44–46 CE, which is passed over in silence in *War* but mentioned in Acts.⁴⁹ According to Josephus’ information, a large number of people believed Theudas’ prophecy that he would split the river Jordan and make them pass across as did Joshua in the days of yore. But Fadus’ cavalry made short shrift of these scriptural phantasies. Thus when *Jewish War* maintains that Fadus and Tiberius Alexander ‘by abstaining from all interference with the customs of the country kept the nation at peace’ (2:220), this must not be taken to mean that ‘under Tiberius all was quiet’.⁵⁰ Rather, these procurators wisely avoided interference with matters of Jewish cult and ritual while resolutely crushing any signs of revolt.

Not all Roman commanders were so disposed. *War* merely narrates that the next procurator, Felix (52–60 CE), having rounded up large numbers of ‘brigands’, suddenly was faced with a new type of bandits, the *sicarii*, whose Roman designation (cf. *sica*, dagger) may well have originated at that occasion.⁵¹ *Antiquities* revealingly adds that Felix outdid his predecessor Cumanus by hiring the *sicarii* to murder the high priest Jonathan who stood in his way. This information is prefaced by the comment, already quoted, that under Felix, ‘matters were constantly going from bad to worse’, a comment justified by the information given. The murder was left unpunished and this, Josephus suggests, gave the *sicarii* impunity in continuing to sow terror.⁵² To be sure, both *War* and *Antiquities* report that Felix was not squeamish in acting against the ‘impostors and brigands’, crucifying large numbers of them.

365–6 and cf. discussion by H. Schreckenberg, ‘Flavius Josephus und die lukanischen Schriften’, in W. Haubeck and M. Bachmann (eds.), *Wort in der Zeit* (FS K.H. Rengstorf; Leiden: Brill, 1980), pp. 179–209. Many thanks to Prof. Bart Koet for making both works available to me.

⁴⁴ *Ant.* 18:4–10, 23–25.

⁴⁵ *Ant.* 20:101–103.

⁴⁶ Cf. his subsequent military record, *J.W.* 2:493; 4:616; 5:45.

⁴⁷ *J.W.* 2:433, 447. Cf. the pedigree of Judas’ dynasty in Hengel, *Zealots*, p. 332.

⁴⁸ The expression is also used by Hengel, *Zealots*, p. 346.

⁴⁹ *Ant.* 20:97–99, cf. Acts 5:36, Gamaliel’s speech. See Louis Feldman’s note in the Loeb Classical Library edition *ad loc.* and Fitzmyer, *Acts*, pp. 333–4, 339–51 on chronological problems in the Acts version.

⁵⁰ Tacitus’ phrase, also writing from a Roman perspective, see above n. 41.

⁵¹ Hengel, *Zealots*, p. 88.

⁵² *Ant.* 20:160–6; *J.W.* 2:254–7. Contrast *J.W.* 2:256 and *Ant.* 20:165.

But apparently this did not quell the rising tide of violence. According to *Antiquities*, the *sicarii* had grown particularly numerous by the time Festus succeeded Felix in 60 CE.⁵³

Moreover both *Antiquities* and *War* inform us that ‘deceivers and impostors’ of the type of Theudas kept appealing to the multitudes, ‘leading them to the desert’ with promises of miraculous redemption, only to be mercilessly decimated by Felix’s soldiers. One of them was the Egyptian ‘false prophet’ also mentioned in Acts. Josephus in *War* wants us to believe that these were ‘villains with purer hands but more impious intentions’, as distinct from the *sicarii*, but the Roman commander in Acts associates the Egyptian with an army of 4000 *sicarii*.⁵⁴ However we must interpret that, it is clear that in those days, with the desert as a typical ambience, messianic fervour was easily associated with military insurgence. It is a connection Josephus unsuccessfully tried to hush up in *Jewish War*, as we have seen in relation to the ‘fourth philosophy’. For all his efforts to dissimulate its importance behind the colourful ethnographic screen of ‘three Jewish philosophies’, he had to concede that its core message was the religiously motivated refusal, not so remote from many Pharisees and Essenes, ‘to submit to mortal masters beside God’.⁵⁵

Discussion about the significance of these resistance movements has circled particularly around their possible relevance for Jesus and his followers.⁵⁶ Questions debated concern the degree of organization of the ‘fourth philosophy’, the *sicarii*, and the Zealots, and the actual links between them. For our purposes, it will suffice to draw on the careful analysis by Menahem Stern and Jonathan Price, ‘Zealots and Sicarii’.⁵⁷

(1) At least since Quirinius’ census, a movement was around that fiercely resented Roman rule over Judaea and was ready to sacrifice all for a life under God’s exclusive reign. Josephus variously indicates it as ‘fourth philosophy’ and *sicarii*, adding that its roots were in the Galilee and neighbouring Gaulanitis (Golan). New Testament evidence such as the question of ‘paying tax to Caesar’ shows that the issue was in the air in the 20s and 30s CE.⁵⁸ It surfaced in the late 40s, gained much strength under Felix during the later 50s CE, and finally poured with great energy into the revolt.

⁵³ *Ant.* 20:186.

⁵⁴ *J.W.* 2:258–63 (σῆφορ ἕτερον πονηρῶν); *Ant.* 20:167–72; Acts 21:38. Stern stresses the unlikelihood of this connection, see M. Stern and J. Price, ‘Zealots and Sicarii’, in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. M. Berenbaum and F. Skolnik, 2nd ed. vol. 21 (Detroit, 2007, pp. 467–80; online in *Gale Virtual Reference Library*, 13 March 2015), p. 469. What counts here is the rumour itself.

⁵⁵ *J.W.* 2:118, cf. the parallel *Ant.* 18:4–23 on Pharisaic connections. See the more cautious assessment by Goodman, *Ruling Class*, 89–93 and *Rome and Jerusalem*, 415–6.

⁵⁶ In addition to Hengel, *Zealots*, the following works may be mentioned: S.G.F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots: A Study of the Political Factor in Primitive Christianity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967); E. Bammel and C.F.D. Moule (eds.), *Jesus and the Politics of His Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); R.A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

⁵⁷ See also M. Stern, ‘Sicarii and Zealots’, in M. Avi-Yonah – Z. Baras (eds.), *Society and Religion in the Second Temple Period* (vol. 8 of World History of the Jewish People, first series, Ancient Times; Jerusalem: Massada, 1977) 263–301, 404–5; C.T.R. Hayward, Appendix B in Schürer, *History 2*: pp. 598–606. Hengel, *Zealots* contains most of the relevant documentation but generalizes about the link between *sicarii* and Zealots; see Stern’s review in *Journal of Roman Studies* 52 (1962), pp. 258–9 and M. Smith, ‘Zealots and Sicarii, Their Origins and Relation’, *Harvard Theological Review* 64 (1971) pp. 1–19. Recent research is mentioned in J.J. Gibson, *Peter between Jerusalem and Antioch: Peter, James and the Gentiles* (WUNT 2.345; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), pp. 195–213.

⁵⁸ Mark 12:13–7; Matt. 22:15–2; Luke 20:20–6. Luke distinguishes Jesus from the movement, cf. the mention of the census at 2:1 and the accusation made before Pilate, 23:2 (upper priests, 22:66). The high priest Joazar son of Boethus made himself unpopular by his involvement in the census of 6 CE, *Ant.* 18:3, 26.

(2) Another phenomenon, though less of a ‘movement’, also grew in magnitude during those years: the widely varying messianic crowds surrounding prophets like Theudas and the nameless Egyptian.⁵⁹ Less political and military-minded, their thirst for redemption nevertheless related to that of the *sicarii*. As such, this was not a new phenomenon either. It seems certain that John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth with their followers were mistakenly condemned as similar messianic insurgents some decades earlier.⁶⁰

(3) Political, belligerent, and allied with priestly and high-priestly circles in Jerusalem was, in Stern’s analysis, the movement that Josephus says called itself ‘Zealots’ since the beginning of the Revolt and made the protection of the Temple against ‘gentile pollution’ its cause. The cessation of daily sacrifices on behalf of the Emperor in 66 CE, a major diplomatic insult and a cause of war according to Josephus, was their doing, initiated by the young Temple captain Eleazar, son of the high priest Ananias.⁶¹ Yet this movement, too, seems to have had certain antecedents at least in the 20s and 30s CE, as is seen from various data in the New Testament, notably relating to what Paul calls his own ‘zealot’ past and his subsequent ‘zealot’ adversaries,⁶² while an upsurge during the later 50s CE appears likely from our above review of New Testament sources.

Thus while they had rather different backgrounds, these various groups and trends seem to have had three things in common:⁶³ they loathed gentile dominance over the Jewish lands and over the Temple, they remained a minority during the early first century CE, and they grew markedly in strength since the 50s. Conversely, there always remained many Jews who rejected armed resistance against the Romans, including the Baptist and Jesus with most of their followers,⁶⁴ although the numbers of these ‘peace lovers’ undoubtedly diminished in the decades before the revolt.

The Politics of Circumcision

Finally, we must try to understand how this development relates to the increased emphasis on circumcision that surfaced during the mid-50s, judging from Paul and Acts. One problem is that this has often been addressed as a timeless theological or religious question, in isolation from social and political aspects.⁶⁵ In Judaeen politics of the Second Temple period, however, circumcision played a small though significant role. This is archetypically seen in Maccabean history.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ Not treated in Stern and Price, ‘Zealots and Sicarii’. See Hengel, *Zealots*, chapter 5.

⁶⁰ E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE – 66 CE* (London and Philadelphia: SCM and Trinity, 1992 and repr.) pp. 35–9 lists John the Baptist (*Ant.* 18:117–9) as one of the ‘major instances of conflict in the period 64 BCE – 74 CE’. Cf. the warning against pseudo-Messiahs and -prophets in Mark 13:21–2 and parallels, and the αἰτία or *titulus* fixed on Jesus’ cross, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων, amidst two crucified λησῆαι, Mark 15:26, 48.

⁶¹ *J.W.* 2:409, cessation of sacrifice; 4:161, ‘Zealots’ (cf. already 2:651). See Stern and Price, ‘Zealots and Sicarii’, pp. 471–4, 478. For the political implications see James B. Rives, ‘Animal Sacrifice and Political Identity in Rome and Judaea’, in Tomson and Schwartz, *Jews and Christians in the First and Second Centuries*, pp. 105–25.

⁶² ‘Simon the Zealot’, Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13. Paul ‘exceedingly zealous’ vis-à-vis tradition, Gal. 1:13–4; Acts 22:3; endorsing the ‘zealot’ lynching of Stephen, Acts 7:58; persecuting Christians having ‘letters from the high priest’, Acts 9:1f. ‘Zealous’, Pharisaic Christians in the later 50s, Acts 15:5; 21:20. Assault against Paul on the accusation of neglect of the law and pollution of the Temple by bringing in non-Jews, Acts 21:28; 23:12–14.

⁶³ Cf. the discussion between the authors Price and Stern, in their ‘Zealots and Sicarii’, p. 478.

⁶⁴ John’s counsel Luke 3:14 sounds un-rebellious. For Jesus see e.g. Matt. 26:52; Matt. 11:12 with Luke 16:16.

⁶⁵ Betz, *Galatians* is an unfortunate case in point, see below n. 72.

⁶⁶ Basic is Hengel, *Zealots*, esp. pp. 197–200. See also Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem*, pp. 168–181; idem, ‘Identity and Authority in Ancient Judaism’, (1990) and ‘Jewish Proselytizing in the First Century’ (1992), both

The decree of Antiochus Epiphanes that all his subjects should become one by adopting a ‘Greek’ way of life meant that Jews had to build pagan altars and leave their infant boys uncircumcised. The priest Mattathias and his sons refused and organized an army, ‘and they went around, tore down the altars, and circumcised all the uncircumcised boys that they found within the borders of Israel by force’ (ἐν ἰσχύι, 1 Macc. 1:44–8; 2:45–6). Re-telling the story in *Antiquities*, Josephus quotes Mattathias as crying out after pulling down the first altar: ‘Whoever is zealous for our country’s laws and the worship of God, let him come with me!’ (*Ant.* 12:271, 278). Thus in the state of emergency occasioned by the foreign decree, zeal for the law went along with violence against objects of idolatry and forced circumcision. Subsequently, *Antiquities* reports that the three motives were made operative also in other situations. The highpriest-kings Hyrcanus (134–104 BCE) and Aristobulus (104–103) subdued the Idumeans and Itureans, ‘permitting them to remain in their country so long as they had themselves circumcised and were willing to observe the laws of the Jews’. In the case of the Idumaeans, this is confirmed by the Greek historian Ptolemy.⁶⁷ Forced law observance and circumcision had become corollaries of Judean military power.

From then on, we lack sources for over a century. Following that, Josephus (*Ant.* 20:38–48) brings a story, probably dating to the 30s and 40s CE, about king Izates of Adiabene on the Persian Gulf who wanted to convert to Judaism.⁶⁸ His mother Helena, who already had adopted Judaism, worried that his circumcision would have dangerous repercussions, but she was reassured by the Jewish merchant Ananias who taught that the king could worship God even without being circumcised if he was really devoted to Judaism. Then another missionary, one Eleazar from Galilee said to be ‘extremely strict’ about the ancestral laws, came along and strongly voiced the opposite view, and the king had himself circumcised at once. The upshot is that toward the mid-first century CE, different opinions existed as to whether male gentiles who wanted to worship God should be circumcised. The royal family, who were praised by the rabbis for their piety, tended to support anti-Roman politics, and remarkably, two of their members fought in the Jewish revolt of 66 CE.⁶⁹

The next bit of information is from Josephus’ autobiography, when he was commander in the Galilee at the beginning of the revolt. Two non-Jewish warlords from King Agrippa’s territory wanted to join his army, but the other Jews wanted to enrol them only on condition that they be circumcised. However, Josephus successfully objected ‘that everyone should worship God in accordance with the dictates of his own conscience and not under constraint’ (*Life* 113). Wondering why once again the Galilee seems host to the more extreme opinion, we may now think of the origins of the *sicarii* from that region.

repr. in idem, *Judaism in the Roman World, Collected Essays* (Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 66; Leiden: Brill, 2007) pp. 29–32, 91–116; S.J.D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley, Univ. of California Press, 1999) chapter 4; D.R. Schwartz, ‘Yannai and Pella, Josephus and Circumcision’, *Dead Sea Discoveries* 18 (2011), pp. 339–59, esp. 351–9; idem, ‘Ends meet: Qumran and Paul on Circumcision’, in Jean-Sébastien Rey (ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Pauline Literature* (STDJ 102; Leiden: Brill, 2014) pp. 295–307.

⁶⁷ *Ant.* 13:257f; 13:319. Ptolemy *apud* Ammonius (Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors*, vol. 1 p. 356): the Idumaeans were ‘subjugated by the Jews and forced to undergo circumcision’. Schürer, *History*, vol. 1 p. 207, 217.

⁶⁸ See on the story Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem*, 169–71; on its historical background, J. Neusner, ‘The Conversion of Adiabene to Judaism: A New Perspective’, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 83 (1964), pp. 60–6. Following S. Mason, W. den Hollander, *Josephus, the Emperors, and the City of Rome: From Hostage to Historian* (Antiquity and Early Christianity 86; Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 246–7 reads the story ‘as fully Josephan’, discrediting its historicity. But Tannaitic stories about ‘King Monbaz’ and ‘his mother Helleni’ (*m. Yoma* 3:10; *t. Pea* 2:18) indicate an historical background, cf. also *Ant.* 20:92–6.

⁶⁹ Neusner, ‘Conversion of Adiabene’, pp. 62–3, 65–6, and n. 9.

Our last example is from Josephus' account of the civil war in Jerusalem during the first stages of the revolt. Having defeated the *sicarii* and killed Menahem, the men of Eleazar son of Ananias – 'Zealots' in Stern's analysis – turn against the Roman garrison that had been left in the Herodian castle. The Romans, unable to hold out, offer surrender but are treacherously butchered. Only their commander, Metilius, manages to save his life by pledging to 'adopt a Jewish life, including even circumcision'.⁷⁰

The evidence is not overwhelming, but it does illuminate the information in Paul and Acts we have surveyed. In the Jewish freedom movements, disgust over foreign dominance went along with the desire for idolatry to disappear from the Jewish land and for resident gentiles to become Jewish and accept circumcision. This motivation stood in remote continuity with the Maccabean campaign, with this difference that the *sicarii* and Zealots accepted no foreign dominance at all, while other Jews to the contrary preferred a mediocre Emperor in distant Rome to a bad Jewish ruler in near-by Jerusalem.⁷¹ The drive for absolute Jewish independence rather resembles the militant ideology of the later Hasmonean kings Hyrcanus and Aristobulus. In this approach, circumcision was an instrument in the power struggle between Jews and gentiles. As is astonishingly seen in Josephus' examples from the revolt period, accepting circumcision was a token of submission to Jewish power.

On the level of Jewish identity politics and circumcision, the discussion of the apostles in Jerusalem bears analogies to the difference of opinion of Ananias and Eleazar in Adiabene.⁷² Certain 'Pharisees who had come to believe' according to Acts – in the wording of Galatians, 'false brothers' propagating a 'different gospel' – insisted that gentile believers must get circumcised, while the apostles disagreed and kept endorsing the 'apostolate for the uncircumcised' next to that 'for the circumcised'. The more radical position must have been around for some decades at least, as is seen also from Paul's own pre-conversion record. The Antioch incident shows its rising strength as from mid-century, issuing from Jerusalem and overtaking all Jews in the local church. Then in the mid-50s, Paul is up in arms because the radicalized position is gaining ground even in the churches of Galatia.⁷³ Read in this light, Galatians with its acute protest against compulsory circumcision is a primary document of the novel 'politics of circumcision'.

Conclusion

Our focus has been on the 'long decade' preceding the first revolt, asking what we can know about the political situation in Judaea when Paul wrote his letters to Corinth and other places. In this query we agreed with Martin Goodman and many others that Josephus' *Jewish War* is a misleading source of information. Our findings have not confirmed the claim that its rhetoric of a gathering storm merely copies Thucydides' *pentêkontaetia*. The New Testament sources we have studied document several stages of increasing pressure on gentile Christians to accept circumcision. Read as an expression of reinvigorated 'politics of circumcision' reminiscent of the Hasmonean period, these data confirm the scenario of

⁷⁰ J.W. 2:454, μέχρι περιτομῆς ἰουδαΐσειν ὑποσχόμενον, also quoted by Hengel, *Zealots*, p. 198 (the German 'Herodesburg' has been misleadingly translated as 'Herodium', cf. p. 367).

⁷¹ Sanders, *Judaism*, p. 37 identifies this stance in the negotiations with Pompey, *Ant.* 14:41, while Hengel, *Zealots*, p. 86f. stresses the novelty of the fourth philosophy's rejection of all foreign dominance.

⁷² Cf. comments by Betz, *Galatians*, 83–5 and 328, albeit with an anachronistic theological slant.

⁷³ Inspired by Hengel, R. Jewett drew similar conclusions: 'The Agitators and the Galatian Congregation', *NTS* 17 (1971), pp. 198–212, as does, more recently, Gibson, *Peter between Jerusalem and Antioch*.

increasing Jewish-gentile tensions. However, we have also found that the *Jewish War* conceals the impact of this development by captivating the reader's attention with the interesting excursion on the 'three sects' and by blaming the war on the outlaw Jewish extremists and the incompetent lower Roman governors. The more candid information provided in *Antiquities* serves to correct this representation and to provide historical relief.

Our findings lead us to suggest that the 'fourth philosophy', an anti-Roman freedom movement closely related to the Pharisees, was more important than appears from Martin Goodman's study on the origins of the revolt. This might also concern the movement that later calls itself 'Zealots'. Goodman does convincingly argue that the involvement of the Judaeen elite in its power struggle was a major cause and that Josephus wished to conceal this in his *Jewish War*.⁷⁴ It appears, however, that the involvement of the elite went much further than just instrumentalizing existing popular anti-Roman sentiments,⁷⁵ and that Josephus' class actually shared those sentiments to a considerable degree.⁷⁶

In sum, during the fifties CE, Judaea was not on the brink of war with Rome. There was, however, a growing exasperation over the presence of non-Jews and an increasing readiness to act violently against it, apparently even in the diaspora. One place where this was keenly felt are Paul's churches. His autographed letter postscript is striking, if we take in its political connotation: 'It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised – only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ' (Gal. 6:12). The implication is that Jewish Christians were pressurized by force of arms, from Jerusalem it seems, to impose circumcision on gentile believers.⁷⁷ 2 Corinthians suggests that this pressure was now also felt in Corinth: 'false apostles' (ψευδαπόστολοι) had brought a 'different gospel' (εὐαγγέλιον ἕτερον) boasting Jewishness.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Goodman, *Ruling Class*, pp. 19–20.

⁷⁵ As argued by Goodman, *Ruling Class*, 93–108; 198–227.

⁷⁶ This would accommodate Goodman's restrained sympathy for the thesis of Israel Ben-Shalom concerning the anti-gentile stance of the Pharisaic school of Shammai, see Goodman, *Ruling Class*, p. 23 n. 39; p. 95 n. 19; p. 108 n. 33, and I. Ben-Shalom, *The School of Shammai and the Zealots' Struggle against Rome* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 1993, in Hebrew). Millar, *Roman Near East*, pp. 351–66 soberly weighs up the strength of popular anti-Roman resistance movements against the hard to define 'ruling class', while underlining the overall context of 'a sharp contrast between Greek city ... and Jewish community' in 6–66 CE Judaea.

⁷⁷ Betz, *Galatians*, pp. 314–6 oscillates between taking Gal. 6:12 as theological polemics and as a reflection of actual events. But see Rom. 15:30–1 and Acts 21–3 on armed violence in Jerusalem in those days.

⁷⁸ 2 Cor. 11:4, 13. Cf. different readings of the situation in Goodman, 'Politics of the Fifties', pp. 31–5, and in Safrai and Tomson, 'Paul's Collection', pp. 158–61. The use in 1 Cor 7:18 of the rare technical term μὴ ἐπισπάσθω, 'let him not draw back' (the prepuce, *t.Shab.* 15:9, רִשְׁוּ; cf. 1 Macc. 1:15; Josephus, *Ant.* 12:241) must refer to this same discussion, showing that it was already alive for Paul but not yet urgent while writing 1 Corinthians.