History, rhetoric and the writings of Josephus

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ABSTRACT

History is never for itself; it is always for someone. A historical narrative is an attempt at persuasion to a point of view and an initiation into a world of significance. These problems will be considered by brief analyses of some of Josephus’ writings and the use made of Josephus' ‘histories’ by scholars.

1 INTRODUCTION: HISTORY AND RHETORIC?

The conclusion that ‘history is the most dangerous product evolved from the chemistry of the intellect’ because of its infinite potential is well known: history ‘teaches precisely nothing, for it contains everything and furnishes examples of everything’ (Paul Valéry, in White 1978:36). This is so because the past is not out there, but is a linguistic phenomenon: a human, verbal creation. Rather than arguing or proving this point, I consider it much more important to explicitly work with this insight and reflect on what it means to examine our histories.

What I want to do is to show how (somewhat unsophisticated) conceptions of how supposed rhetoric and supposed history relate to each other, a lot of historiography in New Testament scholarship is simply neither good history nor good rhetoric. Because of dualistic conceptualisation—fact versus fiction, part versus whole, truth versus story and so forth—somewhat naive and untruthful and disrespectful ‘histories’ abound in our discipline. Specifically, New Testament scholars seem to be interested only in the small, historical authentic ‘bits’ and not the rest—the ‘meaning’ of ancient stories.

Memory, as we all know, ‘is a complex and deceptive experience. It appears to be preeminently a matter of the past, yet it is as much an affair of the present. It appears to be preeminently a matter of time, yet it is as much an affair of space’ (Smith 1987:25). The limits of a re-presentative theory of memory, of language, of history have now become common parlance among scholars—even New Testament scholars. With gallant skill and impressive erudition the fatal flaws of such re-presentative theories of language and history are exposed. Paradoxically, in practice, these very assumptions still dominate historical thinking in New Testament scholarship.
Somehow, we manage to pay lip-service to moving 'beyond objectivism and relativism' yet remain driven by the anxiety that unless we can discover fixed, indubitable positions, we are confronted with intellectual and moral chaos, radical skepticism and self-defeating relativism (Bernstein 1983:16-20; White 1978:23). The connection between language and reality, between story and history is consistently reduced to dualisms, opposites. Hence, the phrase 'rhetoric and history': history and rhetoric are often considered as separable things, the one valuable, the other not.

Semantically, such scholarship can be characterised as (largely) believing in word-magic, with some words 'representing' 'real' essences and, paradoxically, denying any real meaning to others: a double-value, antithetical logic. This makes for insensitivity to relativistic, multidimensional modes of thinking and problem-solving. It is but a small step from thinking about figurative or affective discourse, particularly value laden and judgemental elaboration—which is as present in one's own discourse as in any other's—as having only a secondary kind of importance. Either as vivifying a theme or embellishing a style, it is felt that there is a gratuity about these arts of speech which absolve them of referential validity or fundamental mimetic realism (adapting Wilder 1982:20). The dualistic effects of this rhetorical tradition is quite clear: your stories are fiction (or fictional), whilst mine are historical. One can have a regard for 'truth' and yet a complete disregard for human beings of the past. One merely needs 'evidence' to fill in one's own story, and need not respect ancients as persons.

The discussion presented here pushes us beyond questions of reference and truth towards awareness and appreciation of the poetic, experiential function of language use. History and language are not separate elements, but implications of each other. In historical communication the poetic operation, the strength of emotion, the energy of conviction is, at the least, as crucial as the historian's supposed abstraction. There is a 'power of meaning' which resides in the assumption of responsibility to an audience, and maintaining an audience through communicative skill as such. The very skill and power with which one displays historical activities determine their meaning and value—the historical narrative's 'truth'—and not the reference, its representability outside or unconnected to the speech event itself.¹ Powerful speech and authority are basically the same thing. Is that not what rhetoric is

¹ 'The historian shapes [the] materials, if not in accordance with what Popper calls (and criticizes as) a “framework of preconceived ideas”, then in response to the imperatives of narrative discourse in general. These imperatives are rhetorical in nature. In...the very language that the historian uses to describe [the] object of study, prior to any effort [one] may make formally to explain or interpret it, [one] subjects that object of study to the kind of distortion that “historicists” impose upon their materials in a more explicit and formal way' (White 1975:49). Ong 1975 is informative
about: to see how language works, how values, truth and life come together in our words?

2 MAKING USE OF JOSEPHUS

Almost 1600 years ago, Hegesippus\(^2\) wrote that Josephus was

an outstanding historian, if only he cared as much about religion and truth as he did about the investigation of facts and self-restraint in writing. He reveals his sympathy to Jewish faithlessness even in the very things he describes about their punishment (Hegesippus 1.1).

The ‘investigation of facts and self-restraint in writing’ means, to Hegesippus, the gory detail in which ‘all the Jewish people’ are punished, by God no less, for their heinous crimes (cf 2.15). Josephus’ lack of attention ‘to truth’ refers to Josephus being a Jew and not converting to Christianity.

Today we smile at such blatant misreading and abuse of Josephus. And yet, in many contemporary histories we still find stories of events which for their visibility need special attention to ‘religion and truth’. The values depicted by the plots and heroes attempt to display the Christian faith as ‘better’ than paganism and Judaism. The heroes in these narratives may sometimes fail their own ideals, but their opponents and the bad guys are consistently painted; favourites among villains are the Sadducees and Herod the Great. Most of all, on the basis of sifting out rhetoric from ‘real’ history, a very selective use of Josephus is made.

2.1 Fragmenting

Surely one of the most influential manuals in New Testament scholarship is Schürer’s magisterial History. Vermes and Millar have done an impressive revision, extending its usefulness considerably. Naturally, Josephus’ writings are a major source of information, yet the method of treating the ancient author is sometimes alarming. They regularly cite Josephus’ statements in isolation as if they were ‘facts’, which can be combined with other statements from widely divergent sources (statements of other writers or from on the rhetorical role of the audience.

archaeological studies) to produce a new, intelligible picture. For example, the discussion of the Pharisees opens with a collection of passages from Josephus (a number of fragments from other sources are also included). These passages are then combined into a coherent whole.

To them, the Pharisees were deeply spiritual, a non-aristocratic lay party, very exclusivist and strictly apolitical. Though they were a small body within the nation, they exercised great authority, largely dominating Jewish public life, 'the whole conduct of internal affairs' being in their hands. This was due to their unequalled 'leadership in spiritual matters', which brought the masses over to their side. Such were the earnestness and consistency of their practice of Torah—a truly biblical view representing the main outlook of Judaism according to Schürer, Vermes and Millar—that their popularity among and impact on the ordinary people were unequalled. Despite their considerable authority their 'aims were not political but religious' and those that took part in the uprising did so 'because they were obliged to, but who in their heart of hearts were opposed to it'. Only when the secular power interfered with their observance of the law did they gather in opposition, 'countering external power with external resistance'. They could be intimidated 'outwardly' but 'real subjection' could not be obtained (by the fierce warrior-king, Janneus).

This despite the fact that Josephus criticises the Pharisees on numerous accounts, sometimes confounding himself. There is a considerable shift in the depiction of the Pharisees between the Jewish War and the Antiquities. The influence of the Pharisees is, according to Josephus, 'as chance would have it' (τυγχάνονταί), an unfortunate happenstance (AJ 18.15). Like many others quoting Josephan literature, Josephus' first-century, Palestinian value-system is ignored, his 'theocratic' political point of view is left out of consideration and his distinct hierarchical, aristocratic sense of beauty and merit disregarded.

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3 See Schürer, Vermes & Millar 1979:388-403. It is important to keep in mind that the revised edition attempts to clear the presentation of the Pharisees from the 'dogmatic prejudices of nineteenth-century theology' (v)—a very commendable programme. My point is first-and-foremost about a way of reading Josephus, and not the legitimacy of the portrait of the Pharisees. The emphasis on the 'spiritual' qualities of the Pharisees is probably due to the inclusion of evidence from rabbinic literature, but it would not be difficult to show that the same problems of citing/interpretation extend to their use of this material too.


5 Schürer, Vermes & Millar (1973:57) claim that 'the basic features of his [Josephus'] personality were vanity and complacency'. Aside from the question of how—as scholars—such a claim can be substantiated, the more crucial dilemma is the cultural relativity of such terms. What is considered vain and complacent is culture bound, so
What Vermes and Millar have done with their revision is to continue Schürer's failure to take into account that Josephus' remarks should be understood only in the context that Josephus gave them. Words have their meaning only in context.

Josephus wrote lengthy stories, not digests. If we want to know what he meant to say about the Pharisees, we must read his remarks about them as part of his story, paying careful attention to his use of language. We cannot simply pull them out and combine them with statements by other people who had entirely different stories to tell and who used language in different ways (Mason 1992:27—my emphasis).

Most scholars today admit that such a 'scissors-and-paste' style of history does not work, and yet it is astoundingly common and not limited to the use of Josephus.

We still see authors, some of whom would insist on interpreting passages from, say, the Gospels, within their narrative contexts, ripping chunks out of Josephus and citing them as "raw data" or facts—as if they were the product of a robot and not a real human mind with a story to tell (Mason 1992:27).

A core problem of such historiography is the naive trust that interpretation is unnecessary. The often encountered use of the phrase that Josephus 'is not always very objective' (e.g., Jagersma 1985:106) serves as an example. What does 'not very objective' mean? It means that 'true, undisputable, clear evidence' is out there; the only problem is to discover it. A distinct view of history is at work here: the historian already knows what happens and only needs to find the necessary proof.

2.2 Overinterpretation
In all of his voluminous works, Josephus refers to only two individual Sadducees. One would never guess that from the confidence with which the Sadducees are discussed in New Testament scholarship. One will also never suspect that Josephus portrays the Sadducees, in all of his works, in only four rather short paragraphs (BJ 2.164–166, AJ 13.171–173, 13.297–298, 18.12–15).

When Josephus discusses the beliefs of the Sadducees, the 'most striking feature about these lists is that no single belief appears in all of them. When he enumerates their doctrines not one element of their system of beliefs so whose perspective is determinative here? Also, suppose Josephus did commit suicide—who says that is 'honourable'? Why would such a deed (or a 'glorious' death on the battlefield) make Josephus' character defendable? (Schürer, Vermes & Millar feel that no-one 'would wish to defend his character,' :57). If we want to be critical of Josephus, why not have a go at his absurdly selfish theocratic politics?
impressed Josephus...that it immediately came to mind when he set down his
descriptions of their concepts' (Porton 1992:892). What Josephus does, is to
make a few incredible and generalising judgements.

The Pharisees are friendly to one another and seek to promote concord with the
community, but the Sadducees have, even among themselves, a nasty attitude (τὸ
ἡθός ἀγερώτερον) and in their relations with their peers are as rude as to foreigners
(BJ 2.166).

This self-serving comment tells us nothing about the Sadducees themselves. Such a kind of statement would evoke vociferous objection from any
of us should it be said of ourselves. Therefore, ‘the number of historians who
have accepted an equivalent statement by Josephus without question is sur­prising’ (Grabbe 1992:484).

Josephus’ generalisation about the Sadducees’ supposed domination by
the Pharisees is belied by his historical narrative. ‘Typical’ of wealthy
aristocrats, the Sadducees are often depicted as strict, materialistic and
‘collaborating’ with foreign oppressors by biblical scholars. If we take some
of the high priests discussed by Josephus (say Jonathan, Ananias, Ishmael, and
Ananus from the last decade or so before the war) as representative of Sad­
ducean attitudes, then the Sadducees could hardly be categorised as
‘collaborators’ (cf Rhoads 1976:90)—or if not representative of Sadducean
perspectives, then we have no evidence of their collaboration! For their
‘strictness’ Josephus (AJ 13.289–290) is also cited, where he claims that the
Pharisees, in contrast to the Sadducees, are ‘by nature gentle, particularly
with regard to punishments.’ The context explains: the Pharisees prefer the
whip and chains rather than the death penalty, promoted by the harsh Sad­
ducees. ‘Whip and chains’ meaning, often, death by prolonged process.

The only other factor that drew Josephus’ attention was the Sadducees’
denial of life after death—another statement that has achieved the most
astonishingly detailed contents in modern scholarship. Josephus’ remark
must surely be understood in the context of Josephus’ own belief in rein-

6 Smith 1956:77–79; Grabbe 1992:485; Sanders 1985:316. The rabbis also like to tell
stories which ‘rabbinizes’ Pharisaic history. I explore some of the issues involved in
understanding the Sadducees elsewhere (1996).

7 Cf, among many, Freyne 1980:103; Goodman 1987:79; Mulder 1973:40; Jagersma
1985:70; Vermes 1977:118.

8 Was a negative injunction, a punitive flogging (maximum 40 lashes) at stake here?
Such floggings often resulted in death—notice the care which the executioner had to
observe the law to avoid being liable of accidental homicide (the ‘forty strokes save
one’ injunction). If it was a disciplinary flogging, like those reported in the Talmud,
poor Eleazar could have been flogged ‘until his soul departed’ (cf t Ketubot 86a–b).
Discussion of ‘the whip’: Dembitz 1905; Falk 1978:160; Cohn 1971:1350.
carnation. It is not possible to give content to Josephus' (cryptic) statements about the Sadducean denial. Was the bone of contention the issue of penalties and rewards? The different positions in heaven? The one new body?

2.3 A notorious person

In New Testament histories, historical Jesus studies and socio-political investigations of Judea of the first century, the figure of Herod the Great plays a major role. For these pictures of the tyrant, Josephus is most handy. Conveniently ignoring the 'texts' by Herod himself, namely his buildings and coins, which incidentally 'show a complex form of piety...and a concern for Torah that attempts to work within its limitations as he understood them' (Richardson 1986:347), Josephus is relentlessly raided for all sorts of evidence.

On the one hand, 'Herod has been such a notorious and controversial figure that any evaluation of him is very difficult. One must consider against what standard his reign is to be assessed: Other Greco-Roman despots? The Hasmonean rulers? Some golden ideal of kingship?' (Grabbe 1992:362). Few historical investigations even ask this question. Josephus actually depicts Herod as an able leader, someone who achieved extraordinary success as king (AJ 16.77), but prefers to concentrate on his tragic family life. He does this explicitly because Herod's family life provides undisputable historical proof that those who depart from the venerable and noble traditions of the Judeans—as interpreted by Josephus—are punished by tragic deaths and terrible son-father relationships. No effort can succeed if not done with the

9 Josephus believed in continued existence after death, a 'renewed existence' and at the turn of the ages 'a better life' (Ap 2.217–219): humans have immortal souls, those of the wicked suffer eternal punishment while those who live good lives receive the best spots in heaven and at the turn of the ages will find new habitation in a new sacred body that will bring a better life. The following main passages reveal Josephus' own views on the afterlife: BJ 2.157, 3.372–375; AJ 17.349–354. Josephus feels quite strongly about this (BJ 3.374; AJ 18.14; see Mason 1991:156–170).

10 'What we know about other eastern Mediterranean courts during these centuries suggests that the sordid horrors at the court of Jerusalem were very far from unique. They are merely better known than the others, owing to the accident that Josephus' accounts have survived. ...a rich mine of authentic squalor [about other Hellenistic monarchs] has been lost. Nor is one entitled to adopt the superior occidental view that there was something specially eastern about all these murders within the family; a glance at the pages of Tacitus and Suetonius will recall that imperial Rome was seeing with murderous domestic strife' (Grant 1971:232). Note Perowne's (1956:18–19) comments: 'In those days to be a king's brother was a dangerous calling which nearly always brought death or insurrection. Indeed, Plutarch tells us that among the Seleucids (as afterwards with the Ottomans) it was regarded as a "mathematical axiom" that on attaining the throne, a king should murder all his brothers'.
appropriate piety towards God (AJ 18.128; cf Vita 83, 138); indeed, witness only his own life Josephus subtly but constantly reminds us. ‘Evil’, according to Josephus is associated with those who do not keep the Laws of Moses, the Laws interpreted in a very specific manner that is.

On the other hand, the fact that Josephus tells two different versions of Herod’s life in the Jewish War and the later Antiquities is conveniently overlooked. The latter is far more extensive than the first, but this is not due to additional information. Much of the longer work is marked by ribald embellishment and dramatic expansion, often referred to as ‘novelistic elements’: descriptions of the thoughts of the characters, additional dialogue and speech, expansion by means of inessential detail that obviously comes from imagination rather than a greater knowledge, and from Josephus’ personal views (Grabbe 1992:316; cf Smallwood 1976:100 n 140, Attridge 1984:212-213).

Few New Testament scholars take into account the social function of ancient texts. Josephus recreates histories which are ‘rhetorical novels, far removed from legend and the popular novel’ (Villalba i Varneda 1986:221). His stories are often not unlike contemporary soap operas. During Herod’s final illness, for instance, his genitals are said to crawl with worms (AJ 17.169). Grant (1971:12) writes:

...when we come to the last phase of Herod’s long life, the tale is not history but myth or folk-lore: a portentous symbol of the grip which one man’s formidable personity exerted upon the imagination of his contemporaries.

Herod is often portrayed as the perfect example of irreligiousness; which is of course exactly what Josephus says of him. But note the context, once more: Herod’s action against thieves (AJ 16.1-5). In an honest attempt to curb injustice (ἀδικίας) Herod issued a proclamation that thieves caught should be sold as slaves outside of Judea. The Jewish traditional custom—restitution

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11 Josephus’ emulation of Hellenistic novel writing is evident in the anecdotes about his characters’ thoughts, emotions, motives and virtues, and are colourful, amusing and often salacious. Josephus ‘takes great pains to entertain his readers, to write excitingly and to shape his account in a dramatic and also often in a rhetorical form’ (Bilde 1988:204). He appeals ‘to the reader’s desire to be entertained’ (Moehring 1975:156-157; see also Mason 1992:70-71). Downing’s (1982:558) description, ‘high-minded entertainment’, is particularly apt.

12 Schalit (1969:247ff) sees in the king’s actions, on the one hand, efforts at maintaining responsibility towards the Romans (the background, for Schalit, being Octavian’s laws against ‘open thieving’—stealing at night or armed during daylight—and the Jewish custom of selling into slavery of Jews only to Jews and then only for a period of 6 years; cf AJ 16.3). On the other, Schalit is of the opinion that Herod is actually acting against those who do not support his rule, the ‘freedom fighters’ terrorising supporters of the Herodians. This is an interesting way of reading Josephus: to find evidence of Herod’s tortuous ways of dealing with his opponents.
and if not possible sale into slavery—benefitted the rich and powerful (those like Josephus himself) and clearly had little effect. Josephus sees in Herod’s strict laws a desecration of the ‘customs of the fathers’ and hence his lack of piety. Josephus considers Herod’s proclamation ‘a sin against religion rather than a punishment of those caught (ἀμαρτία πρὸς τὴν θρησκείαν ἢν, οὐ κόλασις τῶν ἀληθομένων)’ (AJ 16.2).

2.4 Using and understanding

Another illustration of uncovering the ‘real’ Josephan history are the attempts made to extract from Josephus’ narratives some details about post-war Jewish history—something Josephus himself studiously avoided. The assumption is that when Josephus speaks well of some group in the past (such as the high priests or the Herodians or the Pharisees), he actually displays advocacy in the internal Jewish history of his own day. The problem is simply that such consistent patterns can scarcely be found in Josephus. These approaches pay scant regard to Josephus’ own theses, Mason (1992:28) reminds us, and they do not account for much of the praise and blame Josephus does assign.13

Many other examples can be referred to, but the basic point has become clear:

In modern English, when we speak of “using” people, we often mean abusing them—exploiting them for some selfish benefit while disregarding their personal integrity. I believe this is precisely what has happened to the legacy of Flavius Josephus in the nineteen hundred years since he lived: he has been widely used but little understood and seldom appreciated as an intelligent author (Mason 1992:7).

3 JOSEPHUS’ RHETORICAL HISTORY

As there is not something like ‘the past as it was’—only God can adopt the appropriate point of view—what about Josephus claims of writing honest and proper history?14 What Josephus did was to create some narrative worlds, and he made them as persuasive as possible; he wanted his audiences to join

13 I do think it possible, however, to gain some insight into post-war Jewish history, reading Josephus carefully and with constraint, correlating suspicions with other evidence. See the interesting study by Schwartz 1990, referred to by Mason in the above mentioned context.

14 BJ 1.6, 1.30 (writing for ‘those who love the truth’). In BJ 7.454–455 he writes: ‘Here we close the history, which we promised to relate with the utmost accuracy... Its literary merits must be left to the judgement of the readers; as to its truth I would not hesitate boldly to claim that throughout the entire narrative I have aimed at nothing else.’
his narrator and to become part of his worlds so that thereafter one would think in a specific way about one's own 'real' world.

Let me illustrate.

3.1 Sources

The first thing to emphasise is that Josephus is not an incompetent user of sources. The efforts by modern scholars to explain the difficulties in Josephus' narratives by means of his inept handling of contradicting sources make little sense: he is not an incoherent rambler. Josephus did write differently about Herod the Great in the *Jewish War* and the *Antiquities* because he changed his mind and had different purposes in writing the two books. His great admiration for the Hasmoneans does not follow because he slavishly copied some 'pro-Hasmonean' source, rather, he claims in his autobiography to be a proud descendant of the Hasmoneans (*AJ* 16.187; *Vita* 2). The contradictions between the *Vita* and the *Jewish War* are often 'solved' by referring to Josephus' use of sources and long discussions about which work is more reliable, but although the relationship of the two works to each other is important, whether 'a close paraphrase of BJ, a revision of a common source, an independent work, or a combination of these works' (Cohen 1979:66), such relations can never be the guiding interpretive principle.

Josephus actively creates a complex, coherent, meaningful his-story.

3.2 Admirable people

Josephus tells a story about a hero and a heroic people. These people are not immediately evident as heroes, but because the hero and his people are particularly favoured by God's providence, the narrator can portray a man of outstanding moral worth with a great love for the traditions of his forebears, a member of a 'nation of philosophers' (*Ap* 1.179); a nation which by obeying

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15 Of course Josephus used sources; I am merely emphasising that, on the one hand, we tend to underestimate the complexities of using source criticism to understand Josephus' writings, and, on the other, that we tend to overestimate the usefulness of source criticism to solve problems in the narratives of Josephus. See the important comments of Hata 1994:320 n 29. Schwartz 1986 provides an interesting discussion of probable revisions of book 7 of the BJ. Smith 1958:276–293 argues that Josephus made use of a 'composite' account of the three Jewish schools as source for his portrayal—hence the circumstantial and contradictory nature of his descriptions (cf the description of the Essenes in BJ with AJ, amongst other reasons). For impressions of Josephus and his use of sources see, e.g. Villalba i Varneda 1986:266–272; Cohen 1979:24–47. Schwartz 1990:23–57 (on 'Josephus' intellectual development') is quite interesting and insightful.
the laws of Moses, 'promotes piety, proper relations with each other, and humanity towards the world at large' (Ap 2.146).16

Josephus is trying to impress his audiences with the depth and variety of Judaism and to expose a 'few' rebels as the true anti-social elements abandoning their admirable traditions. That is the past as it was—to Josephus that is.

As one becomes familiar with his stories one discovers their many interconnections. The narrator of Jewish War is subtly shown to be another Jeremiah, depicted in the Antiquities as one of the greatest prophets used by God and also one who suffered at the hands of his fellow Judaeans.17 This narrator is of course none other than Josephus himself. In fact, the Antiquities portray several characters with whom Josephus identified: his namesake, Joseph, who likewise was accused falsely; Daniel, Esther and Mordecai who suffered for their convictions; and Saul, a martyred general like himself (cf Feldman 1992:986).

Josephus depicts his youth and education in the Vita as that of a Danielic figure—familiar also from the Antiquities.18 His fortunes, later on, 'excited envy and brought danger' (Vita 425), once again evoking Daniel (cf AJ 10.250-252) and subtly exonerating himself.

In these, and many other ways, Josephus draws his audiences into his 'worlds'. No justice is done to either Josephus—as a person—or the history he talks about by interpreting his stories with a simplistic method of replacing 'things he left out', or removing his camouflaging or covering up of supposed facts with fiction (or ideology, or exaggeration or rhetoric). The inadequacy of such a reductionist use becomes particularly noticeable when statements by Josephus are separated from the values holding his narrative together. To simply cite a statement made by Josephus as evidence may achieve certain effects, but the ethics of interpretation demands that we deal

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16 In his treatise commonly called Against Apion, Josephus again picks up the themes of the Jewish War and the Antiquities. Although his books are meaningful works in their own right, they do form a mosaic, with clear interrelations. For the purpose of illustrating Josephus' rhetorical history I concentrate on the general and common themes of his books, suggesting some things about his 'grand' narrative. Excellent introductions to Josephan literature: Bilde 1988 and Mason 1992.

17 AJ 10.84, for instance; Hadas-Lebel 1993:175-178 ('Josephus, the new Jeremiah'). Josephus believes several important connections between history and prophecy exist, not only in general (the prophets as his predecessors as historians of the past—see, e.g., BJ 1.18, Ap 1.37) but specifically in his own life as historian/prophet; such roles are, to him, parallel. Cf Feldman 1990:397-402. Nothing is more beneficial than 'the foreknowledge which prophecy provides because this is the way in which God enables us to know what to guard against' (AJ 8.418).

with context—we should endeavour to cite his ‘meaning’.

3.3 The one qualified for telling this history

Josephus wants to tell the Greco-Roman world that the Judaeans are truly worthy people, and that he, Josephus, is eminently qualified to tell their story.

Despite the disgrace of a few rebels and their deplorable, though limited, influence, Judaism does not deserve Roman denigration. The rebels met their deserved fate; the horrors of the war are, in the end, part of God’s dealing with the world. Most importantly, true Judaism is not a menace. Jewish and Roman sympathies can meet as a coherent whole as the two nations do not have dissimilar traditions and aspirations. Josephus cleverly pictures Judaism as a highly philosophical culture, comparable to the widely admired culture of the Greeks. Like theirs, Judaism has its spectrum of philosophical opinion.

Jews are not the bizarre and anti-social people that some Greeks and Romans claim them to be. Their customs and traditions deal with important and relevant (from a Greco-Roman point of view) human issues. The rebels and other disobedient fellows deny their admirable traditions and they deserve the charge of misanthropy.19

Now, not any one can explain this in the correct manner, truthfully and competently, and Josephus proposes himself as qualified in all regards.

Josephus tells us that when he was sixteen years old—he also boasts that at age fourteen he had won ‘universal acclaim’ (πάντων ἐπηρεάσθη) for his love of books and the chief priests and leaders constantly consulted him for references and matters of exegesis (Vita 9)—he decided to examine in depth the three schools into which the Jewish people were divided. He submitted to hard training and laborious exercises and passed all the courses of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes (Vita 10). Hereafter, still not satisfied, he became the devoted disciple of the ascetic called Bannus for three years. During his nineteenth year he returned to the city and started to establish his public life, mainly according to the rules of the Pharisees, a school with some resemblances to ‘that which the Greeks call the Stoic school’ (Vita 12).20

19 Misanthropy, as is well known, was a common accusation against Jews in antiquity; cf, e.g., AJ 16.174-178. See also Bilde 1988:118–121; Moehring 1975:155–156.
20 Josephus probably did not become a Pharisee. Vita 12 says simply that Josephus began to involve himself in public affairs, generally following the Pharisaic perspective (see Mason 1991:325–356). After all, even the Sadducees had to submit to the Pharisees!
With his *Vita*, Josephus is persuading his audience that he is of eminent priestly and royal descent; he is a gifted prophet with immaculate knowledge of the Jewish scriptures.\(^{21}\) His discussion of his background and education fits in with that aim. A discerning Greco-Roman audience will immediately recognise the picture of another talented and inspired savant who not only surpasses his peers but his superiors too.\(^{22}\) What we have is the story of a young aristocrat who attends the various academies and chooses a life philosophy.\(^{23}\) ‘This is normal Hellenistic procedure and seems to bear little relevance to Jewish realia’ and Josephus’ tour of the academies is imaginary (Cohen 1979:106–107).

His ‘real’ background has disappeared. His claim to have ‘fully investigated’ the schools of Jewish thought (*Vita* 10) is artificial. Josephus probably experienced very little exposure to the Jewish schools.\(^{24}\) Even if his descriptions of the Jewish schools are accurate, ‘they certainly are not coherent’ (Cohen 1987:147).

Josephus was *not* a Pharisee. Nothing in the *Antiquities* suggests that he was a Pharisee (Neusner 1987:281). What he does claim in his *Vita* is that at age nineteen he began to engage himself in public affairs, generally following the Pharisaic school of thought (Mason 1991:342-356). Of course, by the time of writing his *Vita* the Pharisees had indeed become very influential (some scholars maintain the sole ruling class...) ‘How convenient that Josephus had the wisdom and foresight at the age of nineteen to choose that way of life after “years” of intense study and consideration!’ (Hata 1994:328–329).

Josephus himself says that his ancestors were not only priests but belonged to the ‘first of the twenty-four courses’ of the priestly division (*Vita* 2) and that the high priests and the leading men of the city (*Vita* 9) frequented his father’s house. One can surmise that Josephus’ father was a Sadducee and Josephus himself was brought up in that tradition. At some stage of his life Josephus gained an interest in life after death, and eventually harboured intense feelings about reincarnation (*BJ* 3.374; *AJ* 18.14; see note 9, above). Josephus, I suggest, is disguising his aversion to Sadducean philosophical convictions, or religious beliefs. Although he likes their politics he seems

\(^{21}\) Being a priest seems to have been of vital importance to Josephus’ self-conception, and knowledge of the sacred books the fundamental claim to authority. See *BJ* 3.352, *AJ* 20.262–267, *Ap* 1.53–54; Bilde 1988:110–113. See also note 17, above.


\(^{24}\) Cf Attridge 1984:186. To Morton Smith, Josephus’ account of his training in the three schools ‘is obviously absurd exaggeration’ (1958:278).
reluctant to disclose the party affiliation of the moderate chief priests and other aristocrats, probably because he rejects their religio-philosophical views. In the *Antiquities*, furthermore, he is promoting good government and order and he admits that, generally speaking, this lies the way of the Pharisees.

### 3.4 Divided loyalties

Another way of showing Josephus' narrative rhetoric is by giving attention to his many silences—of course I will argue from silence: what better way to prove a point? At the age of 27 Josephus was 'sent' on a 'routine' embassy of diplomacy to Rome with the purpose of negotiating the release of some priests (according to Rajak 1983:39).²⁵

What Josephus writes, however, is quite revealing for what is not revealed.

When Felix was procurator of Judaea, he sent certain priests of my acquaintance, very excellent men, on a slight and trifling charge in bonds to Rome to render account to Caesar. I was anxious to discover some means of rescuing these men, especially as I learnt that, even in affliction, they had not forgotten the pious practices of religion, and supported themselves on figs and nuts. I reached Rome after surviving great hazards at sea. [the ship foundered, but Josephus and some others, after a night's hard swimming, were saved “through God’s good providence”]. Landing safely at...Puteoli, I formed a friendship with Aliturus, an actor of Jewish origin who was a special favourite of Nero. Through him I was introduced to Pop­paea, Caesar’s consort, and I procured her aid as soon as possible to secure the liberation of the priests. Besides this favour, I received large gifts from Pop­paea, and then I returned to my own country. *(Vita 13-16).*

Josephus clearly suggests that this was an ‘official’ trip, that things happened the way they did because of God’s ‘good providence’, and that he achieved the supposed goals of the visit with honours to spare.

What raises one’s suspicion is the realisation that Josephus is talking about *two* years here; two years ‘abroad’, from a small province on the eastern border of the Roman empire. Did he not experience wonder at the greatness and diversity of the world? Can one really only say about such an undoubtedly impressive experience which lasted such a long time, ‘I returned to my own country and there I found revolutionary movements already

²⁵ ‘That Josephus does not mention his own embassy outside the *Life* is curious, and we can only conclude that the incident was a routine one; this is confirmation, if confirmation be needed, that such activities took place more often than we are told about them’ (Rajak 1983:39).
widespread...? If the trip was ‘official’ by whom was he sent? Why the need to contact an actor? And, astoundingly: gifts from the emperor’s wife...

Josephus’ visit took place in 64, he returned to Jerusalem in the early summer of 66. The shipwreck story is probably invented for the simple reason to invoke God. It is an impressive event to relate: of the original 600 (!) people on board only about 80 survive. Josephus impresses upon his readers that he is under the special care of God (God’s providence, πρόνοια θεου is his words). This ‘is an attractive and convenient term for any storyteller. It requires no logical, rational, or circumstantial explanations’ (Hata 1994:313).

The priests were sent to Rome by Felix (procurator of Judaea 52-59 CE) ‘on account of a minor and trifling charge’. That is, they were detained in Rome for at least five years, possibly as long as twelve years. A ‘minor and trifling charge’ could hardly be at stake here. Either they had been involved in some anti-Roman activities or they carried Roman citizenship (and demanded a hearing before Caesar).27

This ‘little’ incident in Rome indicates Josephus’ involvement with Roman loyalties long before the war.

The fact that the emperor gave some gifts to Josephus (whereas we would have expected Josephus to bring gifts to the emperor) could be explained most readily if we assume Nero hoped thereby to persuade Josephus to use his influence to defuse the impending Jewish revolt against Rome (Feldman 1992:315).

Hence it is quite understandable why Josephus (and his friends, the priests recently liberated from the emperor’s clutches) urged their compatriots not to revolt against Rome as the Jews are inferior in both military skill and good fortune (Vita 17). His warnings were so incessant that he was suspected of being a traitor (Vita 20). Eventually Josephus failed to execute his Roman

26 Rajak (1983:43-44) too doubts this story: it shows Josephus’ tendency to ‘pick out traditional themes and happenings’. The ‘incident’ also deals with the gifts which Josephus brought from Jerusalem, along with the crucial letters of introduction: all are now at the bottom of the Adriatic Sea. I think Josephus is providing his life story with epic proportions with this event; Hadas-Lebel (1993:44-45, 49-51, 243 map) sees the report as truthful. For some ancient sea dramas and sea voyage stories see Conzelmann 1987:231-236, and for discussion and other material see Praeder 1984:685ff; Robbins 1978:217-232.

27 In AJ 20.215, Josephus reports that Albinus (procurator 62–64) released those who had been imprisoned ‘on account of a minor and trifling charge’ (exactly the same phrase: μικρὰ καὶ τυχόνσα αἰτία) after accepting money (one of the ways in which corrupt officials often supplemented their income). Cohen 1979:61-62 suspects a difference in nuance of Josephus’ use of the phrase between the Antiquities and the Life; the phrase in Vita 13 is used by Josephus ‘to cover revolutionary activities’, in AJ 20 it is ‘ambiguous and/or self-contradictory’.
mission in Jerusalem but made a second attempt at it in the districts elsewhere. He and his priest friends secured the command of Galilee. 28

As things turned out, Vespasian, who must have known that Josephus was up to clandestine activities for the Roman cause, and Josephus came together after the first clash of their armies. Josephus' 'transition' to Roman realities came after he prayed to God in realisation of God's support of the Romans (BJ 3.353-360) and having escaped another attempt on his life by fellow Jews.

From the Romans Josephus received every care, precious gifts, a marriage, and considerable respect as a 'prisoner'—with more than a little help from God, the giver of true prophecy, Josephus would insist. Throughout the war Josephus demonstrated his loyalty to the Roman cause—after all, God elected them for his then current purposes (on these issues cf Hata 1994).

Josephus was loyal to Rome from a very early stage of his life. But he was also intensely loyal to his ancestral religion, customs and people. His loyalties often brought him into extreme danger, but he survived to display his loyalties in an acceptable and attractive manner. His stories carefully deal with the offensive, hard realities of loyalty with integrity.

Josephus appears as an intriguing and complex person; someone caught between survival and integrity, between common sense and tradition, between people and power, between loyalty and self-interest.

4. CONCLUSION: HISTORY AS RHETORIC

History is a story about the past. It can only be stories: narration is the process of making sense of the experience of time. It consists of narratives about people and their activities, told by someone to someone. Whether the characters are real or imaginary 29 is, in a sense, a superfluous question. What really matters, is whether the historian's audience(s) believe—whether they can be persuaded.

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28 I consider Josephus' statements in Vita 70-73 as clear indication of his mission to Galilee. On the difference between BJ and Vita—Josephus as ὁ στρατηγός (general) or as mediator/Roman agent in Galilee—see especially Cohen 1979 and Rappaport 1994.

29 'The word "real" has several different meanings here, and we simply do not have, at the present time, a sufficiently precise vocabulary for distinguishing them' (Rabinowitz 1977:122). The 'extremely perplexing questions about the nature of knowing, understanding, meaning and truth' with which we are dealing here are inescapably germane yet unresolvable; cf Hexter 1968:393. To avoid misunderstanding: history is not an optional game, but a deadly serious part of human self-understanding. What I am pushing in this article is that we should be honest about the simple insight that history is not 'What Really Happened,' but 'What Shall Be Remembered,' in Hernadi's memorable words (1976:248, 253).
What I am advocating here, summarised, is that we see history as rhetoric, and rhetoric as history.\footnote{The relation of writing history, of its rhetoric, to history itself is quite other than it has traditionally been conceived. Rhetoric is ordinarily deemed icing on the cake of history, but our investigation indicates that it is mixed right into the batter. It affects not merely the outward appearance of history, its delightfulness and seemliness, but its inward character, its essential function—its capacity to convey knowledge of the past as it actually was. [So]...historians must subject...the process of writing history to an investigation far broader and far more intense than any that they have hitherto conducted (Hexter 1968:390).}

What difference does this shift in perspective make?\footnote{It is about extending (or improving) the question 'What do we know?' to include 'How and why do we know what we believe what we know'. With regard to history this perspective demands not being content with the 'original' or the 'real' event: 'original', 'best' or 'real' in whose terms? We do not have and probably will never have a framework with which to describe the original or best or real reading of data. Cf, amongst many possible references, Hexter 1971:135–156; Jenkins 1991.}

To start with my example, it allows us to see Josephus’ ‘histories’ as a life-story. Life-stories can provide us with opportunities to understand ourselves, intellectually as well as emotionally, and may also influence, change and create ourselves (cf Southgate 1996:131–134).\footnote{A rhetorical-critical approach naturally suggests a biographical perspective on historiography—or at least greater existential awareness. Such a perspective leads to sensitivity for the details of a person’s life. One might thereby gain some insight into how important choices were made—choices of career, of lifestyle, of whether or not to conform to intellectual and social pressures. Need I note, with reference to interest in Josephus, that the intensity of divided loyalties have become a well-known experience among South African intellectuals, particularly White, Afrikaans-speaking ones.}

The difference between the history-and-rhetoric perspective and history-as-rhetoric is that with the former one is mainly interested in the result obtained, whereas the latter deals with the way in which one obtains it. It is all about developing historical narratives which does not suggest the possibility of final results which need only be consulted. It is about a style of doing history, in which readers and narrators, investigators and subjects are all drawn into the process itself.

So, in a way all this amounts to the claim—and the Habermasian resonance is quite intended—that history can posit itself as an intentional and organised process of identity formation that remembers the past in order to understand ourselves in a way that meets the requirements of reason arrived at by consensus and persuasion.

It is to see history both as a form of cognition and as a mode of self-identity and to reflect both forms in our historiography: consciously and critically.
It accepts the notion, forcefully brought to our attention by Kant, that every inquirer is inherently limited by one's language and that we can only see what our linguistic equipment allows us to see. It escapes from relativism by taking seriously the task of discriminating kinds and qualities of linguistic equipment, and by accepting the conflicts generated by rival truths. 'The changing and creating of ourselves may seem an unlikely objective for historical study, but what else is education ultimately for? The choice of what we may wish to change into, of whom we may wish to create, remains highly problematic, but it is a choice that does have to be made, and again it is better made self-consciously' (Southgate 1996:133).

Wenn die Anerkennung des Anderseins der Anderen und das Verstehen von Eigensinn in der Vielheit zeitlich differenter Kulturen zum Maßstab für die Konsensbildung der Geschichtskultur einer Gesellschaft gemacht würde, dann ließe sich mit guten Gründen von einem Fortschritt an historischer Vernunft sprechen (Jörn Rüsen, in Duvenhage 1993:v-vi).

WORKS CONSULTED
For Josephus I have consistently used the Loeb Classical Texts. Translations are my own.


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