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Historical Truth and Historiography: The Case of Flavius Josephus

The topic of my contribution is not directly connected to the scholarly work of Professor Iza B i e ż u ń s k a – M a ł o w i s t because I have been working mainly on different fields. But there is some common ground, particularly in the Hellenistic and the early imperial period. Presenting some ideas on one of the most important historiographers of this epoch, may thus not be inadequate to express my admiration and indebtedness to her work and her personality.

Flavius Josephus is an author of outstanding significance for the history of the Jewish culture and the Jewish people within the framework of Ancient history in general and for the archaeology of the Holy Land as well. He is thus regularly the point of departure in many studies within these fields. But in dealing with the author, one is usually confronted with a problem (which is, by the way, not restricted to him alone): we historians and archaeologists always tend to pick out of the works of Josephus those pieces of information important for our studies and questions, just like cherries from a cake. This involves being very critical when something does not seem compatible to us, while voluntarily taking into consideration whatever confirms our interpretation and helps us along.

In contrast, I want to adopt a very different approach today, taking Josephus himself as a starting point.[1] He shall not be used like a stone quarry, but be in the

[1] On Josephus in general see esp. G. H ö l s c h e r, 'Josephus 2. Der Schriftsteller', *RE* 18. Halbband (1916), 1934–2000; E. S c h ü r e r, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*. *A New English Version Revised and Edited by G. Vermes & F. Millar*, Literary Editor P. V e r m e s, Organizing Editor M. B l a c k, vol. I, Edinburgh 1973, pp. 43–63; Flavius Josèphe, *La guerre des Juifs*, traduit du grec par P. S a v i n e l, précédé par 'Du bon usage de la trahison', par P. V i d a l – N a q u e t, Paris 1977 (*cf.* the review by P. G o u k o w s k y, *Revue des Études Grecques* 90 [1977], pp. 88–91); S.J.D. C o h e n, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome. His Vita and Development as a Historian*, Leiden 1979; T. R a j a k, *Josephus, the Historian and his Society*, London 1983; H.W. A t t r i d g e, 'Josephus and his Works', [in:] M.E. S t o n e, *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period. Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus*, Assen 1984, pp. 185–232; P. B i l d e, *Flavius Josephus between Jerusalem and Rome. His Life, his Works and their Importance*, Sheffield 1988;

spotlight as an author, being understood on the basis of his own background and ideas. In doing so, I wish to use more strongly insights offered by recent research in rhetoric and narratology.[2] I believe that a new overall picture can be gained by directing our reflections on the text as a whole. This can then provide a frame, within which our critical treatment of the author needs to be situated. It is only from this point that the validity of Josephus and thus his source value can be determined adequately: it is then no longer necessary to find some things objectionable, while also not expecting to find reliable information there. Then again, phenomena previously neglected will be examined more carefully.

My contribution thus starts off with a brief characterisation of the literary genre, to which Josephus attributes himself, namely Greek historiography or rather historiography in Greek, as well as the traditions and rules of this genre. At the forefront is this genre's primary problem: the question regarding historical truth and its feasibility. With this fundamental issue in mind I shall turn to Josephus in a more extensive second part. For it is precisely the discourse on truth that Josephus himself focuses on in his explicit and implicit references to the genre of historiography. He virtually invites us to begin his contextualisation in this genre at this point. It will thereby become apparent that in the *Jewish War* there was an especially great closeness to traditionally 'Greek' concepts of truth and authenticity, while when it comes to older matters, namely in the *Antiquitates*, rather contrastively a very different concept of truth is underlying.

L.H. Feldman, G. Hata (eds.), *Josephus, the Bible, and History*, Detroit 1988; M. Hadas–Lebel, *Flavius Josèphe. Le Juif de Rome*, Paris 1989; S. Schwartz, *Josephus and Judaean Politics*, Leiden 1990; S. Mason, *Flavius Josephus und das Neue Testament*, Tübingen–Basel 2000; J. Sievers, G. Lembi (eds.), *Josephus and Jewish History in Flavian Rome and Beyond*, Leiden 2005; L.H. Feldman, 'Josephus', [in:] *idem*, *Judaism and Hellenism Reconsidered*, Leiden–Boston 2006, pp. 313–342; S.J.D. Cohen, J.J. Schwartz (eds.), *Studies in Josephus and the Varieties of Ancient Judaism. Louis H. Feldman Jubilee Volume*, Leiden–Boston 2007; M. Tuval, *From Jerusalem Priest to Roman Jew. On Josephus and the Paradigms of Ancient Judaism*, Tübingen 2013; W. den Hollander, *Josephus, the Emperors, and the City of Rome: From Hostage to Historian*, Leiden–Boston 2014; *cf.* also the bibliographical overviews by A. Schalit (ed.), *Zur Josephus–Forschung*, Darmstadt 1973; L.H. Feldman, *Josephus and Modern Scholarship (1937–1980)*, Berlin–New York 1984 and *idem*, *A Supplementary Bibliography*, New York 1986.

[2] The 'classics' are S.B. Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, Ithaca 1978 and F.K. Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens*, 1979, 8th ed., Göttingen 2008; the new 'authorities' G. Genette, *Figures* I–V, Paris 1966–2002; *idem*, *Fiction et Diction*, Paris 1999, and M. Fludernik, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology*, London–New York 1996; *eadem*, *Erzähltheorie. Eine Einführung*, Darmstadt 2007; *eadem*, 'Experience, Experientiality, and Historical Narrative: A View from Narratology', [in:] T. Breyer, D. Creutz (eds.), *Erfahrung und Erzählen: Historische Sinnbildung im Pränarrativen*, Berlin–New York 2010, pp. 40–72; for a first orientation see D. Hermann, *Basic Elements of Narrative*, Oxford 2009 and M. Martínez, M. Scheffel, *Einführung in die Erzähltheorie*, *9. erweiterte und aktualisierte Auflage*, München 2012; helpful for classicists is now I.J.F. de Jong, *Narratology & Classics: A Practical Guide*, Oxford 2014.

I. TRUTH AS A PROBLEM IN GREEK HISTORIOGRAPHY

Truth was a central and fundamental topic in Greek historiography.[3] The frequency alone with which it was made the subject of discussion reflects this. Already the first sentence of the *Genealogies* by Hecataeus of Miletus (ca. 560–480), which I want to place at the beginning of this genre, makes this abundantly clear: 'Hecataeus of Miletus recounts the following (*hōde mytheitai*): I write this in the way that it seems true to me (*alēthea*), for the stories (*logoi*) of the Greeks are numerous and laughable (*polloi kai geloioi*)' (*FGrHist* 1 F 1).

The subject of this polemic is easily recognisable: the *logoi* of the Greeks are the varied stories and narratives that we describe mostly as myths. They were the creations of poets and singers already prior to Homer. They were then presented not least in the Homeric epics, but increasingly also in various other genres, in oral performances and in direct contact between author and audience.

While their subject matter was very diverse, they most frequently dealt with stories situated between gods and men. However, many of these stories could be understood as history: the Trojan War was received as a historical event, figures such as Heracles, Achilles and Odysseus were considered historical characters. Myth and history were far from being categorically differentiated. It is even possible to say that it was above all here, in the world of poetry, that the Greeks communicated and exchanged ideas about their history (or their 'histories' — *historiai*).

That historiography became prominent towards the end of the 6th century in the way that is conveyed by the quotation of Hecataeus was due to the fact that the question of truth had become a particularly pressing problem. Already in poetry itself and very early on (our most ancient evidence illustrates this), a sense for the tension between truth and authenticity (*etymon*) on the one hand and deception and fraud (*pseudos*) on the other hand can be detected. The Muses, daughters of Zeus and Memory, guaranteed truth — while at the same time they were able to deceive, by pretending that the false was true.[4]

The Muses are goddesses, and for the Greeks the deceitful belongs not least in the divine realm. However, it was exactly here that during the 6th century a fundamental criticism set in from the point of view of certain poets and intellectuals. It operated with moral and rational criteria and condemned especially

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[3] The following remarks are based on recent research of my own, see esp. H.–J. Gehrke, *Geschichte als Element antiker Kultur. Die Griechen und ihre Geschichte(n)*, Berlin 2014 (with further references).

[4] Hesiod, *Theogony* 27f. (see, similarly, Pindar on Charis, *Ol.* 1, 30–32), *cf.* esp. R. Kannicht, 'Der alte Streit zwischen Philosophie und Dichtung. Zwei Vorlesungen über Grundzüge der griechischen Literaturauffassung', [in:] *Der Altsprachliche Unterricht*, 23,6 (1980), pp. 6–37; L.H. Pratt, *Lying and Poetry from Homer to Pindar. Falsehood and Deception in Archaic Greek Poetics*, Ann Arbor 1993.

the invented stories ascribed to the gods. Xenophanes from Colophon in Asia Minor distinguished himself in this above all others, already pleading for a careful search for knowledge.[5] We have now entered a world of a new intellectuality oriented towards independent rational thinking, which apparently first unfolded in Miletus, one of the great melting pots between the Mediterranean and the Asiatic worlds.

Quickly, intellectual positions developed, differing in subject and direction. Characteristic was primarily a marked orientation towards the truth and the critical examination with one's own intellect. Hecataeus, allegedly the student of one of the most important leaders of the new way of thought, namely of Anaximander of Miletus, expresses both principles in an introductory sentence: that 'what seems true to me' does not mean a subjective arbitrariness, but the critical examination by a rationally acting subject. Here hides the criterion for truth. With this, Hecataeus set a precedent. The founding fathers of Greek historiography, Herodotus of Halicarnassus and Thucydides of Athens, who followed in his footsteps and whom we know not only fragmentarily, show this in a special way.

Here, we learn more about the concrete quest for truth. At first, it is a matter of seeing and hearing, and thus about testimony, especially eye witnessing. This is the basis of true knowledge. It is supplemented by the effort for reasoned judgement (*gnome*) and adequate interpretation, so to speak. The strict working out of these criteria had the consequence that recent history was privileged (because of the witnesses). The rational examination, for example of witnesses' accounts, but also of other information, utilised certain structures of argumentations, refutations and justifications that were familiar not only from philosophy, as already mentioned, but also from lawsuits, pleading in court, or political debate. The closeness to forensics was particularly important, just as the figure of the witness indicates.

During the 5th century, the rhetoric that was of importance in this context experienced an increasing professionalization under the influence of widespread processes of democratisation and here, too, many reflections repeatedly revolved around the subject of truth. Once again the proximity between forensics and historiography is significant. Both dealt with a rather simple notion of truth, namely with the plain question whether a situation had taken place as claimed by those involved or questioned. That the rhetoric in this sense was directed towards truth was strongly emphasised by its most important teacher, the Sicilian Gorgias, by designating truth as the 'ornament (*kosmos*) of speech (*logos*)'.[6]

In court — and thus also in rhetoric — something else was also, or even primarily, important. Already Plato called attention to it in his dialogue named after Gorgias, and Gorgias himself was everything but unaware of this. After all, it was all about the victory in a lawsuit. And for this it was sufficient to make the jurors

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[5] See, *eg.*, Xenophanes 21 B 11. 12. 34 Diels–Kranz.

[6] This quote is to be found in the beginning of *Helenes enkomion* (Gorgias 82 B 11,1 Diels–Kranz).

believe that one's claims coincided with the truth. Suddenly, only the appearance of truth, the likely, the probable, was important.

But by making only the appearance of truth count, one comes close to the deceitful that already the ancient poets spoke of. This is precisely what Gorgias recognised: in the same speech that begins with the connection between *logos* and truth already mentioned, he issues a warning that many experts in *logos* have produced lies and deceit in all areas. A hundred years after beginning to search for new routes towards truth, one had in the end returned once again to where centuries before the poets had already been.

And so it has eventually remained: there were no solutions, but extremely creative and instructive (and for us still fruitful) debates about the forms of truth and the possible means of finding them. Isocrates of Athens, the great teacher of rhetoric of the 4th century, who at the same time (and justifiably) thought of himself as a philosopher, time and again occupied himself with this topic. His recipe in the dilemma between truth and appearance was continuous examination and control, *elenchos*, known to us from the philosophy of Socrates. In practice, this meant the precise weighing of different versions, the examination of contradictions and the reciprocal discussion of divergent positions.

Isocrates evidently had great influence on the development of 4th century Greek historiography. Ephorus of Cyme, who was said to be his student, as a historian also turned towards the older epochs, thus establishing something like a sub–genre of universal history. He tried to transfer the method of critical examination, in terms of a questioning of witnesses, to objects, which in turn were only attested by older narrations and traditions. Others followed him in this. Thus, the occupation with more ancient matters always accompanied the strand of Greek historiography in which the authors focused on their own temporal experience.

It was evidently the journey of Alexander the Great, bursting every dimension and exceeding all expectations, that also evoked new debates and orientations in the genre of historiography: in opposition to the rationality of critical examination was now set — the first historian of Alexander, Callisthenes, after all a nephew of Aristotle, and Duris of Samos are to be named here — precisely the unpredictable, unbelievable and miraculous, as if the events could only be adequately understood in this manner. Thereby, the understanding of truth shifted: it was important to describe events in a way that allowed the audience to take part in them just like an eyewitness, just as if they had been present. Truth was supposed to be actual closeness, important was visualization and thus — in a literal sense — dramatization: history happened before one's eyes, like in a theatre — or in a film, as we would say today. And the fact that none other than Angelos C h a n i o t i s drew this parallel regarding Oliver Stone's 'Alexander' is very characteristic.[7] It is thus possible also to speak of a 'tragic' historiography.

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[7] 'In the second century B.C.E., the historian Polybios criticized his fellow historian Phylarchos

Henceforth, the lively debates of the historians took place within this framework, whereby — in terms of ideal types — essentially two positions were opposed: it was a matter of a rather sober focus on the events, the 'activities' (*pragmata*), as well as their adequate, and therefore truthful, determination and presentation. Alternatively, the effort for truth was about showing events in terms of their impact, making them tangible and visible, and allowing the audience to take part in them both emotionally and mentally. The polemic of Polybius against his antipode Phylarch shows this clearly — although even the pragmatist by no means lacked the sense for the dramatic and paradox.

There are constantly also unambiguous expressions in favour of critical reservations against the excessively fantastical and in support of a rational control for the purpose of discovering the truth. This becomes manifest particularly in the historical works of authors with a strongly philosophical, often primarily Stoic orientation, such as Agatharchides of Cnidus, Poseidonius of Apameia and Strabo of Amaseia. One may also think of Nicolaus of Damascus, who was influenced by Peripatetic views and who brings us very close to Josephus. In any case, this — as regards the question of truth — was the state in which Josephus came upon Greek historiography.

II. JOSEPHUS AND THE DISCOURSE OF TRUTH IN GREEK HISTORIOGRAPHY

II.1. TRUTH IN CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

Let us now ask whether and how Josephus positions himself in this context, and let us begin — starting from the differentiation within the genre made here — with recent history. This is reasonable also because we may thus begin with Josephus'

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for writing in such a manner that his readers had the impression that they were eyewitnesses to what he was narrating. Eager to arouse pity and empathy among his readers, Phylarchos talked of women clinging to one another, tearing their hair and baring their breasts, and of lamentations of women, children, and aged parents led away in captivity. Polybios resented all that, because he made a sharp distinction between the treatment of the past by the tragic poet, who seeks to thrill and charm an audience in the moment, and the historian, who seeks to educate for all time. Polybios may be right in distinguishing between history and drama, but he is wrong in all other respects: in his assumption that empathy can be separated from cognition, and emotion from reason, and in his assumption that drama is less instructive than historiography. Twenty–two centuries later, audiences have the illusion that they are eyewitnesses of events not thanks to the words of skillful narrators, but thanks to the moving images presented to them by the directors of feature movies and documentaries. The motion picture, the most popular form of dramatization, entertains, educates, and fills us with empathy. In this respect, it is an ally of the historian, not a rival. The dialogue of historians with Oliver Stone indicated the possibilities of interplay between scholarly history and the screen' <http://www.ias.edu/about/publications/ias–letter/articles/2013–spring/chaniotis–oliver–stone>.

first work, the narration of the *Jewish War*. But let us first allow Josephus himself to have a say by taking a closer look at the important passages of his proem.

At first he emphasises the greatness of the war, the insufficiency of previous historiographical descriptions of this event and his own decision to improve this. He especially stresses that former accounts exaggerated the significance of the Romans. In contrast, he claims to aim at representing adequately also the achievements and suffering of his people. In doing so, he was also interested in provoking pity for them, so he says. He announces that in contrast with the rather more frivolous works of Greek intellectuals, he was going to provide a serious work of history based on truth and the tedious compilation of facts.

Already the first three paragraphs offer a powerful entrance: 'Whereas the war which the Jews made with the Romans hath been the greatest (*polemon sustanta megiston*) of all those, not only that have been in our times, but, in a manner, of those that ever were heard of; both of those wherein cities have fought against cities (*poleōn pros poleis*), or nations against nations (*ethnōn ethnesi*); while some men who were not concerned in the affairs themselves (*ou paratuchontes tois pragmasin*) have gotten together vain and contradictory stories by hearsay (*akoēi*), and have written them down after a sophistical manner (*sophistikōs*); (2) and while those that were there present (*hoi paragenomenoi*) have given false accounts of things (*katapseudontai tōn pragmatōn*), and this either out of a humour of flattery (*kolakeia*) to the Romans, or of hatred (*misei*) towards the Jews; and while their writings contain sometimes accusations (*katēgorian*), and sometimes encomiums (*enkōmion*), but nowhere the accurate truth of the facts (*akribes tēs historias*); (3) I have proposed to myself…to translate those books into the Greek tongue, which I formerly composed in the language of our country…; Joseph, the son of Matthias, by birth a Hebrew, a priest also, and one who at first fought against the Romans myself (*autos*), and was forced to be present (*paratuchōn*) at what was done afterwards, [am the author of this work].' (transl. William W h i s t o n).

The benchmark is introduced straight away: it is none else than Thucydides, who begins his great historic work in a very similar manner, by claiming that the war he deals with was the greatest known to men.[8] The universality, *poleis* fighting *poleis* and *ethnē ethnē*, reminds of remarks by Thucydides about the participation of almost all Greeks and most barbarians. And it is with virtually the same term ('movement'), used by Thucydides to name the dynamics of the war (*kinēsis megistē*, 1,1,2), which Josephus subsequently (4) uses to describe the war–related events, as *megiston kinēma.* Just like Thucydides, in this case, too, the author early on and succinctly, but effectively draws attention to both himself and his qualities. Regardless of the significance of the Aramaic original Josephus mentioned,[9] the

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[8] On the greatness of war in Josephus see also *Bell. Iud*. 3, 4.

[9] Unfortunately, the poor remains of early Aramaic literature do not give any hint at what such kind of historiographical writing could have been. The only piece of storytelling in Aramaic language

programmatic introductory remarks are entirely related to categories of Greek historiography. This is signalled by numerous key words assembled in a small space.

The important topic of eye witnessing is made clear by the repeated emphasis on direct participation (*paratuchein, paragenesthai; autos*), of others or Josephus himself.[10] In contrast, mere hearsay, *akoē*, is presented as of only secondary importance, a view well known from Greek tradition since Herodotus. This bears a particular risk of becoming a rhetorically embellished presentation. Josephus, entirely in accordance with philosophic criticism, calls it 'Sophistic'. As regards eye witnessing, there is the problem of distortion resulting from excessive sympathy or ingratiation ('flattery') or antipathy ('hatred'). The postulate of unbiasedness inherent therein — best known to us from the *sine ira et studio* of Tacitus, which is verbally very close to Josephus — is repeatedly emphasised strongly as part of the Greeks' historiographical objectives — think only of Polybius (1,14, 2–8).

Josephus correlates two rhetorical genera from the fields of forensics and epideictics with the inappropriate negative and positive characterisations, namely indictment (*kategoria*) and eulogy (*enkōmion*). Once again in accordance with philosophical criticism regarding rhetorics, it is spoken of a 'falsification of facts' (*katapseudontai tōn pragmatōn*). Precisely the orientation towards the 'actions', which has already been emphasised and was categorical in Greek tradition, is here misguided, and this is marked as a violation of the commandment of truth, with reference to lies and deception (*pseudos*). Tellingly, this is compared with the 'exactness of history' (*akribes tēs historias*), a notion of precision made prominent already by Thucydides and also providing a key category of the genre. A little later (6), Josephus speaks entirely in this sense about the 'truth' (*alētheia*) in the treatment of *pragmata*. He takes them for his own and underlines his particular efforts (*epimeleia*) for exactness, for the *akribes.* Emphasising the tediousness of research is also part of the genre's tradition, from the very beginning and particularly underlined once again by Thucydides.

When Josephus concludes his programmatic remarks, about which much remains to be said at this point, with polemic comments on the methods of Greek intellectuals (*logioi*, 13–17), it would be possible to summarize this by saying that he was able to do the historical, and thus the Greek, better than the Greeks, with his love of truth (*historia, entha chrē t'alēthē legein,* history, where they must

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that may give us a certain impression, the tale of Ahiqar (*cf.* I. K o t t s i e p e r, 'Die Geschichte und die Sprüche des weisen Achiqar', [in:] O. K a i s e r, G. B u r k h a r d, *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments*, Bd. 3, *Lieferung 2: Weisheitstexte II*, Gütersloh 1991, pp. 320–347; I.M. K o n s t a n t a k o s, *The Tale of Ahiqar in Ancient Greece*, vol. I: *Origins and Narrative Material*, Athens 2008; G. T o l o n i, 'Ahiqar tra leggenda e rielaborazione letteraria. Una tradizione e i suoi riflessi', *Sefarad* 73 (2013), pp. 7–31, with further references) is quite different from what one could reconstruct as a possible (hi)story of the Jewish war in Aramaic.

[10] The importance of autopsy and eyewitnesses is also stressed in *C. Apion*. 49–52; *Vita* 361–66.

speak truth) and his efforts regarding research (*meta pollou ponou ta pragmata sullegein,* gather facts together with a great deal of pains): 'Yet shall the real truth of historical facts be preferred by us, how much so ever it be neglected among the Greek historians (16).'

I may not and do not wish to pursue this philological precision work any further at this point. However, those indications of Josephus' very dense intertextual cross–linking with the objectives of Greek historiography were necessary in order to demonstrate the extent to which Josephus — with some understatements as regards his grasp of the Greek language — places himself within this tradition. Part of this is the frequent and often strongly polemical proclamation of very noble principles, which the authors in the course of their own work not always or only barely met.

It is thus always necessary to examine how the author proceeds within the work itself and in his narrative performance. Naturally, this cannot be achieved here. I thus limit myself to sketching very briefly and with reference to the detailed analysis just made, what Josephus has to offer in this regard. Let us start with the important category of precision, the *akribes*. We detect a consistent and very considerable endeavour for precision in dates and numbers, especially regarding the Roman side (emperors' dates, troops and resources[11]). This is accompanied by a sense for the documentary: there are citations from letters and edicts. Numerous topographical and geographical descriptions also show this orientation towards exactness,[12] just like the detailed depictions of social and ritual practices within the Jewish *ethnos* as well as the references to Hellenistic and Roman imperial practices and structures.[13] There is much that can be confirmed from other sources or reconstructions.

However, in the process two phenomena emerge particularly prominently; and they would normally make it very difficult for us to still accept historical precision at this point, much less even speak of a true account. The descriptions are frequently vivid and anecdotally recounted to such an extent that they are barely credible. Moreover, there are numerous exaggerations. In the process, Josephus at times demonstrably — this applies above all to verifiable topographical details — detaches himself from all precision. This affects above all those passages that deal

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[11] 1, 41; 2, 168. 180. 204. 248. 345–400; 3, 70–108; 4, 491. 548. 652.

[12] Regarding Jerusalem see *e.g.* 5, 136–247, *cf.* 2, 528–32 and, on details, 1, 39. 50. 75. 77. 118. 141–44. 150. 250. 353. 402; 2, 46. 218. 172. 305. 315. 344. 411; 5, 57. 67–70; 6, 6f., see, in addition, 3, 419–23 (Jaffa); 1, 667; 4, 452–475 (Jericho); 1, 673 (Herodeion), and, on other regions, 4, 476–485 (Dead Sea); 3, 506–521 (Sea of Tiberias); 6, 608–15 (Egypt and Alexandreia).

[13] Role of the people (esp. acclamation and rituals of consensus): 1, 22. 55. 107. 207. 209. 240. 457. 552. 560. 670; 2, 1. 4; elements of Hellenistic monarchy: 1, 460 (role of friends and *sungeneis*). 411. 420; Roman practices and procedures: 1, 170 (*cf. Ant*. 14, 91). 183–85. 535–543; 2, 18f. 80. 206–14; 4, 592–601. On the Jewish practices *cf.* D.R. S c h w a r t z, 'Josephus on the Jewish Constitutions and Community', *Scripta Classica Israelica* 7 (1983/84), pp. 30–52.

with himself (especially the campaign of Galilee)[14] and his Roman benefactors, namely Vespasian and especially Titus. But let us beware of jumping to terms such as manipulation, absurdity or even a kind of schizophrenia.

Let us try once more to see this in the light of the genre and the declared aim of Josephus that we spoke of before. To begin with, it is necessary to take into consideration that the ancient reader of historiographical reports with explicit claims to truth was used to a lot, above all in the treatment of the persons of the authors or their friends. Certain ways of behaviour and orientations were evidently thought of as compatible with the aim of correct description. This was especially the case for the vivid and clearly emotionally appealing narrative style of the so–called tragic variant of historiography: the narration was meant to literally set the exceptionality of reality before the reader's eyes. This was called *enargeia* ('visualization'); and it was like putting events before the reader's eye. Duris of Samos, one of the founding fathers of this school, spoke of the 'imitation' (*mimēsis*) of events, and this meant presenting a story like in a dramatic performance. The aim was thus, if you like, an artificial authenticity.[15] This may appear questionable to us today, but in the theory and practice of Greek historiography it was a legitimate literary tool that was compatible with the reference to truth.

In this especially, Josephus was an expert: the vividness of his descriptions and the literal setting before one's eyes goes as far as the evocation of sensual experiences. Even today it is possible to feel drawn into the events if one simply surrenders to the narrative style.[16] If one has to deplore that only fragments remain of the 'tragic' manner of historiography of Hellenism polemically criticised by authors such as Polybius, Josephus, in my view, can be considered a fully preserved exemplum — comparable to the Roman historian Livy.[17] In addition, in this way he can make certain stories so distinctively visible that with them he is able to exemplarily condense a certain message. This is connected to his central aim.

I pick out an extreme story from the time of the siege of Jerusalem (6,199–219), of which Josephus himself says: 'I am going to relate a matter of fact, the like to which no history relates, either among the Greeks or Barbarians. It is horrible (*phrikton*) to speak of it, and incredible (*apiston*) when heard (199).' In order to

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[14] This is particularly problematic, esp. the stories about Josephus role in defending Iotapata and his contact with the Roman commanders (3, 158–288. 316–408). The apologetic tendencies are here extremely strong; on these tendencies in general see below note 25.

[15] On *enargeia* see G e h r k e, *loc. cit.* 92 and *cf.* esp. J. M a r i n c o l a, 'Polybius, Phylarchus, and "Tragic History": A Reconsideration', [in:] B. G i b s o n, T. H a r r i s o n (eds.), *Polybius and his World. Essays in Memory of F. W. Walbank*, Oxford 2011, pp. 73–90.

[16] See, for instance, the battle of the rafts on the lake of Tiberias, evoking *pathos* (3, 522–31), the description of a flight (4, 107–109), or the characterization of an ominous thunderstorm (4, 287).

[17] One may note, in this respect, that Hieronymus called Josephus a 'Graecus Livius' (*Ep*. 22, 35.8; vgl. H. S c h r e c k e n b e r g, *Die Flavius–Josephus–Tradition in Antike und Mittelalter*, Arbeiten zur Literatur und Geschichte des hellenistischen Judentums 5, Leiden 1972, pp. 91f.).

effectively illustrate the great famine, he recounts the story of a woman (who, by the way, is described precisely by name and place of origin), who slaughtered, fried and ate her own son, still an infant, and even asked others to share the meal. At the same time, she considered this a symbolic action, which would transmit the whole suffering of the Jews (*sumphorai Joudaioi*) as 'tidings' (*muthos*) (207).[18]

In full linguistic correspondence with the diction of Hellenistic historiography (Josephus even uses the term of the monstrous, the *terateuesthai*, 200) Josephus, in the face of the incredibility of the story, professes himself to it as an actual event, as part of the facts (*erga*). He explicitly stresses that there are many witnesses to confirm it (200). By this story above all, Josephus can clarify the sufferings his hometown (*patris*) was in truth forced to endure. At this point, too, with the term of suffering, the *pathē*, we come very close to the intended effect of the tragic school of Hellenistic historiography.

Josephus uses this story — and thereby this specific method of historiography — in order to exemplarily provide his essential explanation for the sufferings of his people just mentioned: the responsibility for the perversion just described lies with the fanatics participating in the civil war, in the stasis (6, 204). The enemies, the Romans, whose hatred of the fanatics is growing, show greater mildness — representing an almost human sentiment. At the same time, the Roman general Titus is able to justify himself in the face of God, since the fanatics were to blame (215).[19]

A very similar tendency is reflected in the entire narrative arrangement of the historical work. Josephus repeatedly and pointedly refers to the *pragmata*, which for him is virtually a 'law' (*nomos*), an unshakeable rule of historiography (5, 20) — an explicit reference to Polybius, by the way. In doing so, he attaches great importance to giving every reader the chance to form his own judgement being confronted with these *pragmata* (5, 257). This did of course not rule out that the historian had his own opinion, which he put forward emphatically and with all means of rhetorical and literary manipulation. But every educated reader — who was above all rhetorically educated — was familiar with this, at the latest since the time of Gorgias and Isocrates. He knew how to deal with this.

In any case, the account of Josephus follows even in its long lines the various events that are consistently narrated in a vivid and comprehensible manner. It is characteristic that there is no trace of a denial of contradictions as they are often to

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[18] An important interpretation of the passage, underlining the intertextual and conceptual relations to the Deuteronium and to Greek drama as well, is presented by K.M. K l e i n, 'Flavius Josephus, Hieronymus und die Eroberung Roms 410 n. Chr.', *Klio* 98.2 (2016), forthcoming.

[19] On these aspects of the *stasis* among the Jews see esp. 2, 462–65; 4, 128–134. 177–184 (with intertextual references to Thucydides' 'pathology' [3, 82–3] in 4, 131–2); on the regime of terror, see 4, 355–365. 380–388, on the tyrannical aspects, see 4, 393–397. 503–544. 556–584; on Titus' contrasting *clementia* (that even causes mistakes), see esp. 4, 92. 103–105; 5, 128–29. 329. 334f. on the contrast between Jews and Romans see also 5, 285. 306. 348–353; 6, 20.

be found in reality. The great familiarity with the pragmatic side of history led to insights that were based on experience and gave great plausibility to the historical reconstruction: think only of the clear description of a sequence of events, a process, in which political extreme positions blow up in a political conflict (2, 9ff.); or the sober and apt analyses of power, especially regarding Roman power.[20]

The long lines in the historiographical report develop into narrative complexes that follow one upon the other, heading for the catastrophe. One could speak of six big sections: the Herodes–drama, the journey into war, the prelude in Galilee, the war as civil war (*stasis*), Jerusalem under siege, the postlude, especially in Masada. These are literally complexes that are interconnected within their own inner structure as well as among one another by all available means of rhetoric and literary composition.

Similarly to the separate stories talked about earlier, here, too, a direct involvement of the reader is aimed at. Once again the term of the tragic is particularly suited to characterise the sequence of events. This becomes manifest already in the first book, which deals mainly with Herodes and his family. In this case one might even speak of an increasing dynamic of the dramatic and tragic. There is, so to speak, a set of tragedies — and Shakespeare would have been able to find the subject matter for several 'histories' at a time here. It is significant that the European theatre literature has made a number of borrowings from this material.[21] Here, too, the modern reader will quickly be irritated at the excessive dramatizations, the production of shivers and dread, the brutal, the incredible, the unexpected, the peripeties and catastrophes.

But it needs to be kept in mind that it was not the classic–classicistic drama whose example was followed, but the tragic, as exemplified by Seneca with all his pathos. Once again we come upon the principles of mimetic visualization, familiar to the reader and probably required by him in order to be able to adequately imagine the reality represented. Besides, this dramatic nature offered two further aspects that particularly characterised the historic vision of Josephus.

However glaring the tragic may seem, it is not necessarily one–sided, but even enhances ambivalence regarding the historic judgement. Persons and events may be presented vividly and one–sidedly; the dramatic will always, *per definitionem*, and above all in the rhetorically exaggerated form common at the time, also put forward an opposite standpoint, an *audiatur et altera pars*. Especially in view of the fact that history knows no black–and–white, but only tones of grey (Thomas N i p p e r d e y[22]), this needs to be recorded: the very brief concluding judgement

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[20] 2, 356: Pompeius as the beginning of Roman rule over Judea; speech of Agrippa: 2, 345–401.

[21] See now E. B a l t r u s c h, *Herodes. König im Heiligen Land. Eine Biographie*, München 2012, pp. 358–367.

[22] 'Die Grundfarben der Geschichte sind nicht Schwarz und Weiß, ihr Grundmuster nicht der

about Herodes, arranged rhetorically in an antithesis by means of chiasmus and *variatio*, demonstrates this (1, 664–65):

'Now as for his fortune, it was prosperous in all other respects, if ever any other man could be so, since, from a private man, he obtained the kingdom, and kept it so long, and left it to his own sons; but still in his domestic affairs he was a most unfortunate man.' The superlative of the positive in view of the political success is skilfully described and thus given particular weight from this point of view. To this corresponds the greatest misfortune in private affairs, which with a superlative (*atuchestatos*) gives the conclusion with a bang.

These connections become even more distinctive in view of the underlying tragedy which the entire work with the enhancements and links mentioned eventually describes: the tragedy of the Jewish people,[23] experienced by the author himself, as suffering and compassion, which could not have been presented more successfully with the literary and rhetorical means of his time. The dialectic of the dramatic allows even the major antagonists of Josephus, the fanatics, Sicarii, robbers and tyrants, to keep their very own heroism.[24] But much more is at stake here, and thereby a new dimension is opened up for the discourse of truth.

Regarding Josephus' intentions, his apologetic tendencies have been noted, and justifiably so.[25] Many Jews must have considered him a traitor and collaborator, and he had to respond to this. However, if we take him seriously as a priest and prophet, as a pious representative of the Jewish elite — and as such we have to consider him first of all — then the catastrophe with the destruction of the temple was for him also a problem of faith, affecting the bond between God and his people. Just like the Babylonian captivity, it was in need of an explanation, and the explanative mechanism — it was due to divine punishment, since the people had violated the covenant — can be grasped also at this point. Josephus can ascribe the responsibility to the fanatics, while at the same time presenting the Romans as executors of God's will, who in the face of God show more respect than some

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Kontrast eines Schachbretts; die Grundfarbe der Geschichte ist grau, in unendlichen Schattierungen' (*Deutsche Geschichte 1866–1918. Zweiter Band: Machtstaat und Demokratie*, München 1998, p. 905).

[23] See esp. 1, 9. 12. 27; 5, 20; there are paradigmatic stories that illustrate this tragic, see, *e.g.*, the suicide (after the murder of his whole family) of Simon of Skythopolis who had to opt between his identities as a Jew and as a citizen of Skythopolis. The vivid presentation of this fate reminds of the Ludovisi Gaul!

[24] See esp. 3, 317–322; 5, 346; 6, 12–14; and, of course, the famous story of Masada (7, 152–406).

[25] G. Sterling, *Historiography and Self–Definition: Josephos, Luke–Acts, and Apologetic Historiography*, Leiden 1992, pp. 308ff.; L. Grabbe, *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian*, London 1994, pp. 10ff.; K.–S. Krieger, *Geschichtsschreibung als Apologetik bei Flavius Josephus*, Tübingen 1994; G. Mader, *Josephus and the Politics of Historiography. Apologetic and Impression Management in the Bellum Judaicum*, Leiden 2000; U. Rappaport, 'Josephus' Personality and the Credibility of his Narrative', [in:] Z. Rodgers (ed.), *Making History. Josephus and Historical Method*, Leiden 2007, pp. 68–81.

Jewish groups.[26] In doing so, Josephus keeps to the tradition of his fathers and his piety, even in turning towards the Romans.

However, this confession has no triumphalist traits, but grasps the truly tragic dimension of the catastrophe of the people of Israel: the means of tragic historiography, brought to perfection in the *Jewish War*, offer the possibility of adequately presenting this historic situation — truthfully, so to speak. And thus, we ought to read the conclusion of this work as more than a mere claim: 'And her we shall put an end to this our story…Of which history, how good the style is, must be left to the determination of the readers; but as for its agreement with the facts, I shall not scruple to say, and that boldly, that truth (*alētheia*) hath been what I have alone aimed at through its entire composition' (7, 454–55).

II.2. THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION OF TRUTH AND THE EARLIER HISTORY

Taking this religious core as starting point for the interpretation has consequences also for the concept of truth. This was clear already among the Greeks of the archaic period, when poets were confronted by goddesses who took liberties when it came to the truth, and when philosophers tried to found their own clarity. Here, however, in the Jewish environment, God leaves no doubt that he stands for truth. And even though Josephus follows the discourse about truth as represented by Greek historiography until the end, his idea of this inherent truth never wavers.[27] This always needs to be kept in mind, even in the sentence cited above.

These fundamental principles of truth as determined by faith are a constant factor in the entire work and result in an individual and special quality. This affects not least the veracity of prophecies, above all the great prediction of Josephus himself, according to which Vespasian will be emperor, a centrepiece of the work. In this story, too, God takes action (e.g. as regards Caligula, 2, 186.201–203); and Josephus himself in his speech before the walls of besieged Jerusalem (5, 375–419) reminds of the history of Israel with its God, its 'ally' (*summachos*, 376). This confronts us with a concept of truth that differs greatly from that of Greek historiography; it can even be said that the absolute here steps in front of the relative.

Significantly, this becomes particularly manifest in the second great work of Josephus, the *Jewish Antiquities*, which in the manner of a Greek universal history covered everything from the beginnings down to his own time.[28] As we have already

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[26] See esp. 2, 539; 3, 351–54; 4, 104. 184. 318–325. 501; 5, 19–20. 60. 412. 566.

[27] On the concept of truth in the Hebrew Bible as related to the Hellenistic world *cf.*, for instance, G. K i t t e l, G. F r i e d r i c h (eds.), *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, Studienausgabe*, Stuttgart u.a. 1990, Bd. I, pp. 233–239.

[28] On this work see now esp. M. F r i i s, *Josephus Antiquitates 1–11 and Greco–Roman Historiography*, Copenhagen 2015; *cf.* also S. M a s o n, 'Introduction to the Judean Antiquities', [in:] L.H. F e l d m a n, *Judean Antiquities 1–4*, Leiden u.a. 2000, pp. XII–XXXVI; R. W e b e r, *Das 'Gesetz'*

seen, for the Greeks the question of truth arose here in a unique way due to the old age. It is at this very point that Josephus opens up an individual dimension at the very beginning of his work. In the proem, he proclaims his intention to have a general account of Jewish history, dealing especially with the laws and wars of this people, follow his treatise of the revolt. In doing so, he would base himself on the Holy Scriptures of the Jews and translate them. It is for this reason that he reminds of the translation of the Septuagint in the reign of Ptolemy II.

This time, the model is not Thucydides, but the Bible. This is remarkable and immediately results in a specific consequence. By turning the Torah in this manner into a work of history, even the single true Jewish work of history, Moses, considered in Hellenism as the law–giver of the Jews (in the sense of the Greek figure of the *nomothetēs*), becomes an author and therefore also — besides, or even with the philosophical and ethical components of this profession — a historiographer of the early period above all. It is this point especially that Josephus conveys clearly, thereby establishing a significant distinction from the poets, who, as we have seen above, created the early Greek history:

'And now I exhort all those that peruse these books, to apply their minds to God; and to examine the mind of our legislator, whether he hath not understood his nature in a manner worthy of him; and hath not ever ascribed to him such operations as become his power, and hath not preserved his writings from those indecent fables (*aschēmonos muthologias*) which others have framed, although, by the great distance of time when he lived, he might have securely forged such lies (*pollēn eichen adeian pseudōn plasmatōn*); for he lived two thousand years ago; at which vast distance of ages the poets themselves have not been so hardy as to fix even the generations of their gods (*tas genēseis tōn theōn*), much less the actions of their men (*tas tōn anthrōpōn praxeis*), or their own laws. As I proceed, therefore, I shall accurately (*akribōs*) describe what is contained in our records (*anagraphais*), in the order of time that belongs to them; for I have already promised so to do throughout this undertaking (*pragmateia*); and this without adding (*prostheis*) any thing to what is therein contained, or taking away (*paralipōn*) any thing therefrom' (1,15–17).

The truth of even the oldest reports is guaranteed in this case not only by the author's old age, but above all by his orientation towards God and his ethos of truthfulness connected with this precisely. Those matters for which the Greek poets could be and in fact were reproached (e.g. in the philosophical criticism of the 6th century mentioned already) are avoided, even though precisely because of the old age the author could easily have made inventions. It is precisely the

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bei Philon von Alexandrien und Flavius Josephus. Studien zum Verständnis und zur Funktion der Thora bei den beiden Hauptzeugen des hellenistischen Judentums, Frankfurt a. M. 2001; L.H. F e l d m a n, 'Parallel Lives of Two Lawgivers: Josephus' Moses and Plutarch's Lycurgus', [in:] *idem*, *loc. cit.* (note 1; 2006), pp. 523–556.

terms *aschēmōn muthologia* and *pseudē plasmata* used here, that were constantly employed in the Greek debates — also regarding an excessively imaginative and poetic (and tragic) historiography. Josephus uses their words, but he also triumphs in a further manner over them, because he overcomes the simple polemic, thanks to more clear and better criteria for truth: the old age and the religiously influenced and at the same time philosophically understandable ethos of the author, or rather the source. Thus, his work of history — he here uses the characteristic term factual report (*pragmateia*) — is nothing else than a 'precise' retelling (here, in turn, he uses the word *akribes* familiar to us).

Insufficient time remains to confront the actual method of Josephus with the programmatic statements with reference to the entire work. There too, just as in the case of the *Bellum*, we would encounter many surprises. But here also we first of all need to take him seriously in his religious environment. He legitimately had to see a great advantage in the Jewish tradition as opposed to the Greek. For that these Greek traditions were not of old age and were in any case *plasmata*, creations of poets, that merely suggested old age, is a fact we can confirm without reservations. Whether the Jewish history is truly in a better position I leave to the experts on the Hebrew Bible to decide. For Josephus, this was no question at all.

In his treatise against Apion he continued this criticism: the advantage of Jewish tradition is precisely that it was written down early on. Since to them, in contrast, documentary evidence was lacking, the Greek historians were said to have depended upon assumptions, offering deeply conflicting versions of particularly the early times: it is thus that they had missed the truth.[29] In this manner, Josephus was able to reveal mercilessly the reconstruction problems of early Greek history. It remains to be seen who will judge him. At the least he offers a highly instructive example for fruitful and substantial discussions on truth, carried out in the context of various cultural and religious traditions. He was integrated into the Greek discourses[30] while at the same time transcending and overcoming them.

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[29] *C. Apion*. 1, 9–22, see also *Bell. Iud*. 1, 16 and *cf.* H. Cancik, 'Geschichtsschreibung und Priestertum im Vergleich von orientalischer und hellenischer Historiographie bei Flavius Josephus, contra Apionem, Buch I', [in:] E.L. Ehrlich, B. Klappert, U. Ast (eds.), *Wie gut sind Deine Zelte, Jaakow...Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag von Reinhold Mayer*, Gerlingen 1986, pp. 41–62; S.J.D. Cohen, 'History and Historiography in the *Against Apion* of Josephus', [in:] A. Rapoport–Albert (ed.), *Essays in Jewish Historiography: In Memoriam A.D. Momigliano*, Middletown 1988, pp. 1–11.

[30] The idea of a Graeco–Roman audience as addressee of Josephus' works is stressed by S. Mason, 'Flavius Josephus in Flavian Rome. Reading On and Between the Lines', [in:] A.J. Boyle, W.J. Dominik (eds.), *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text*, Leiden 2003, pp. 559–89, and *idem*, 'Of Audience and Meaning. Reading Josephus' Bellum Iudaicum in the Context of a Flavian Audience', [in:] J. Sievers, G. Lembi (eds.), *Josephus and Jewish History in Flavian Rome and Beyond*, Leiden 2005, pp. 71–100.

Does this help us in our own search for the truth, in our historical and archaeological reconstructions? In the critical and rational analysis of findings and texts we should not lag behind the ancients. Our texts, too, are literally shaped to a great degree and in a dramatic manner. We can neither take them at face value, nor simply discard them just because they do not suit us. We need to understand them first from within themselves, and only after close examination, after the manner of the Greek *elenchos,* separate the incredible from the plausible, if possible. The search for the truth, however, will ever remain our task.