Received: June 22, 2024 | Accepted: February 9, 2025

FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS'S ACCOUNT OF THE *JEWISH WAR*: ELEMENTS OF JEWISH TRADITION AND GRECO-ROMAN CULTURE

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to analyze the work The *Jewish War* by the historian Flavius Josephus. To this end, it focuses on examining the narrative structure of this work and its relationship to the various dimensions of historiographical practice in antiquity, drawing on Meier's (2013) concept of correspondences in conceptions of history in antiquity. Furthermore, the study sought to analyze elements reflecting Jewish culture and the assimilation of Hellenism within the context of the Roman Empire. This context proves fundamental to understanding the complex interactions between culture, power, and identity that permeate the historical narrative crafted by Flavius Josephus.

Keywords

Flavius Josephus; Judaism; historiography.

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Received: June 22, 2024 | Accepted: February 9, 2025

Introduction

To analyze historiographical practice in antiquity, it is essential to distinguish it from its modern counterpart, which, as Koselleck observed, although the result of the continuous evolution of the word's ancient meanings, takes on a distinct form in practice (2013: 119). In ancient cultures, the writing of history operated under different assumptions and lacked the kind of reflection that is currently understood as historiographical practice. These gaps only become evident from a contemporary perspective, which has been shaped by the influences of the disciplinarization of history and the establishment of scholarly communities that emerged in the nineteenth century.

Although one cannot attribute a single concept of history to ancient cultures, it is possible to identify what Meier describes as "correspondences in conceptions of history in antiquity." These correspondences, while not constituting a defined paradigm, allow us, at the very least, to outline a set of practices that can be characterized as activities of a historiographical nature (2013: 49).

In this sense, understanding Flavius Josephus's (37–100 CE) practice of writing history becomes an important intellectual endeavor for shedding light on the complex interactions between culture, power, and identity that permeate the historical narratives of ancient cultures, as well as the elements that allow us to identify specific forms of correspondences in historiographical practices.

Flavius Josephus was a Jewish historian of the first century C.E., born and raised in the priestly circles of Jerusalem; he was considered a member of the Jewish aristocracy due to his descent from the royal Hasmonean dynasty. His upbringing was shaped by the Jewish tradition of the Pharisees, during a period and in a context marked by Hellenistic influences and Rome's expansionist rule, which had a profound impact on life in the Middle East.

In A.D. 70, at the invitation of Emperor Vespasian (A.D. 9–79), Flavius Josephus moved to Rome, where he remained until the end of his life. His biblical first name, Josephus, chosen by his father Matthias, was combined with the family name Flavia—linked to the emperor's family—establishing him as Flavius Josephus. According to Hadas-Lebel, upon arriving in Rome, Josephus "found a way to make history: by writing history" (1991: 252). During the thirty years he subsequently lived in Rome, Josephus devoted himself to collecting documents and actively engaging in writing, producing extensive historical works such as The *Jewish War* and

Antiquities of the Jews, as well as *Against Apion*, an apology for Judaism, and his *Autobiography*.

In this regard, Flavius Josephus's first work, The *Jewish War*, which recounts the First Jewish-Roman War (66–73 CE), the Jewish revolts, and the administrative difficulties faced by the Romans—particularly in the province of Judea—allows us to understand the nuances of the relationship between identity and the writing of history in antiquity.

The *Jewish War* was originally written in 76 A.D. in Aramaic, a popular and regional language, after the Romans conquered the fortress of Masada, and is divided into seven books. The historian, eager to align himself with the scholarship and literary elite of the Roman Empire, produced a significant intellectual work, methodically translating it into Greek during the reign of Titus (79–81 CE), since Greek was the language of the educated Roman elite. The aim was to present it to the Greco-Romans as a "correct" account of events—covering the origins of the war, its calamities, and its end (BJ. I: 6).

Josephus, in recounting the history of the *Jewish War*, expresses his ambition to be a historian who lives up to classical models, highlighting his interest in restoring prestige to his compatriots. He offers an irreplaceable account by closely addressing the affairs of Rome during the reigns of Vespasian and Titus, who were victorious generals in Judea. By tracing the circumstances of the ascension to the throne and the conduct of military campaigns, his life story embodies the contrasting facets of the major events and conflicts in the provinces of the Near East—between local patriotism and the assertion of imperial order, and between native culture and the imposition of Greco-Roman culture.

Within these reflections, the aim is to examine the work The *Jewish War* as a historical source by identifying connections to ancient narrative styles. This article was developed through a bibliographic study, based on the assumption that Flavius Josephus's contribution is essential not only for understanding Jewish history but also for comprehending broader historiographical practices in antiquity.

Historical Practices in Antiquity: Jewish and Greco-Roman Historiography

As Momigliano noted, "the preservation of the memory of the past, the chronological structure, and an interpretation of events are elements of

historiography found in various civilizations" (2004: 54–55). According to Meier (2013), the category of history encompassed a variety of representations, including genealogies and local chronicles, without any clear demarcation. Even narratives that, by contemporary standards, could be described as historiographical works—encompassing geographical and ethnographic aspects—generally focused on written history as a narrative of events, with their content predominantly limited to the history of political and military events.

Hartog points out that in early historiographical efforts, the absence of defined parameters was evident. However, the imperative to record historical events spurred the emergence of the first works that can be characterized as true historiographical undertakings, in the words of the aforementioned historian,

> Over the centuries, it has become clear to us that history was being written—that a power, a group, or a society, according to various methods and protocols, had the responsibility, the task, not to say the duty, to preserve its memory and write its history (2013: 23).

For the Jews, history was a source of understanding of Yahweh, whose will was manifested in the unfolding of historical events. According to Baron (1974: 30), Yahweh "guided the destinies of humanity and of Israel." Hartog termed this approach "history-memory," since Jews used historical narrative as a tool to combat forgetting—"Zakhor, 'remember' in Hebrew, is the imperative that runs through the biblical narrative and all of Judaism." (2013: 27–28).

Yerushalmi argues that Jews play a fundamental role in defining meaning in history, as their Israelite faith has a unique nature that establishes an essential meaning for the course of history. This faith is based on the belief that the destiny of history is intrinsically linked to divine will and human freedom. According to Yerushalmi, this intuitive and revolutionary understanding of God has been refined through deeply lived historical experiences. He asserts that the crucial encounter between humanity and the divine has shifted from the realm of nature and the cosmos to the plane of history (Yerushalmi, 1992: 28).

Another crucial element in Jewish historiography is the conception of time. According to Naser (2015: 44), a significant portion of biblical texts attributes great importance to time as a repository of lessons within the narrative. Past experiences serve as lessons, and the future is conceived in terms of salvation or damnation based on human actions. The narrative is constructed through the interconnection of meanings between the past,

present, and future. Time is regarded as a compass that guides humanity through the world's changes, facilitating the exchange of experiences and information. In this way, writers can influence readers through examples from the past that are rooted in historical experience.

The diaspora of the people of Israel across various regions of the Greek world led to the significant development of Jewish literature in the Greek language. This historiography was no longer integrated into a Jewish narrative but became part of Hellenistic civilization. The traditional Jewish scholar acted as a commentator on sacred texts rather than as a historian; the concept of the historian as a distinct professional was a Greek influence. According to Ibánez, during the Hellenistic period, there was a flourishing development of Jewish historiography, with Jewish authors employing Greek forms to present and celebrate the history of their people. They turned to Greek historiography in order to reach a wider audience (Ibánez, 1995: 25).

Jewish texts reflect Jewish experiences in various ways by employing the Greek language and adapting to the cultural elements of Hellenism, while always maintaining distinctive characteristics. There was a gradual fusion between the traditions of the Jewish people's ancestors and Hellenic traditions, although this fusion occurred unevenly. Different transmission strategies were adopted by various individuals, across different territories, communities, and documents. In other words, the way in which Hellenism permeated the East was not systematically defined in antiquity, but rather was part of a process characterized by contrasts and the retention of diverse perspectives.

Unlike the Jews, Greek historiography focused primarily on chronological issues and on establishing connections between events, with the aim of understanding their causes and consequences. The choice of topics to be addressed was limited, due to concerns about the reliability of the available information. For Greek historians, the composition of their accounts was intrinsically linked to historical research. Following the tradition of the ancients, they saw writing as the means to preserve the memory of human achievements, preventing them from being lost in the flow of time, driven by a deep concern for the pursuit of greatness and immortality, and drawing on a variety of literary genres—such as mythography, ethnography, and local history—as tools for crafting their accounts.

The arrival of Roman rule led to differences in the approach to history compared to that of Greece. For the Romans, history represented continuity, and they valued the legacy of the past and the preservation of their historical monuments. According to Wolfgang Meier (2013: 56),

however, in Rome, historiography from the outset focused on the history of a singular entity, seeking to explain Rome's successes, legitimize its expansion and claims, and convey the examples set by its ancestors. History was viewed as a tool to be used for these purposes. The approach to Roman history was fundamentally tied to events, distinguished only by the specific interests projected onto them and by the perception of a special purpose in the sequence of these events.

Roman historiography stands out in the political sphere due to the centralization of historical knowledge in public spheres, which involve discussions in the Senate, political debates, and military campaigns. It fulfills an intellectual function by reflecting on the issues raised by history. Examples drawn from historical narratives serve as guides for civic conduct in public life. For the Romans, history plays a crucial role in providing examples of moral behavior and virtues valued by society. Therefore, history is seen as a means of making moral judgments about the events and characters presented, similar to tragedy, providing a dramatic narrative with profound moral content.

According to Arendt (1972), the Romans attribute meaning to events through their grandeur and significance, thereby justifying their preservation for future generations. The Romans develop history with the intention of demonstrating what the tradition and authority of their ancestors demand of each generation, as well as revealing what the past has accumulated for the benefit of the present.

Greco-Roman historiography establishes a comprehensive narrative of human history, with the purpose of recounting historical events and human nature, seeking the truth by explaining the causes and context of events. This approach is influenced by the ancient world's long literary tradition, which aimed to preserve past events for present and future generations. The goal is to create works that are meaningful and of great value over time.

The various historiographical approaches and traditions in antiquity are rich in traditions and perspectives that reflect different cultures. From the conceptions of history in ancient civilizations to the historiographical practices of the Jews, Greeks, and Romans, one can observe a variety of approaches, methods, and purposes in the documentation and interpretation of the past. Flavius Josephus stands out as a significant example of this diversity, as he incorporates elements of both Jewish and Greco-Roman historical traditions into his work; by embracing his identity as a Jew, he illustrates the complexity and mutual influence of historiographical traditions in antiquity.

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Flavius Josephus and the Writing of History in The *Jewish War*

It does not seem an exaggeration to identify distinctive elements that characterize the various forms of historical writing and historiographical activities in antiquity. In light of the above, Flavius Josephus, as a first-century C.E. Jewish historian, provides an opportunity to understand historiographical practices in his work, The *Jewish War*, by reflecting a fusion of Jewish historical traditions as well as Greco-Roman influences.

Flavius Josephus's work expresses a Roman perspective on the war; his ideas emphasize an affinity for the Flavius dynasty and the Greco-Roman historiographical tradition. However, according to Degan, "even with his explicit reliance on the Roman point of view, Josephus did not waver regarding his Jewish origin, which he claimed was a source of pride" (2010: 24–25). As a historian linked to the Jewish priesthood and Roman citizenship, he sought to develop his work on the War through the dominant historiographical traditions of his time, which were Jewish, Greek, and Roman.

At the same time, Flavius Josephus employs narrative and rhetorical techniques influenced by Greco-Roman historiographical traditions, seeking to present events in an objective and analytical manner. Like other ancient historians, he seeks to understand the political, military, and cultural events of his time, using history as a means of conveying moral lessons and preserving cultural identity.

a) Preface: A Space for Criticism and Aspirations

The inclusion of a preface at the beginning of a work was a common practice among ancient writers. As Hartog (2013: 20) notes, this practice primarily consisted of providing guidance on how to proceed, often exposing the errors and falsehoods of others. The prefaces of Greek historians are clear examples of this practice, as they seek to highlight the importance, relevance, and depth of the subject matter presented, while also serving as a forum to refute earlier writers by pointing out their lies and misunderstandings of the facts.

The preface presented by Josephus in his work reveals the essential intentions of a classical preamble. He expresses the quality and importance of his account, as well as the responsibility and rigor involved in defining himself as a reliable historian. Josephus emphasizes meticulous accuracy regarding the facts and the authenticity of the accounts of past and

contemporary historians, presenting a concrete and detailed summary of his work as a whole. The essence of the preface is to introduce the work and the responsibility of recounting the events of the War, which he considers "the greatest of all that have ever broken out between cities or nations" (BJ. I: 1).

The preface to The *Jewish War* stands out as a revealing element due to its critical assessment of the historiographical writings on the war. It provides an important avenue for analyzing, through the author's critical perspective, the limitations inherent in Flavius Josephus's conception of history. In examining works related to the war, Josephus criticizes certain historians for their narratives:

> There has been no shortage of historians, but some—without having participated in the events—gathered unfounded or contradictory accounts and compiled them in a rhetorical style; others, despite having witnessed the events, distorted the facts—out of flattery toward the Romans or hatred of the Jews—and their writings contain either attacks or praise, but no historical accuracy (BJ. I: 2).

According to Hadas-Lebel, "since the war's end, several accounts of the *Jewish War* had been published. All of them had annoyed Josephus" (1991: 238). He categorized these authors into two distinct groups. On the one hand, Josephus criticizes those who wrote without having experienced the events of the war firsthand, producing accounts lacking in evidence to support the facts and in coherence. Consequently, their narratives became contradictory due to a lack of rigor in their research, resorting to a rhetorical style that, for Josephus, represents an attempt to subvert the truth through eloquent rhetoric.

Other historians, even though they were eyewitnesses to the events, were not reliable in their narratives because they inserted their personal perspectives on the facts—whether out of hostility toward the Jews or an intention to glorify the Roman Empire—by classifying their works as "stories" for negligent purposes. For Josephus, the narrative cannot be conducted with the intent of promoting the historian's own perspective, since the imposition of personal opinions indicates a departure from "historical rigor." This conception reflects Thucydides' method of history, in which the search for truth lies in the rigorous investigation of events, initially through the historian's impartiality.

Josephus presents an account that is faithful to the actions taken by both the Jews and the Romans. However, he is aware that he cannot hide his personal feelings in his narrative when reflecting on the facts, and does not refrain from lamenting the calamities faced by his people and country. Understanding a potential point of criticism regarding his narrative, the

author seeks in advance "indulgence for a compassion that runs counter to the laws of history" (BJ. I: 11). Nevertheless, knowing that this indulgence might not be accepted by more rigorous critics, he insists that "you judge the history by the facts and condemn the historian for his lamentations" (BJ. I: 12). In claiming historical truth, Josephus is aware that he is not claiming objectivity, given his interruptions in the account to express his pain and indignation at having witnessed the events he describes. What he asks is that readers be able to separate his lamentations from the historical facts, since these deviations from the conventions of the historical genre stem from his grief.

It is clear that Flavius Josephus draws on historiographical principles—what he calls the "laws of history"—which entail a serious account of events, grounded in concrete understandings of the methods, norms, and influences of the historical genre. By identifying points that compromise his narrative because they involve his own experiences of the war, Josephus assures his readers that, at the very least, he presents a work worthy of trust in its account of the facts.

n part of the preface, Josephus implies criticism of the Greek scholars. Even while acknowledging their superior literary skill, he regards them as unprincipled historians, since they focus on ancient wars, which are insignificant when compared to those of more momentous times. Even so, they seek to pass judgment on current events and criticize those who set out to study them. His intention is to direct his criticism at certain Greek historians of his time, who prefer to write about ancient history rather than contemporary history. In the historian's own words, the Greek historians,

> They focus on the Assyrian and Median empires, as if the accounts of ancient historians were not good enough. The truth is that these modern authors are inferior to them in literary talent and analytical ability. Ancient historians devoted themselves wholeheartedly to writing the history of their time, a task in which their connection to the events added clarity to the record, and in which falsehood discredited an author in the eyes of readers who knew the facts (BJ. I: 13–14).

For Josephus, revisiting topics from antiquity that have already been written about undermines the excellence of works from that period. The significance of producing a work lies in the analysis of unrecorded past events, leaving for posterity stories of his own time that will come to be highly regarded over time. A historian's skill lies in the use of unpublished materials and in creating his own structure, not in reworking the work of others. According to Hadas-Lebel, for Josephus, such compilations do not constitute true historical work, since a historian's recognition lies in the

"account of uncharted events" and in the composition of an "original historical work" (1991: 239).

Flavius Josephus presents his work to the Greeks and Romans, highlighting the great expense and effort involved in creating a "memorial to great deeds." He criticizes the Greeks for their willingness to produce works when personal gain or a legal case is at stake. As for history, in which "truth and a painstaking collection of facts are essential, they remain silent, leaving to lesser and ill-informed authors the task of describing the deeds of their rulers" (BJ. I: 16). This indifference and ignorance regarding historical truth on the part of the Greeks are Josephus's main criticisms, and he takes the position of upholding it.

In these considerations, Josephus seeks to distance himself from the redundancy of a narrative of ancient Jewish history—from the Jews' origins as a nation to the events they experienced in the context of Israel's history—since these are themes already well-established in antiquity. "Since many Jews before me have accurately recorded the history of our ancestors, and since these records have been translated by some Greeks into their native language without significant errors" (BJ. I: 17–18), the historian does not intend to revisit the history developed in antiquity, but rather to organize and document the events of the present for posterity regarding the war between the Jews and the Romans.

In the preface, Josephus highlights the influence of classical canons on historiography, expressing his interest in critiquing earlier authors' accounts of the War, in his imminent quest for the truth, and in outlining the work's overall structure. This approach reflects a stance typical of Thucydides, marked by the aspiration to present a truthful account of events, guided by historical rigor, and by indifference toward other authors. In addition to considering his account an indispensable source—because he witnessed key parts of the conflict's events and was directly involved in the War—Josephus asserts that his work is the only account that establishes a coherent narrative. In contemplating the grandeur of the War and the countless catastrophes that befell Jerusalem and the Jewish community, Josephus seeks, as a historian, to elevate his role by offering a sincere narrative dedicated to doing justice to the subject matter of his account.

b) The Narrative of Flavius Josephus: Between Judaism and Greco-Roman Influences

Flavius Josephus, as a historical source, presents a narrative that draws connections to ancient styles of historical writing. However, there is a complexity regarding his reliability due to the historian's undefined identity, as he develops a Flavian Jewish historiography, with political inferences and conceptions of the Jewish aristocracy and the Romans embodied in the figure of the Flavians. According to Degan, Josephus composed a "hybrid work" by initially submitting to Greco-Roman literature through his adoption of Greek as the language in which to produce his work. This reinforces the incorporation of Hellenistic culture, and, as a portrayal of the Diaspora, he developed an appreciation for Judaism through models of Greek thought (2016: 37).

When writing about the War, the first justification cited by Josephus stems from his authority—as he wrote about events he witnessed firsthand and was personally involved in. His own experience made Josephus a "historian-narrator of the events described in his writings" (Hadas-Lebel, 1991: 172). His position as an eyewitness to certain events that took place during the War enabled Josephus to provide a more detailed account and more thorough information, as in the case of the narrative on the siege of Jerusalem found in Books V and VI. During this period, Josephus was granted his freedom by Vespasian and accompanied Titus daily during the war; his account is considered the most detailed and comprehensive record preserved regarding the First Jewish-Roman War.

As a witness, Thucydides exhibits a significant historiographical influence by taking responsibility for what he wrote, by valuing and relying on his own view of the facts and on witnesses considered trustworthy to compose his account, with the aim of preserving his work to make it a prestigious work for posterity. To this end, Josephus, like Thucydides, demonstrates a commitment to presenting his account of the events clearly, regarding himself as an important source by virtue of being an eyewitness and interpreting the events through his own eyes.

In the words of Flavius Josephus, "were it not for the accounts of eyewitnesses and the subsequent calamities thus confirmed, what I am about to recount would pass for a fable" (2021: 420). Although Josephus did not participate in all the events he narrates, in his quest for accuracy through eyewitness accounts, he interviewed individuals who were actual witnesses to the events in question to substantiate his narrative. During the siege of Masada, for example, amid the massacre and mass suicide, two women had escaped with five children, who were the only survivors.

Josephus confirms that "one of them lucidly recounted Eleazar's speech and how everything unfolded afterward" (2021: 469).

Among the sources used, Josephus's personal notes form the basis of his account of the War. It was during the siege of Jerusalem that he gathered information at the Roman camp through the testimonies of Jewish survivors and dissidents. Josephus, in addition to drawing heavily on oral tradition and his own memories as a witness to the events, demonstrates a concern for preserving the memory of the Jewish nation. This characteristic reveals a Greek influence in recounting facts through memory, with the aim of ensuring that events are not lost to oblivion. Before launching the battle against the Romans, Josephus exclaims: "Since all hopes of salvation are lost, it is time to begin the fight. It is wonderful to sacrifice our lives for fame and glorious deeds so that we may leave our memory to posterity" (BJ. III: 204–205).

In antiquity, memory continually served as a social framework to guide collective entities, conveying information from the past to the present. According to Degan, "the constitution of memory takes place in the present, which encourages, provokes, and dictates its recollection, providing the necessary conditions for the formation of a fertile ground for memory to flourish" (2010: 297). Josephus's writing consists of recollections of natural landscapes and urban structures that were destroyed in the conflict; the act of recalling past events and destroyed places initiates Flavius Josephus's narrative by reconstructing the past, the present, and the future, "in a complex reflection that required great intellectual and emotional effort, far removed from the cold repetition and rectification of the past" (Degan, 2010: 299).

Memory is an important feature of educational trends and of the acts of remembrance practiced by Jews. This stems from the belief that remembering the past provides lessons that must be taught, with an eye toward the present and the future. According to Degan, Josephus's work is rooted in Jewish tradition, intended as a teaching tool to "influence the present," and the remembrance of the past symbolizes a "religious act" (2010: 307).

For Hadas-Lebel, the History of the War was likely a commissioned work. This was due to the danger of a new armed revolt by the Parthians against the Romans—who, for their part, included Jewish converts—or the involvement of other Eastern peoples. Despite the Romans' victory, Jews were numerous in the Roman Empire and in the eastern provinces. It was necessary to deter any new insurrection (1991: 237–238). To this end, at the beginning of Vespasian's campaign, Josephus sought to describe the

workings of the Roman army. After a lengthy introduction, Josephus justifies himself,

> My intention was not so much to praise the Romans as to console those they had defeated and to dissuade others who might be tempted to revolt. And perhaps educated readers who are unfamiliar with this subject might benefit from a description of the organization of the Roman army (BJ. III: 108–109).

n this interpretive—and specifically historiographical—effort, Josephus reflects on the Roman army and its achievements, describing with wonder its discipline, order, training, equipment, and other military elements. The army's operation is based on hierarchy, where "each soldier devotes all his energy daily to training, as if he were in action" (BJ. III: 73). The Romans' primary planning strategy involves fortifying the camp and its construction by a military force capable of clearing forests or leveling hills in a short period of time. Artillery devices—whether transported or built on site, such as catapults and ballistae—are discussed in detail, as are the routines of the camp and the battlefield. Josephus provides a thorough description of the armor, helmets, and weapons of both the regular and elite infantry, as well as the cavalry and its elite units. He also highlights the soldiers' duty and honor in dying for the Roman cause, emphasizing not only their physical strength but also their fortitude of spirit, since fear is part of their training, where "they have laws that punish with death not only desertion from the ranks but also the slightest neglect of duty" (BJ. III: 103).

In this context, it is possible to draw parallels in historiography with the Greek historian Polybius (200 B.C. – 118 B.C.), who not only wrote an account of the Punic Wars but also, with the aim of producing a general history, sought explanations for events in their origins in order to understand the power that enabled Rome to achieve its victories. By developing a pragmatic research style—which involved reading and comparing written sources, geographic analysis, and the study of political actions—Polybius distinguished himself through his analysis of the Roman constitution as an essential part of his historiography. He viewed his work as a treatise on constitutional models, a manual for military officers, and a guide for politicians, especially on diplomatic matters. The analysis of the Roman constitution played a significant role in his narratives, as he believed that the political structure was crucial to Rome's success.

In Josephus, the notion is similar when he explains the military organization of the Roman army. He draws on the same themes as

Polybius in assessing Rome's merits, particularly its military organization and discipline. Furthermore, there is the idea of recognizing Rome's power as invincible and the role of Fortuna, which enabled its expansionist and warlike triumphs. Like Polybius, Josephus shows how misguided and irrational it is to wage war against Rome, once one understands the extent of Roman power.

Flavius Josephus also shares similarities with Tacitus's perspective in his account of the war, in which he anticipates Rome's imminent victory. According to Momigliano (2004: 167), Tacitus suggests that any conflict initiated against the Romans would inevitably lead to defeat, drawing on research and relevant information to support this view. Tacitus's central objective in his narrative was to analyze the Roman government, focusing on political life, the Senate, and military affairs. He contributed to a "new political culture" that replaced the model centered on the res publica (republic) with one centered on the imperial household (Joly, 2010: 75).

Initially as a commander, Josephus obtained information about the events in Jerusalem. During his captivity, he likely had the opportunity to take notes for a future account of the war; the narrative of the capture of Jotapata, for example, may be filled with recent notes, probably made shortly after the event. Thus, as the conflict unfolded, Josephus recorded events in advance. In addition, he had at his disposal various Roman reports obtained from the camps and, later, access to the imperial archives in Rome.

Access to these documents provided Josephus with a tool to ensure historical accuracy. Upon his arrival in Rome, Josephus became an imperial pensioner and gained access to the military archives of the campaign. Hadas-Lebel points out that this use of Roman sources led Josephus to show "excessive deference" to the Romans (1991: 147).

For approximately six months, Josephus was with Titus daily as he prepared for the capture of Jerusalem. The route taken by Titus is recounted with remarkable precision in its factual details. This is due to Josephus's circumstances at the time—having recently been freed—and to the friendship he established with Titus, the new commander and future emperor, which allowed him to become a more active observer and participant in "casual conversations in military circles" (BJ. IV: 601).

Within the structure of the work, the speeches of characters from the context of the War take on significant relevance. This is an effective traditional literary method of Greco-Roman historiography, without which, according to Degan, "Josephus would not be able to fully convey

the meaning of his history" (2010, p. 28) if he were to limit himself to a description of the facts. These speeches enable a deeper interpretation by helping readers understand, through the characters' reasoning, the nature of their actions.

According to Degan, Josephus incorporated a historiographical legacy from the epic tradition through these speeches, revealing his judgments to readers. This method was useful for "drawing constant comparisons between Romans and Jews," positioning these speeches at "crucial moments of the War" to highlight the contradictions between Jews and Romans, demonstrate "Roman superiority over the subjugated peoples," or express "Jewish peculiarities" regarding their identity. Furthermore, the speeches were "the moments when Josephus expressed his opinions" (Degan, 2010: 29).

Flavius Josephus, in an effort to convey the experiences lived through during the calamities of the War, follows in his narrative the style of tragedy—a trend in Greek historiography, such as Thucydides' description of the plague of Athens. He presents harrowing events and great suffering resulting from the War. His account reflects a mixture of relentless hatred for the rebel leaders and intense compassion for the civilian population, whom he considers victims. A dramatic example of this account follows:

> The meal was miserable, the spectacle pitiful: the strongest took more than their fair share, while the weak whimpered. Hunger overrides all emotions, but what it destroys most is shame. What in other times would have been respected is now treated with contempt. Wives stole food from their husbands, children from their parents, and—in the most pitiful of scenes—mothers stole from their own babies' mouths, unscrupulously snatching the crumbs of life from them while their dearest ones wasted away in their arms (BJ. V: 429–430).

Josephus depicts terrible circumstances, such as corpses piled up on the city's streets and entire families dying of starvation in their homes, among other disastrous and tragic events that reflect a typical tragedy resulting from war, with death being the defining element of the tragic style. Just as in ancient Greek tragedies, this work highlights its great importance by depicting the ravages of war, allowing readers to visualize the process that led to mass deaths.

The seven books serve an epistemological purpose; there is a logical sequence of chronological events. The events are recounted in detail throughout the narrative in chronological order, organizing the work logically from the beginning to the end of the War. To this end, Josephus establishes specific points to mark the progression of events, thereby creating a solid historical record. He describes the military strategies and

movements of the different factions involved in sequential order, recounting the sieges of cities and fortresses based on their duration. The narrative is guided by ordered segments of events, aligning with Josephus's purpose of recounting the facts of the War, following a notion common among the Jews and Hellenistic methods, such as those of Demetrius, the chronographer and analytical historian of the third century B.C., who grounded his work chronologically to transpose the history of his people into Greek historiographical and chronographical canons, aiming to demonstrate the antiquity and internal coherence of his written sources (Andrei, 1989: 254–255).

Josephus recognized the crucial importance of geographical details in situating events and facilitating readers' understanding. The relevance of geographical details is essential for a more comprehensive understanding of both the historical context and the military strategies employed. By highlighting the geography of Judea and the surrounding areas, Josephus gives meaning to troop movements and siege and defense tactics, and provides readers with a deeper understanding of the topography of the territory that served as the stage for the conflicts. This meticulous geographical description not only broadens the visualization of the events but also underpins the authenticity and credibility of the historical narrative, in line with Thucydides' approach, who, by imposing strict geographical and chronological limitations on the scope of his work, believed he could count on the trust of his readers (Momigliano, 2004: 70).

In describing Palestine and other territories, such as Galilee, Judea, and provinces like Samaria, Josephus systematically divides the regions, outlining their borders, cities, and territories. He highlights the beauty and bounty of these places—such as the fertility of the land, the abundance of pastures, and the diverse variety of trees—which foster agriculture. The geographical description provides a more intuitive visualization of the battles, highlighting the difficulties and unique characteristics of each region. In the conquest of the city of Joppa, for example, readers can visualize the site, with the city ending at a rugged coastline featuring steep cliffs and reefs extending into the sea. When Titus descends to the Sea of Galilee to build rafts and pursue the fugitives, Josephus masterfully describes the lake, its dimensions, its fresh, drinkable waters, and provides details on the variety of fish, the diversity of the basin, the trees, the climate, and other natural features of the territory.

Josephus frequently described the geographical features of the cities, fortresses, and regions involved in the war, detailing their locations and the natural resources that influenced siege and defense tactics. He

provided information on the topography, contributing to an understanding of military strategies and troop movements. He highlighted the geography of significant sites, such as the Temple in Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives, and other religious and historical landmarks. To track the movements of the Roman legions, Josephus provided details on the routes and geography of the areas they passed through, demonstrating how the regional geography influenced war strategies and the challenges faced by the forces involved.

It is understood that the work The *Jewish War* was shaped by a variety of influences, both in terms of the historian's concepts, styles, methods, and literary devices. This influence cannot be fully assessed by historians contemporary to his time, nor by the Greek historians, toward whom Josephus showed great indifference. Josephus's stature as a historian was established in the past by adhering to the canons of classical historiography, with Thucydides serving as his primary model. He employs "the same expository technique, with a first book analyzing the causes of the war, the same structure of the work as a tragedy, the same use of speeches, and the influence of the famous description of the plague in Athens on that of the famine in Jerusalem" (Hadas-Lebel, 1991: 241). In Thucydides, Josephus finds the political articulation in his narrative, the skill in justifying events, and the disproportion and social rationality inherent in a revolt. With Polybius, along with Tacitus, similarities can be observed regarding the notion of power and the reasons for Roman success.

Flavius Josephus produced a narrative containing elements common to the Greco-Roman historiography of his time, seeking historical truth, critiquing earlier historians, and explaining his work with a focus on the history of the present. He incorporated historical arguments, employed rhetorical devices, presented geographical data, and addressed aspects of tragedy. In addition to concepts from the Jewish tradition, such as memory and chronology, distinguishing these elements becomes complex due to the fusion of these practices within his narrative and the instability of his own identity. In short, Josephus draws upon ancient elements—both Jewish and Greco-Roman—to complement and solidify his narrative, incorporating Greco-Roman methodologies while remaining distinctly Jewish.

c) Divine Providence

Flavius Josephus, in addition to being a historian influenced by Hellenistic culture and Roman rule, distinguished himself by incorporating specific elements of the Jewish tradition, remaining faithful to priestly traditions,

and assuming the role of a prophet. His deep involvement with Judaism gave Josephus a Jewish historical perspective, in which events were permeated by the divine presence of YHWH. The remarkable originality of his account of the war lies in the interweaving of Jewish traditions and Greek concepts.

Josephus innovates in his writing by exploring Jewish principles, especially with regard to Divine Providence. Even while writing in Greek, as Degan observes, Josephus took it upon himself to interpret Judaism for the Hellenistic world. He "made use of a Hellenistic theory to enliven his narrative, but with entirely Jewish content, reinforced by his extreme concern for the survival of Judaism within the Roman Empire" (2016: 41).

Josephus's worldview transcends human nature, focusing instead on Providence. He feels the need to ascribe meaning to history, seeking to understand the significance of the tragic war that ravaged his people. As Hadas-Lebel (1991: 242) points out, "his familiarity with the Torah teaches him that, in fact, God intervenes ceaselessly in human affairs. Not in the manner of Nemesis, Fortune, or the fate of the Greeks and Romans, but as a judge and a father." Divine Providence guides his narrative through the course of history and the interpretation of events. Through the facts, Josephus seeks to resolve the issues related to the outbreak of the War, drawing on reflective arguments and moral judgments.

For Josephus, the Jews' inability to understand the heavenly warnings about the war led his people to ruin. In recounting the culmination of the tragedy in Book VI, Josephus highlights how the Jews ignored the omens that foreshadowed their destruction, even disregarding divine signs such as the appearance of a sword-like star that shone in the sky over Jerusalem for an entire year. Other events, such as the unexplained opening of the eastern gate of the inner courtyard, were interpreted in differing ways.

In light of these circumstances, Josephus reflects on all these omens and concludes that "God cares for mankind and, through all manner of warning signs, shows His people the way to save themselves from the destruction caused by the folly and calamities they bring upon themselves" (BJ. VI: 310). As a father, God does not desire the death of the sinner, but rather his repentance, and He uses omens and various signs as forms of guidance toward salvation. However, from Josephus's perspective as a judge, God exercises His strict justice, understanding that no catastrophe is inexplicable and concluding that the Roman victory was the result of God's necessity to punish the crimes of the rebels.

Realizing the inevitable failure of the revolt, Josephus identified Vespasian as a worthy conqueror, appointed by YHWH to punish his people. Through a line of reasoning he considered prophetic, Josephus concluded that his conqueror was destined to become the future emperor of Rome. When he appeared before Vespasian as a captive, he declared: "You will be Caesar, Vespasian; you will be emperor—you and your son who is here present. So chain me even more securely and keep me for yourself, for you, Caesar, are not only my lord but also lord of the land, the sea, and the entire human race" (BJ. III: 401–402). The fulfillment of these words secured for Josephus the protection of the Flavian dynasty. As Hadas-Lebel observes, by highlighting Josephus's duty of gratitude toward the emperor, the complexity of the historian of the War is evident, as he downplays the cruelty of certain actions, attributes virtues to the ideal ruler, and emphasizes supernatural protection (1991: 243).

In Josephus's view, Fortuna is aligned with the divine will, in which YHWH sided with the Romans to punish the Jews, just as in the past he had sided with the Babylonians in the time of Jeremiah. According to Josephus, as cited by Polybius, Fortune favored the Romans not only in the political sphere but also in terms of material power, accompanied by religious authority in the punishment of sins (Nascimento, 2008: 102).

> The tyrants disregarded their own safety and voluntarily came down from the towers, where they could never have been defeated by force, only by starvation, while the Romans, after all their efforts against less formidable towers, unexpectedly conquered those that were impregnable and would have withstood any war machine (BJ. VI: 398–400).

Josephus believed that, as events later demonstrated, they were under the watchful eye of YHWH (BJ. II: 186). For him, Fortune was omnipresently promoting his interests, and circumstances had largely conspired in Vespasian's favor, with Divine Providence having helped him conquer the Empire and placed the sovereignty of the world in his hands.

According to Hadas-Lebel, "History, in effect, was repeating itself. For the second time, the Temple was destroyed. The repetition of the event drew historical parallels: Rome was now the new Babylon" (1991: 200). As events unfolded, Josephus concluded that YHWH wished to punish the nation of Israel for its corrupt generation, just as in the time of the prophet Jeremiah. With this in mind, Josephus exhorted the people, but his advice had no effect. He resorted to speeches, recounting the nation's history and highlighting the exploits of their ancestors and the terrible wars they had faced. Josephus intended to show that they were not fighting against the Romans, but against God.

> Our people spent seventy years in Babylon without ever raising their heads to fight for freedom, until Cyrus granted it to them out of gratitude to God. Yes, it was through His intervention that they were freed and rebuilt the Temple of their Ally. In short, there is no instance in which our ancestors triumphed by force of arms or failed without them whenever they entrusted their cause to God. When they remained inactive, they prevailed—such being the will of their Judge—but when they fought, they were always defeated (BJ. V: 389–390).

Through his speeches, Josephus seeks to warn his compatriots by drawing lessons from his ancestors' past experiences during times of war. He emphasizes that, as Jews, they should not wage war without first considering God's will. According to Samuel Nascimento, "when a nation lost a war, it was its god or gods who had lost to the gods of the victorious nation." However, as a Jew, for Flavius Josephus, "if the nation lost a war, it was because the Jews were in a state of sin or should not have waged that war" (2008: 105).

The successive historical events in the work reflect, in Josephus's view, the combination of YHWH's will and human freedom in decision-making. In this way, he follows a Deuteronomic pattern in terms of Jewish tradition, associating the "chain of events—sin, punishment, repentance, and redemption—with the Greco-Roman structures of historical tradition, functioning as a profoundly original element" (Degan, 2016: 41–42).

Therefore, the work The *Jewish War* as a whole can be considered original for expanding the body of Hellenistic history by writing history within the genre established by the Greeks and delving deeper into reflections prompted by the hardships experienced by the Jews. "It was necessary to write like a Greek, but to think like a Pharisee" (Degan, 2016: 306). According to Degan, in the development of his work, "his theory was Hellenized in form and presentation, yet Jewish in essence, for he accepted divine omnipotence in the affairs of nations, mindful of the weight of YHWH's judgment. Josephus was a providentialist" (2010: 308). In short, his providentialist perspective is the key aspect that distinguishes Josephus not only as a historian influenced by Greco-Roman modes of historiography, but as a Jewish writer who incorporates the principles and values of Judaism into his understanding of historical writing.

Conclusion

The multiple forms of expression used by ancient peoples to record historical events stem from their traditions, through which the most

concrete forms of historiography emerged. The innovative approach, originating with the Greeks, arose from an extensive literary tradition, while the Romans incorporated these elements into their historical framework. In the Near East, Israel stands out for its millennia-old tradition of historiographical composition. It can be said that the historiographical models outlined in this study are developed as a result of these traditions.

It is observed that, despite the diversity of styles in historical writing, there is a natural sense that permeates the traditions of antiquity. The human instinct to preserve past events, historical truth, and lessons for future generations results in the production of significant works. The sense of responsibility for writing, preserving, and mastering memory in the face of the barrier of oblivion has enabled historical narrative to play a fundamental role in the transmission of cultural principles, in reflection on human nature, and in the construction of civic morality.

The intellectual narrative presented by Flavius Josephus is accompanied by elements stemming from the cultural interaction between Jewish conceptions of history and Hellenistic historiography. His historical methods draw upon the ancient traditions of his time. In a Hellenized East, Josephus conforms to the classical models adopted by the Greeks, applying the Jewish experience by using the Greek language and adapting to the cultural elements of Hellenism. Under Roman rule, he aligns himself with imperial claims. And as a Jew, his awareness of his faith amid a conflict-ridden context is inevitable, thus constructing in his narrative a gradual fusion between the traditions of the Jewish people's ancestors and Hellenistic traditions, under the sovereignty of the Roman Empire.

Flavius Josephus's identity as a Jew and his Roman citizenship form an important basis for analyzing Jewish-Roman relations in the first century CE. While remaining faithful to his ethnic origins and preserving his identity as a Jew, his stay in Rome and his relationship with the Flavius family as patrons led Josephus to turn his interest toward Roman history.

It is widely acknowledged that Josephus stands out as an important historian of antiquity, contributing to the study of Judea under Roman rule, to the history of Israel, and to a more specific analysis of Rome. The work The *Jewish War* depicts a landmark event in the history of Israel—the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem—and the climax of Jewish resistance against Roman rule in Judea. Furthermore, it is the most comprehensive literary source on this period. It can be said that Josephus achieved his primary goal of becoming the official historian of the war between the Jews and the Romans.

In this regard, we can see that Flavius Josephus's writing adheres to the principles of Greco-Roman literature by adopting Greek as his language, thereby reinforcing the incorporation of Hellenistic culture; furthermore, as a reflection of the Diaspora, he developed an appreciation for Judaism through the models of Greek thought.

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