Josephus and the "Archaeology" of the Jews

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Josephus' Jewish Antiquities, like his surviving Jewish War, is not only a history written in Greek, but one apparently Greek in conception and form. This substantial product of Josephus' later years was composed at Rome, where he lived as an expatriate, assisted to some extent by the emperor Domitian, and encouraged and perhaps subsidized by a Greek freedman, Epaphroditus. Yet the question arises how close the Antiquities are at a deeper level to the Greek historiography of their time. Should we treat them as Greek history?

This question can be, and has been approached along various lines, through analysis of parts, or of aspects of the text: of such features as narrative technique, the treatment of individuals and their reactions, rhetorical devices, the author's attitude to the course of history and to the role of divine Providence, or his view of the miraculous. Here I shall consider Josephus' project in a more general way. I shall ask what was understood in Greco-Roman culture by "antiquitates" or rather, to use the Greek term, "archaiologia"; and then whether Josephus' book conforms to those expectations. It has been taken for granted that, in writing a work to which that label was attached, the author was operating within a Greek framework. In a limited sense, this is obviously true. But, if we look further, doubts occur, and interesting contrasts emerge. We shall see that the answers to our question are to be sought within the first, Biblical part of the Antiquities, which truly constitutes the "archaeology". Examination of the largely political history in the second half of the work might well lead, by another route, to a not entirely dissimilar conclusion, but that is for a different occasion.

Archaiologia, the description Josephus himself gives of the theme of his work, is a word with a clear meaning and an established usage in Greek. At


1 AJ XX, 259; 267; V 430; CA I 1 1, 2, 54, 127; II, 136; 287.
its simplest, it can of course signify nothing more than "an old story"; and that is how Strabo uses it when he tells of an Armenian legend that Armenus went with Jason to Armenia (XI, 14, 12, 530). But it had been employed in an extended sense already by Plato, and roughly defined in his dialogue Hippias Maior (285d), where Hippias the sophist talks of archaiologia as a subject about which the Spartans are prepared to learn from him, and which includes the genealogies of heroes and of ordinary men, and stories of the foundation of cities. This becomes an established usage in the Roman period, at least by the reign of Augustus. As the way of referring to a literary product, we find the label in Diogenes Laertius' history of philosophy (VII, 175), listed already among the numerous productions of the Hellenistic philosopher Cleanthes: the work in question may have been primarily a cosmogony.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the first century B.C. rhetorician, stylist and historical scholar, wrote a history of the Romans from the pre-Trojan, "aboriginal" period down to the beginning of the first Punic War (*Rom.Ant.*, I, 8, 2), and he describes his theme as the archaiologia of Rome; this is how his book is now known. The name, and its arrangement in twenty books, makes it, on the surface, the closest parallel to Josephus, so that Dionysius is often regarded — rather misleadingly — as the Jewish historian's model. In Latin, there were, in the first century B.C., M. Terentius Varro's forty-one books *Antiquitatum Rerum Humanarum et Divinarum*, of which twenty-five were devoted to human affairs — people, places, times and things — and sixteen to divine; but these were not chronological history, and were perhaps more like the book about the nature of God and Jewish laws and customs which Josephus had considered writing after the *Antiquities* (*AJ* XX, 268).

Other works of the same period shared with Dionysius the characteristic of starting with the most distant knowable (or supposedly knowable) events and coming down to quite recent history: we think, say, of Livy, or of Diodorus Siculus and his Universal History; both of these included their

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4 See, e.g. Diod, I, 4, 6; Dion. Hal. I, 4, 2. There appears to have been a special interest in such matters at that time: we may recall the interest of the age in the Greek logographers, noticed by L. Pearson, *The Early Ionian Historians* (Oxford, 1939), 12-13.
own lifetimes. Josephus, a century later, followed a similar scheme for the history of the Jews. As in the case of Dionysius, the label archaiologia applies only to the first half (roughly) of his work. Even this apparently peculiar usage seems to be not abnormal. With Cato the Elder's seven-book work on the history of Italy, the name Origins is strictly applicable to the first three books, where the origins of different cities are discussed; but theories that the author changed his intention in midstream, or that two separate works were combined, have now rightly been rejected; support is offered for this rejection by other works whose title really applies only to their first part, such as Xenophon's Cyropaedia and Anabasis. Another somewhat curious phenomenon, the tendency of ancient books to lack formal titles, to some extent accounts for all this; in default of suitable opening words, a work could conveniently be referred to by a name applicable to its first part, or indeed to any distinctive portion of it. It should be added that Josephus can also use archaiologia even more narrowly than might be expected; and in his introduction he distinguishes between two major themes, the Jewish archaiologia, and the formation of the Jewish constitution (politeuma) (1,5).

Now the earliest history of Greeks, and on the whole of Romans too (partly in imitation of Greeks), was embodied in myths which told of their wanderings, their heroes and the foundation of their cities. Myths were the principal source for archaiologia. This state of affairs is nicely demonstrated by the use of the word archaiologos to mean an actor, which occurs in an Attic inscription: for tragic actors were concerned, precisely, with the representation of myth. The limitations of the available material were recognized by Varro in his schematic threefold division of the past, in which the first of the three eras was the "mythical", the second was a dark age, and only the third earned the title "historical". And when historians incorporated such material into their works, some of them at least cherished no illusions about it, as we can see in Livy's appealing justification (and he was not the most critical of writers): "what is transmitted from before the foundation and establishment of the city is more appropriate to poetic tales than to the solid structures of history, and it is not my intention to confirm or deny these things. Let the license be granted to hoary tradition, of mixing

1 See RE Suppl. XII (1960), 1108-9, s.v. "Thukydides".
2 See L. Robert, Opera Minora Selecta I (Amsterdam, 1969), 671-4. The inscription of the second or third century A.D., is IG II2 2153. Robert confirmed this meaning in a late Latin-Greek glossary, where archaiologoi translates "Atellani". For the reading, cf. M.Thr.Mitsos, in Phoros: Tribute to Benjamin Dean Meritt (New York, 1974), p. 120.
3 The division is described by Censorinus, de Die Nat. 21, 1:1 "mythical"—from the beginning to the first cataclysm, an unknown length of time. 2. "obscure" (adelon) — from the first cataclysm to the first Olympiad, 1,600 years. 3. "historical"—"quia res in eo gestae veris historis continentur".
the divine with the human, so that the city's beginnings might be made more dignified" (praef 6). Apology or no apology, it came naturally to historians to treat prehistory as their province. They were perhaps encouraged by the example of Thucydides' willingness, in what became known as his archaiologia, to look in myths for certain proofs (tekmēria) from which he could make inferences about how things had once been; he talks of Hellen son of Deucalion as the man who united the Hellenes in an alliance and gave them their name (I,3), and speculates as to the power of Minos (I,4) and of Agamemnon (I,9). In fact, it was wrong of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, in his study of Thucydides (de Thuc.7), to say that Thucydides had altogether excluded the mythical from his history. The few fragments of Polybius' so-called archaiologia of early Rome (VI, 11a) show signs of a similar procedure, for Pallas, son of Hercules and Lavinia, is there discussed as an historical figure. The opponents of this approach did not manage to hold the field for long; Diodorus (IV, 1, 1-5) vigorously defended the incorporation of myths in an historical work against the scepticism of those who claimed that the traditions in them could neither be proved nor disproved and were mutually contradictory; and, in contrast to the practice of fourth century historians like Ephorus, he announced his policy of presenting ancient legends and honouring the heroes and demi-gods of old.

It was, one might say, the defeat of the sceptics which allowed Josephus to make the remote past of the Jews, that is to say Biblical traditions, the material for the first half of his Antiquities. In a sense, Moses, Joseph, David and the rest were the Jewish heroes. The stories would not look very different from those which readers were used to, especially after they had received Josephus' enlivening treatment, through the addition of a degree of realism, of psychological interpretation and of sentiment.

But the similarity is a superficial one. In a variety of respects, Josephus is performing a task different from the Greek and Roman writers. It is noticeable that he never uses the words mythologia or myths with reference to his own nation's past. He himself points out the important ways in which the Jewish archaiologia was distinguished and in his view superior to others, above all to the Greek archaiologia (he did not discuss


12 Neither Thucydides nor Polybius, however, considered such subject-matter suitable for a whole work: see A. Momigliano, "The Place of Herodotus in the History of Historiography", Studies in Historiography (London, 1966), 130-1.

13 Josephus' "psychologizing" is assessed by Attridge, op.cit. (n.1), p.40, with examples in nn. 3 and 4.
that of the Romans). First, there was the comparative antiquity of Jewish traditions. Josephus insists, both in the *Antiquities* (I,13) and in the defensive *Contra Apionem* (I, Iff.), where he backs up the *Antiquities* and often makes explicit what is latent there, that the Jews had a history going back five thousand years, which made them an older people than the Greeks, and also that they had adequate records of the earliest period of their history. The number five thousand is a somewhat exaggerated approximation to the total of Josephus’ figures, based largely on the Biblical generations, for the lengths of the different eras of Jewish history; from Adam to the flood; from the flood to Abraham; from Abraham to the Exodus; from the Exodus to Solomon’s Temple; from the building of Solomon’s Temple to its destruction; the seventy years of the Babylonian captivity; and finally from Cyrus to his own day. The work of Hellenistic Jewish chronographers may have assisted this calculation. In the *Antiquities*, as contrasted with the *Contra Apionem*, external attestations for the chronological claims are not felt to be necessary; nor are explicit and detailed synchronizations with other events in world history. But Josephus is in no doubt that he has an impressive claim to make. And indeed, the estimated five thousand years compares favourably with anything the classical world could offer. The last two of Varro’s periods taken together total only some two thousand years. For Josephus, the supposedly historical period extended into what for Greeks was the mythical. This advantage over the Greeks was something which many Eastern peoples shared with the Jews; in respect of antiquity, Greeks were used to finding themselves unfavourably compared with Orientals.

Then apart from the question of the age of the traditions involved (which might be seen as merely a difference of degree), there was a fundamental distinction between the kind of task which Greek writers of early history had to perform and that which lay before Josephus. The work of Greek historians of the remote past consisted in collecting ancient memories, which would exist in a variety of forms and versions and might be of a recondite character, and in combining, sifting and criticizing them.

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14 *AJ* I, 82; I, 148; I. 318; VIII, 61-2; X, 146; XI, 1. Two inconsistent but not greatly divergent systems of calculation seem to be employed by Josephus which may, but need not (it seems to me) be due to the use of two different sources. See Thackeray’s notes, *Loeb Josephus, ad loc.*

15 *CA* I, 93ff. is the key passage in Josephus for such synchronizations. See further B. Z. Wacholder, “Biblical Chronology in the Hellenistic World Chronicles”, *HThR* 61, 1968, 451-81.

Josephus would not have worked in this way. It is true that the Bible may have seemed to be a remote and inaccessible tradition to Josephus' intended readers, and in that way he may have been for them unearthing abstruse information. But that was not, of course, the real situation. For Jews, the collection had been made.

In this case, therefore, there was no need for the material to be discovered; nor was there any room for the examination of it, which to many Greeks was so important. Hecataeus of Miletus, the predecessor of Herodotus, had already approached the mythological material which he had gathered in a critical spirit. Much later, it was virtually automatic among Greeks to adopt a questioning stance, even if the actual questioning done was superficial. The main criterion used to sift the accumulated learning, whether explicitly or implicitly, was naturally that of plausibility. Thus Dionysius of Halicarnassus in de Thucydide (5) criticizes the forerunners of Thucydides for their naivety in accepting many incredible myths. And to give an example from his own work, he dismisses fanciful suggestions about an apotheosis of Romulus, and prefers the more realistic story that the king was assassinated by some of his subjects (Rom. Ant. 11,56). The pejorative implications of the very word "myth" made it necessary to tread with care. On the whole, a residual uncertainty about many points was acknowledged in Greek writing, as, for example, in Plutarch's statements about Theseus' battle with the Amazons (Theseus 26). Josephus takes pleasure in pointing out the dubiousness of Greek sources and the contradictions contained in them, and makes the multiplicity of the tradition into grounds for disparagement and contempt. Ironically, his remarks are somewhat reminiscent of the criticisms ascribed by Diodorus to predecessors who had altogether opposed the inclusion of myth in history (IV, 1, 1): "May one not easily discover from the writers themselves that they wrote without secure knowledge of any one fact, but in accordance with conjectures on the subject? For the most part they confute one another in their books, not hesitating to give the most contradictory accounts of the same matter" (CA 1, 15). Among the Jews on the other hand, the fact that the records are the product not of human hand but of prophetic utterance under divine inspiration, means that there exists no

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17 On their unfamiliarity with it, see below, pp. 475-476.
19 Which it could not but be, in the absence of much documentary material: see the remarks of Momigliano, loc. cit. (n. 12), 135-6.
20 See Wardman, op. cit. (n. 11), 409-410.
multitude of inconsistent, warring texts (CA I, 38). Thus Josephus sees the Jewish tradition, so he tells us, as one which may not, and at the same time need not be, questioned. It was unique and incomparably superior to Greek traditions; in fact, it was all true. The Bible was worlds apart from Greek myth. Nor is in traditions; the Aggadah does introduce AND JOSEPHUS mutually contradictory, or on the factual level — to consider how far different exegeses or legends were mutually contradictory, or individually plausible. A basic characteristic of Aggadah is that it can accommodate such contradictions.22

Again, it is not a serious departure from his principles when Josephus invokes extra-Biblical, non-Jewish authors, as he does occasionally in his narrative, above all in book I, to confirm some point in the Biblical tradition. For they are used not to check but only to reinforce the latter.23 Thus we are told that the flood and Noah's ark are also to be found in the work of Berossus, of Hieronymus of Egypt (otherwise unknown) and of Nicolaus of Damascus (I, 93-4); or (I, 158ff.) that Berossus knew but did not name Abraham, while Hecataeus of Abdera wrote a book about him (probably, in fact, a Jewish forgery), and Nicolaus made him king of Damascus (a tradition on whose validity Josephus offers no comment). It is clear that although Josephus took the trouble to ransack the obscure corners of Greek literature for this sort of material — and there is no reason to think he used an anthology24 — this has made not the slightest difference to what he has to say, but serves only as embellishment: the accumulation of authors' names confirms the infallibility of the Bible. Greek and Roman historians tend to do exactly the opposite, not naming their predecessors or citing their points of view except where they disagree with them or want to indicate that there is a dispute between them.

Of so little importance are these outside sources to Josephus that he feels able to claim his work to be an exact version of the sacred texts in their original language; it is interpreted from the Hebrew (I, 5). The point is made with some emphasis: "the narrative will proceed through the Scriptures, rendering them accurately in their original ordering. For I have

21 Discussed below, pp. 264-82.
23 For a full list, see Schürer-Vermes-Millar, 49, n. 3; or Schalit, op. cit. (n. 6), XLIII-XLIV.
24 As Schalit argues, op. cit. XLIV-XLVII, precisely from the fact that these authors were not of material interest to Josephus. Their reappearance in the Contra Apionem suggests, rather, that he was genuinely familiar with them. Josephus' assertion there (1,16) that his readers would be better placed than himself to judge the reliability of Greek historians is not to be taken as a confession of real ignorance of his part.
already undertaken to do so throughout this whole work, without adding or removing anything” (I, 5; cf. X, 218). The claim that an historian had neither added to, nor subtracted from, the facts has, as one might expect, parallels in Greek writers. But to have transmitted texts unaltered was a different matter.25 True, we find one instance of this, too, in a Greek context: a process of faithful reproduction similar to that claimed by Josephus was ascribed by Dionysius of Halicarnassus to the earliest Greek antiquarians, the so-called “logographers”, who had compiled local histories, both Greek and foreign (de Thuc. 5). But these fall outside the mainstream of Greek historiography. And even in their case, there have been doubts as to whether the task was merely one of publishing existing archives. Gomme’s comment is worth repeating: “It is clear, I think, that the main object of the chief writers of his class was not reproducing local records of epic legends in prose, but re-arrangement (which would of itself imply much correction) and, above all, criticism”.26

In practice, however, the Greek precedent had very little in common with Josephus’ case. The real home of the sort of claim which he makes about accurate reproduction of a sacred tradition seems to be among the later Greek exponents of Oriental cultures. And we can see that these writers of the Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic period, generally native in origin but using the Greek language, are altogether closer to Josephus in function than the students of early Greek tradition. Their work is distinctive, and in some cases unusually reliable, precisely because they drew extensively on genuine records. Thus, according to Josephus, Manetho, the Egyptian priest and a contemporary of Ptolemy Philadelphus, “wrote his native history in the Greek language, translating it, so he himself says from sacred tables”. (CA I, 73; cf. I,288).27 Likewise, the somewhat less sound Greek writer, Hecataeus of Abdera, had slightly earlier consulted priestly authorities and writings for his work on Egypt: “Those things which have been set down by Egyptian priests in their sacred writings we shall assiduously collect together

25 W. C. van Unnik’s “Die Formel ‘nichts wegnnehmen, nichts hinzuflugen’ bei Josephus”, in Flavius Josephus als historiker Schriftsteller (Heidelberg, 1978), 26-40, overlooks this distinction. In general, his attempt to assimilate Josephus’ formula with isolated classical Greek instances, and to associate its implications with Tacitus’ claim of being without personal partisanship (“sine ira et studio”) fails to convince.
26 Cited by W. Kendrick Pritchett in Dionysius of Halicarnassus on Thucydid (California, 1975), p. 54, n. 20.
27 Manetho was thus able to lay the foundations for the study of Greek chronology. The fragments: Jacoby, FGH IIIC 609. On Manetho’s priestly sources, see first the brief account in Waddell’s Loeb Classical Library edition (1940), intr. xxii. For a good general survey see P. M. Fraser, Ptolemaic Alexandria (Oxford, 1973), I, 505-510; for some bibliography, Fraser, II, 727, n. 93.
and publish". (Diod I, 69, 7). In a comparable way, Berossus the Babylonian astronomer and priest of Bel, in a work dedicated to Antiochus I, assures his readers that he has preserved and used old documents; with their help he refutes many false notions of Herodotus. In all probability, later writers, now lost, continued the same tradition. There was Ptolemy of Mendes, an Egyptian priest who wrote a chronology used by Apion and whom Josephus specially commends for telling each nation's history from its own written records (CA I, 116; AJ VIII, 283); or Menander of Ephesus, who translated the archives of Tyre (AJ VIII, 144; 324; IX, 283); or various other Phoenician historians, such as Dion, whose accuracy Josephus praises (CA I, 112; AJ VIII, 147). Perhaps the roots of this approach are in Herodotus, for he repeatedly supplements his own observation with native tradition and reports on many interviews in Babylon and Egypt, especially with priests, some of whom read to him from written records. It is significant that most of what we know about the later authors who employed this method comes to us from none other than Josephus; clearly, this was a branch of Greek literature which was very much alive to him, however remote is seemed to real Greeks.

Josephus, then, has much in common with those native historians, and it is in this tradition that he is explicitly putting himself with his claim of following sacred sources verbatim. Yet his function is different even from theirs. For even such writers as Manetho and Berossus used, it appears, a variety of sources of different kinds, many of them more in the nature of bare records than literary texts; and for them the task of selection and compilation was not eliminated. Josephus had only the freedom of selecting within the Bible. In fact, of course, he did make omissions and even additions. But the operations performed by him are of a kind endorsed by Jewish tradition, compatible with a pious reverence for the text. The

28 FGH IIIA 264. On his sources, Jacoby, IIIA Comm., 82ff. For a vindication of the general supposition that Diodorus' first book is taken from Hecataeus, and an assessment of Hecataeus' methods and reliability, see O. Murray, "Hecataeus of Abdera and Pharaonic Kingship", JEA 56, 1970, 144-171, together with the criticisms of Fraser, op. cit. (n. 27), II, 1116, n. 11; and Fraser I, 496-505.


30 Ptolemy: see RE XXIII, 2 (1959), 1861, Ptolemaios no. 74. The dates of Menander and Dion are unknown, although Menander has sometimes been thought to be the pupil of Eratosthenes mentioned by the Suda: see on him Fraser II, 735 nn. 130 and 131.

31 See e.g. II, 100. This is not to say that he was not frequently misled by his informants. That presumably is why Menetho wrote a pamphlet attacking him: FGH IIIC 609 F13; CA I, 73. On this aspect of Herodotus, see R. Drews, The Greek Accounts of Eastern History (Cambridge, Mass., 1973), especially 78-81.

32 On the neglect of Manetho and Berossus, cf. Drews, op. cit. (n. 31), 208, n. 81.
procedure for omissions is the same as that of later synagogue readers, and consequently Targumists, who by Rabbinic prescription avoided dangerous or discreditable passages; it does not matter that not all of Josephus' omissions actually coincide with those mentioned in the Mishnah. As for his additions, they may be described as Aggadic or of Aggadic type, and it is well known that many of them reappear in later Midrashic literature; this kind of exegesis was seen as an extension of the Book itself. Thus Josephus' modifications in no way signified a departure from Scripture. His respect for the Bible was unbounded; for him this one source was possessed of a greater sanctity than anything else in existence. No other collection of documents known to him, even among those treasured by priests or deposited in temples, enjoyed the same status as did the Bible in the eyes of the people of the Book, which for countless generations no-one had dared touch (CA 1, 42). Only the Jews had shown themselves prepared to die for their Law (CA 1, 43).

Before Josephus, there had been other Jews who had contributed in a minor way to Greek literature, exploiting Biblical themes. We might be tempted to think that at least in this limited way our author's archaiologia fits comfortably into a Hellenized historiographical tradition. But it is remarkable that he refers on only one single occasion — and that in the Contra Apionem — to any Hellenistic Greek rewritings of parts of the Bible. And there his purpose is to assert that while "Demetrius of Phalera, Philo the Elder and Eupolemus" may have known the history better than some, "they were not in a position to follow our texts with complete accuracy" (CA 1, 218). He is apparently so ill-informed about those writers that he can confuse Demetrius the historian with his better-known Greek namesake, the politician and librarian, and can assume all three to be non-Jews. He did not, then, regard Hellenistic Jewish historians as his precursors; and in reality such authors can hardly have shared Josephus' broad objectives. It has been concluded that Demetrius (in the third century B.C.) was interested mainly in chronological arguments, and the other chronicler, Eupolemus, in reproducing such inventions as King

31 Analyzed by L. H. Feldman, "Josephus' Portrayal of Man's Decline" (see n. 1). Of five passages which Mishnah, Megillah 25a recommends for reading without translation, Josephus omits three, including the golden calf episode.

Solomon's correspondence. Philo was an epic poet, exploiting Biblical material. In general, the main concern was manipulation rather than re-statement. Only in one respect were these writers like Josephus: they addressed themselves (at least in part) to an outside audience, and their writing, like his, was possessed of a strong apologetic purpose.

The justification for Josephus' own re-writing had been made quite plain. It was that his national treasure had been ignored by pagans. It had received even less recognition than other Eastern traditions. Here, again, Josephus stands apart. His approach is in the sharpest contrast with such pagan writers as had concerned themselves, in excursuses or in whole works, with the origins of the Jewish people. or with some phase of their early history (generally the exodus or the Mosaic constitution). For it is clear that it was not so much ignorance or the difficulty of access to information which made writers like Strabo, Diodorus and (even after Josephus) Tacitus collect and repeat absurd and garbled stories about these matters. The Bible existed in Greek. The answer to the question why pagans did not consult the Septuagint is not that they simply did not happen to see it. They would not have been impressed with its contents if they had. For they showed little or no willingness to ascribe special value to what this contemptible nation thought about its own past; and, indeed, no very great willingness to consider what any nation thought about itself. As far as the main Greek and Roman authors were concerned, it was writers from a milieu close to their own who appeared to them reliable. Thus, to select the best known example, Tacitus presents six conflicting accounts of the origins of the Jews — that they were Cretans from Ida, Ethiopians, the surplus Egyptian population, Assyrians, Homer's Solymi or a diseased part of the Egyptian people — and it is clear that he takes them all quite seriously, although he does not care to choose between them. Yet he does not reflect up on what

35 On these writers see J. Freudenthal, Alexander Polyhistor und die von ihm erzählten Reste jüdischer und samaritanischer Geschichtswerke (Breslau, 1874); Fraser, op. cit. (n. 27); B. Z. Wacholder, Eupolemus, A Study of Greco-Jewish Literature (Cincinnati, 1974); E. J. Bickerman, "The Jewish Historian Demetrius", in Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty III (Leiden, 1975), 72ff; N. Walter, Fragmente jüdisch-hellenistischer Historiker ( Gütersloh, 1976).


37 See E. Bickermann, "Origines gentium", CPh 47, 1952, 65-81, who maintains (75ff.) that Caesar's approach to the Gauls was a rare exception; and A. Dihle, "Zur hellenistischen Ethnographie" (followed by discussion), Grecs et Barbares: Entretiens Hardt VIII (Geneva, 1961), 207-239, especially 233-4.

the Jews thought of the matter. Perhaps our own attitudes to peoples whom we regard as barbarous are not so very different: we expect our own scholarship to produce better answers than indigenous traditions. It is interesting that one of the many contrasts between Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Josephus lies in this very area: even though Dionysius admired the Romans, his way of making them respectable was by integrating them into Greek myth and giving them the pedigree of Arcadian descent. Josephus, on the other hand, justifies the Jews essentially on their own terms.

To suggest that Greeks and Romans did not care about Jewish traditions is not to say that all important pagan writers disapproved of Judaism; but even those who admired some aspects of it, or held mixed attitudes — Hecataeus of Abdera, Theophrastus, or, most probably, Posidonius — gave curious and garbled accounts, substituting Utopianism for calumny.39 The only possible exception is that apparently remarkable polymath who flourished in the 40’s B.C., Alexander Polyhistor.40 Probably under the impact of Pompeius’ conquests — although not, it seems, in any direct relationship with them41 — Polyhistor collected information about many peoples and regions. His On the Jews, about which we know a certain amount from book IX of Eusebius’ Praeparatio Evangelica, was a compendium of extracts from Hellenistic Jewish writers, from Greeks like Apollonius Molon, and from other stranger figures such as a man whom Josephus calls “Cleodemus the prophet, also called Malchus” (AJ I, 240), who is thought to have been a Samaritan. Polyhistor does not appear to have used the Bible directly, but some of the authors he cited — Demetrius the chronographer for example — probably did. Be that as it may, since Polyhistor also gave space to Greek views, we may infer that even he did not assign pre-eminence to the native version.

39 According to Hecataeus, Moses the wise lawgiver founded a state in which purity was jealously guarded, youth was trained for deeds of valour, and land was inalienable. For Theophrastus, the Jews were philosophers who pondered the nature of God, watched the stars and sacrificed at night. For Posidonius, as cited (it is commonly agreed) in Strabo’s Geography, Moses and his people were uncompromising monotheists who therefore founded their own state, so well-governed that their neighbours were drawn to it (until corruption set in). I have discussed pagan ignorance of the real character of Judaism in connection with Stern’s source-book in “The Unknown God”, JJS 28, 1, 1977, 20-29.

40 On Polyhistor, see Freudenthal, op. cit. (n. 34), 16-35; Ed. Schwartz in RE I, 2 (1894), 1449; Jacoby, IIIA Comm. (1954), 248ff. As to the date, Servius ad Aeneid X, 388 describes Polyhistor as a freedman of Sulla; the Suda says he flourished during and after the period of Sulla; the forties are indicated by the information in Suetonius, de Gramm. et Rhet. 20 that Hyginus, the Augustan freedman, had heard Polyhistor, when we know that Hyginus was brought to Rome in the mid-forties. cf. Jacoby, FGH loc. cit. 248-50.

41 Not all the works seem to have described peoples conquered by Pompeius: there was one about Caria, and probably one about India: see Jacoby, loc. cit. 256-7; FGH IIIA F18 and 21-28.
In general, there was wilful ignorance about the Jews. It was this cast of mind which Josephus had set himself to shake when he presented the historical portions of the Bible in Greek dress, as an "archaeology", to the attention of Greek readers. He was in this sense quite aware that he was in a class apart from the Greek and Roman antiquarians and that they provided no more than a formal precedent for him. The composition of the Contra Apionem some years later shows, as clearly as does Tacitus' attitude, that Josephus felt that he had not succeeded; the work is an admission of defeat, for in book I, as we have seen, Josephus combs a number of non-Jewish authorities to try and convince his readers once again of the antiquity of the Jewish people. They had not, he says, been persuaded by his previous writings: "Since I observed many people, influenced by the malicious slanders of certain individuals, distrusting what I said in my archaiologia, and adducing as a proof that our nation is young the fact that the most famous Greek historians did not see fit to mention it, I thought I should write briefly on this whole subject". (CA I, 2). In book II, Josephus attacks the statements of Apion about the Jews; these were the product of a previous generation, but evidently still heeded in spite of the publication of the Antiquities (CA II, 4). Still, the historian's failure to achieve what was perhaps an impossible task should not obscure the importance and originality of what he had tried to do in the archaeological part of his Antiquities. There is no parallel for it in the Graeco-Roman world.

It would be wrong, in the end, to dismiss as insignificant the Greek form in which Josephus' product is clothed; after all, to achieve a kind of Hellenization is central to his whole enterprise, and a reconciliation of the two nations is, as we know, his ultimate aim. But we cannot escape the conclusion that, at least in the way he conceives of the Biblical part of his undertaking, this Jewish writer is less of a Greek historian than he appears at first sight, and that he expects his Greek readers to accept the early history of the Jews on his terms, and not on theirs. The pill may be sugared, but it remains a pill.