

# Writing Politics in Imperial Rome

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

OF DESPOTS, DIADEMS AND *DIADOCHOI*:  
JOSEPHUS AND FLAVIAN POLITICS

Steve Mason

ἀγῶνος δὲ ἐνδεήσειν οὐδέν· οὐ γὰρ τὴν σύγκλητον ἢ τὸν Ῥωμαίων δῆμον ἀνέξεσθαι τῆς Οὐιτελλίου λαγνείας ἀντὶ τῆς Οὐεσπασιανοῦ σωφροσύνης, οὐδ' ἀντὶ μὲν ἡγεμόνος ἀγαθοῦ τύραννον ὠμότατον, ἄπαιδα δὲ ἀντὶ πατρὸς αἰρήσεσθαι προστάτην μέγιστον γὰρ δὴ πρὸς ἀσφάλειαν εἰρήνης εἶναι τὰς γνησίους τῶν βασιλέων διαδοχάς.

(Joseph. *Bj* 4.596)

But there will be no need of a competition, for neither the senate nor the Roman populace will tolerate the lust of Vitellius in place of the self-control of Vespasian; nor will they choose as patron a savage tyrant in place of a good governor, nor a childless man in place of a father. For the greatest security of peace consists in natural successors of the kings.

[Vespasian's legions, Judea, 69 CE]

In a previous essay I have argued that Titus Flavius Josephus, the only extant historian from Flavian Rome, used his *Antiquitates Judaicae* to comment on Roman governance, both directly and obliquely through the medium of Judean politics.<sup>1</sup> Published at the beginning of Domitian's "terror" (93/94 CE), his *magnum opus* promises to chart the vicissitudes of the Judean πολιτεία ("constitution," *Aj* 1.5, 10). In doing so, however, it speaks often about the odium of monarchy, which as everyone knows degenerates to tyranny (Pl. *Resp.* 8.565–9; Arist. *Pol.* 1279b, 1295a; Polyb. 6.4.8; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 7.55.3), while extolling senatorial aristocracy. Josephus' Moses cautions the Hebrews that ἀριστοκρατία μὲν οὐν κράτιστον καὶ ὁ κατ' αὐτὴν βίος, καὶ μὴ λάβῃ πόθος ὑμᾶς ἄλλης πολιτείας ("aristocracy, and the life associated with it, is the noblest. So do not let the desire for any other constitution snare you," *Aj* 4.223). When the people demand a king because of the bad behavior of the prophet Samuel's sons, Josephus uses the lads to illustrate the rule that the character of a child is often at variance with that of the parents (6.33–4)—the case *against* hereditary succession, and so kingship. He claims that Samuel became profoundly upset at the demand for a king,

<sup>1</sup> Mason (2003) 559–89.

...διὰ τὴν σύμφυτον δικαιοσύνην καὶ τὸ πρὸς τοὺς βασιλέας μῖσος· ἥττητο γὰρ δεινῶς τῆς ἀριστοκρατίας ὡς θείας καὶ μακαρίους ποιούσης τοὺς χρωμένους αὐτῆς τῇ πολιτείᾳ.

(Joseph. *AJ* 6.36)

...because of his innate justice and his hatred of kings, for he had enormous affection for aristocracy, as divine and rendering happy those who use this constitution.

Kings tyrannically enslave their people and expropriate their possessions (*AJ* 6.40–1), and so the constitution provides for an aristocratic *γερουσία* (“senate”) led by the high priest. Monarchy was an aberration.

Such passages plainly have an application beyond Judean affairs. Josephus’ extended treatment of the heir-obsessed Herod, in *Antiquitates Judaicae* 14 to 17, yields in books 18 and 19 to a detailed exploration of the Roman crises that attended the deaths of Tiberius and Gaius Caligula.<sup>2</sup> He dwells on Tiberius’ problem finding an heir (*AJ* 18.205–23) and hosts an internal Roman debate on the best form of government (19.158–211). Like Moses and Samuel, the consul Gnaeus Sentius Saturninus opines that collegial senatorial governance *πολιτειῶν ἐχεγγυώταται πρὸς τε τὸ παρὸν εὖνουν καὶ τὸ αὐθις ἀνεπιβούλευτον καὶ τὸ δόξαν οἰκείαν τῷ ὀρθουμένῳ τῆς πόλεως* (“of all constitutions best guarantees both good will in the present and freedom from intrigue in the future, as well as the reputation attached to the right ordering of the city,” 19.178). Sentius contrasts favorably the assassins of Gaius with Julius Caesar’s murderers (19.184)<sup>3</sup> and tars *all* the *principes* as tyrants (19.173–4). Josephus editorially confirms the link between principate and tyranny: *οὗτοι γὰρ πρότερον ἢ τυραννηθῆναι τὴν πόλιν κύριοι τῶν στρατιωτικῶν ἦσαν* (“for before the city had been *subjected to tyrants*, it was they [the senators] who had been masters of the military,” 19.187). The senators contemplate a putsch to recover their historic *libertas* (“freedom”), but end up with Claudius as *princeps*, in a compromise with the army brokered by a Judean king (19.212–73). Evidently, Josephus’ treatment of governance in the *Antiquitates Judaicae* was attuned to the interests of an elite Roman audience.

The present chapter has a narrower focus, namely the story of King Herod’s succession crisis (4 BCE) in Josephus’ earliest known work, the *Bellum Judaicum*. Although this work is commonly dismissed as Flavian

<sup>2</sup> Mason (2003) 559–89.

<sup>3</sup> On the dangers of perceived support for Brutus and Cassius: Tac. *Ann.* 4.34–5, 4.76, 16.7, 22; Plin. *Ep.* 1.17.3; MacMullen (1966) 1–45; Salles (1992) 70–5.

propaganda,<sup>4</sup> I shall ask whether already here Josephus does not offer material for reflection in the vein of “safe criticism”<sup>5</sup> on the problem of monarchical succession. This issue was of course fundamental for the Julio-Claudians;<sup>6</sup> it surfaced immediately in the civil war of 68–9 with Galba<sup>7</sup> and played a prominent role in the rise of the Flavians. Hasmonean and Herodian succession woes occupy a remarkable amount of space in a work ostensibly devoted to the Judean war of 66–73. In book 1, the Hasmonean dynasty reaches its apogee with John Hyrcanus (governed 135–104 BCE), who is allowed through prophecy to see that his dynasty will soon collapse under his sons Aristobulus and Alexander Jannaeus (*BJ* 69). The former immediately transforms the rule into a monarchy and ominously assumes the diadem. His brief reign (104 BCE) becomes a tyranny marred by matricide and fratricide (70–1). In the latter half of the Hasmonean story, Josephus treats his brother Alexander’s long tyranny (104–76 BCE)—he kills more than 50,000 of his own people (91)—and the succession struggle between Alexander’s two sons, which will fatefully invite Roman intervention in 63 BCE (117–54). Then King Herod (ruled 37–4 BCE) plans his succession with seven different wills, not least because in fits of pique he eliminates heirs.<sup>8</sup> In *Bellum Judaicum* 2, following the king’s death, Augustus’ verdict about Herod’s successor displaces almost everything else from the narrative of the decade 4 BCE to 6 CE (1–118). That passage is our focus. It is not enough to explain such a narrative preoccupation by supposing that Josephus merely records what happened or by resort to sources that he thoughtlessly compiled. My task is to interpret this fascinating passage in relation to the work as a whole and in light of Josephus’ Roman context.

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<sup>4</sup> E.g., Laqueur (1920) 126–7; Thackeray (1929) 27–8; Smith (1956) 67–81; Shutt (1961) 26; Yavetz (1975) 421; Cohen (1979) 86, 237–41; Cohen (1982) 366; Attridge (1984) 192–227; Jones (1984) 78; Hengel (1989) 7–10; S. Schwartz (1990) 10; Levick (1999) 12, 31.

<sup>5</sup> See Ahl (1984a) 174–208.

<sup>6</sup> E.g., Gagé (1931) 11–41; Syme (1939) 415–39; Parsi (1963) 2–12; Mellado Rivera (2003).

<sup>7</sup> E.g., Wellesley (1989) 11, 17–9.

<sup>8</sup> Richardson (1996) 33–51.

*Civil Strife and Tyrants—Judean and Roman*

Josephus claims to have written the *Bellum Judaicum* because, in the immediate wake of the conflict, reporting by others was hopelessly inaccurate and biased (*Bj* 1.1–3, 6–8). Such authors always *καταβάλλουσιν* (“bully”) and *ταπεινοῦσιν* (“diminish”) the Judeans (1.7). A proud priest-aristocrat and former general in the northern theater facing the Roman advance, he will mount a sustained effort to correct this bias. While allowing due credit to the victors, he will reveal how much difficulty they faced from his people (1.8). He will make his audience aware of the Judeans’ real character; their long period of suffering under unworthy governors, and their excellent leadership; in battle, their tenacity, courage, pride, and contempt for death (e.g., 5.306, 315–6; 6.11–7, 285). He will explain that Jerusalem fell and its temple was destroyed not because of Roman power or Titus’ design, as commonly supposed, but because certain *τύραννοι* (“tyrants”) among the Judeans generated a *στάσις* (“civil conflict”) that hijacked the war from the aristocrats, whom they eventually murdered (1.10; 4.305–65). The tyrants fought incompetently and from the wrong motives; they disregarded the lives of their own people, whose freedom was their ostensible goal (1.10, 27). Their gross impiety led the Judean God to abandon and purge his temple (5.402, 444; 6.300).

There is every reason to believe Josephus’ account of his situation and motives. Decades later, another native Aramaic-speaker would complain in similar terms about the bias and ignorance of historians purporting to describe the Parthian war of Lucius Verus (*Lucian Hist.* 2, 7, 13, 15, 17, 24, 29). All the known evidence bearing on Roman conditions in the 70s and 80s<sup>9</sup> abundantly confirms that the Judean image suffered badly in consequence of the endless Flavian celebrations. In response, Josephus’ narrative really does attempt a balanced portrait, consistently recognizing both Judean and Roman acts of valor.

The *Grundkonzept* of Judean *στάσις* and tyranny is programmatically linked by Josephus with Roman parallels. As he says retrospectively in the *Antiquitates Judaicae* (1.7), the work has a symmetrical arrangement. Analysis reveals an overarching concentric plan, moving towards and then away from the central panel concerning the murder of the esteemed aristocrats Ananus and Jesus, who had been virtuously man-

<sup>9</sup> See especially Millar (2005) 101–28.

aging the conflict with the welfare of the people uppermost in mind (*Bḡ* 4.305–65). Their deaths open the gates to an unbridled tyranny and *στάσις* (362, 366), resulting in the ultimate catastrophe. Within this symmetrical plan, Josephus connects Roman civil war (*στάσις*, *πόλεμος ἐμφύλιος*) and *τύραννοι*, pre-Augustan and pre-Flavian, with the two halves of his Judean story.<sup>10</sup> Of course, these phenomena were well-known threats facing every state (cf., e.g., Plut. *Mor.* 799b–804c, 814f–816a). Yet Josephus does not (like Plutarch or Dio) treat them as a generic, much less a Greek, problem: he matches up only and continually the Judean and Roman situations.

In the prologue (*Bḡ* 1.4) he identifies the *κίνημα* (“commotion”) when the Judean war erupted as a period in which Roman affairs also *ἐνόσει* (“were becoming diseased”—a verb commonly applied with its Latin equivalents to the blight of civil strife: Pl. *Resp.* 5.470c, *Soph.* 228a; Sall. *Cat.* 36.5, *Hist.* 2.77; Tac. *Ann.* 1.43.4, *Hist.* 1.26.1).<sup>11</sup> The same prospectus mentions the *μεταβολαί* (“upheavals”) in Rome at the time of the Judean war (*Bḡ* 1.23). Josephus implies that the civil war that afflicted the Judeans and led to Roman intervention was an experience quite familiar to the Romans and not—as Nicolaus of Damascus and others would claim (2.92)—a perverse Judean trait.

That such civil wars have always characterized great foreign powers is a point made repeatedly, even under the glorious period of native Hasmonean rule (*Bḡ* 1.31–168). So the opening sentence of the narrative:

Στάσεως τοῖς δυνατοῖς Ἰουδαίων ἐμπεσούσης καθ’ ὃν καιρὸν Ἀντίοχος ὁ κληθεὶς Ἐπιφανῆς διεφέρετο περὶ ὅλης Συρίας πρὸς Πτολεμαῖον τὸν ἕκτον, ἡ φιλοτιμία δ’ ἦν αὐτοῖς περὶ δυναστείας ἐκάστου τῶν ἐν ἀξιώματι μὴ φέροντος τοῖς ὁμοίοις ὑποτετάχθαι...

(Joseph. *Bḡ* 1.31)

Civil strife broke out among the leaders of the Judeans at the very time when Antiochus surnamed Epiphanes had a quarrel with Ptolemy VI concerning all of Syria: the rivalry among them was about supreme power, since each person of status could not bear to be subjected to his peers...

Local contenders for power had larger political affiliations, such that for example the defeat of Ptolemy VI required the withdrawal of his Judean

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Rajak (1983) 91–4; Feldman (1998) 140–8; Mader (2000) 55–103; cf. Price (2001) on the Thucydidean background.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Keitel (1984) 320, n. 32.

client, the high priest Onias, to Egypt.<sup>12</sup> After Antiochus IV launched his notorious persecution against the Judeans (167 BCE), the Hasmonean rebels were able to carve out their state in large part by taking advantage of dynastic rivalries within Seleucid circles (1.49, 50–1).

When the Romans came on the scene, they too imposed their power struggles on the Judeans. In the bulk of book 1, which is devoted to the exploits of Herod's father Antipater and then the great king himself, the Roman civil wars and their famous protagonists furnish the context. Antipater and Herod pursue an astonishingly deft program of managing relations: with Pompey (127–31); with Crassus, who plundered 2,000 talents from the Jerusalem temple for his Parthian campaign and promptly perished in the effort (179); with Pompey's enemy Julius Caesar (183); with Caesar's assassin Cassius (218–20); with Caesar's avenger and victor at Philippi, Marc Antony (242); and finally with Antony's mortal enemy Octavian-Augustus, who would reportedly become Herod's closest friend (386, 400). Upon Caesar's assassination, Josephus turns the spotlight directly on the problem of Roman governance (216–9): πόλεμος ἐμφύλιος (“civil war”), διαστασιάζω (“fomenting factionalism”), and κίνημα (“commotion”) broke out at the center of the world. All this conspires to highlight the instability of Roman government through a long period: no matter how solidly established he appeared to be, even the most powerful man faced sudden removal by a stronger force.

Josephus drives this point home in the case of Antony and Octavian. Antony was at the height of his powers when he persuaded the senate to appoint Herod King of Judea (1.282–5); in return, Herod was generous with loyalty and military support (320). Though supremely powerful in the East, Antony was himself a slave to his passion for the bloodthirsty Egyptian Cleopatra (359–60, 390; cf. 243). Still, Herod was his friend and he would have rushed to support him even at Actium if he could have done so (388). Josephus therefore makes vivid the anxiety felt by Herod after Actium, and his great relief when Octavian confirmed him as king—bestowing on him once again the diadem that he had respectfully removed (387, 390, 393). The two become best friends (400). Paradoxically, the Idumean-Judean dynasty of Antipater

<sup>12</sup> In fact (cf. *AJ* 13.65–8), this Onias (III) died in the conflict and Onias IV founded the temple at Leontopolis.

and Herod proves more stable than the Roman regime to which it is subject during the decades following Pompey.

After book 1, the story of the *Bellum Judaicum* continues to connect with Roman struggles. Book 2 pays particular attention to the more grotesque products of the Julio-Claudian line—from an aristocratic perspective, at least: Gaius Caligula and Nero, whose memories were subject to erasure in Rome. In both cases Josephus emphasizes issues of succession at their elevation. Gaius is introduced as the son of Germanicus (*B* 2.178)—enough of a reference to evoke both the scandalous death of that adored young man (as it was widely rumored) from dynastic causes (*Tac. Ann.* 2.82; *Suet. Tib.* 52.3) and Gaius' well-known fall from his great father's glory. Of Nero, Josephus notes with all malice that Claudius left him as successor even though the *princeps* had a natural son, Britannicus, and two daughters; he had adopted Nero τῆς Ἀγριππίνης τῆς γυναικὸς ἀπάταις (“because of his wife Agrippina's trickery,” *B* 2.249). Gaius and Nero become in Josephus' narrative the primary agents of the breakdown in Judean-Roman relations (below). Josephus coins a phrase for both: ἐξέβρισεν εἰς τὴν τύχην (“they abused fortune,” 184, 250). Even the accession of the mild Claudius, between these two, was marked by a brief civil war in Rome: the impotent senate at first declared war on him, determined either to re-establish ἀριστοκρατία (“the aristocracy”) of old, or to select by vote someone worthy of *imperium*, 205).

From book 4 onwards, the backdrop changes to the recent civil war in Rome, from the revolt of Vindex (4.440) through the months of turmoil following Nero's suicide (491–502, 545–9). The relevance of this parallel story becomes clear at 4.545. While describing the violent conflict in Jerusalem between the tyrants Simon bar Gioras and John of Gischala, Josephus observes: Οὐ μόνον δὲ κατὰ τὴν Ἰουδαίαν στάσις ἦν καὶ πόλεμος ἐμφύλιος, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς Ἰταλίας (“not only in Judea were there civil war and sedition, however, but also across Italy,” 545–6)—and he briefly covers the struggles of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, adverting to audience knowledge for the details (546–9). Later he writes, κατὰ δὲ τὸν αὐτὸν καιρὸν περιέσχε καὶ τὴν Ῥώμην πάθη χαλεπά (“at about the same time [as the Jerusalem tyrants were polluting Jerusalem], heavy sufferings enveloped Rome,” 585). The Judean-Roman comparison is strengthened by Josephus' characterization of Vitellius: he filled every house in Rome with armed men, who pillaged at will and slaughtered those who obstructed them (4.586–7). Vitellius thus behaves just like the despots of Jerusalem, described immediately before this section.

The Roman, like his Judean counterparts (566, 569), was a τύραννος ὀμότατος (“savage tyrant,” 596)—the same phrase used of Herod and Archelaus by the Judean delegates to Augustus (2.84, 88; see below).

Again, several paragraphs near the end of book 4 provide a graphic, day-by-day portrait of the end to the civil war in Rome (630–55), which comes immediately before Titus is sent to quell the civil war in Jerusalem (656–63). For Titus understands as does Josephus that the problem in Jerusalem is a *civil war* (5.1–3) and not a matter of the Judean people’s opposing Rome, as the Flavian portrait would have it. Thus, we have two great nations racked by civil discord, with would-be tyrants pursuing their personal power no matter what the cost to the commonwealth.

The end of the στάσις theme in the *Bellum Judaicum* is also the end of the main story. This occurs with the joint triumph of Vespasian and Titus, concerning which Josephus comments

ταύτην γὰρ τὴν ἡμέραν ἡ Ῥωμαίων πόλις ἐώρταζεν ἐπινίκιον μὲν τῆς κατὰ τῶν πολεμίων στρατείας, πέρας δὲ τῶν ἐμφυλίων κακῶν, ἀρχὴν δὲ τῶν ὑπὲρ τῆς εὐδαιμονίας ἐλπίδων.

(Joseph. *B* 7.157)

For on this day the city of the Romans celebrated *both* victory in the campaign against her enemies [the Judeans] *and* the end of civil disasters [among the Romans]—and thus the beginning of hopes for prosperity.

The next paragraph, collapsing some four years, covers the dedication of the Temple of Peace in Rome (158–62). Vespasian’s triumph over internal chaos, with his sons as ostensible insurance against further bloody contests, coincides with Vespasian’s and Titus’ decisive victory over foreign enemies. This is the mirror image of the Judean situation: the end of her civil war and tyranny means the cessation of conflict with Rome.

Josephus continually reverts to affairs in Rome, then, partly in order to make the Judean conflict intelligible, less alien. Every statesman understands the perennial threat of στάσις and *seditio*, and the Romans have suffered more than their share. Judeans can hardly be singled out for contempt because the disease has affected their society.

*Native Aristocracy, Foreign Hegemony, and “Freedom”*

To understand Josephus’ handling of the Herodian succession and the tyranny of Archelaus, one must bear in mind the general thrust of his

approach to Judean governance in the *Bellum Judaicum*. The ongoing interplay between respectable native δυνάτοί-aristocrats, kings and their heirs, and tyrants who seek personal power under the slogan of ἐλευθερία (“freedom,” “independence”) makes this work among other things a meditation on the meaning of freedom.<sup>13</sup> In contexts of rebellion from Rome, the language of freedom and slavery came easily to expression, as Tacitus’ account of the nearly contemporary revolt under Civilis in 69, for example, indicates (*Hist.* 4.17, 64; *Ann.* 3.45, 4.24, 4.46, 14.31). Paradoxically (given our topic), Civilis allows that slavery to Rome may be good enough for Syria, Asia Minor, and the East, accustomed to kings (*Tac. Hist.* 4.17), but not for Germans! One reason for Josephus’ inclusion of the Hasmonean history in his account of the Judean-Roman war surely has to do with this theme. The movement towards rebellion in the war just completed had drawn inspiration from the presumed Hasmonean example of ἐλευθερία, seen as independence from foreign rule.<sup>14</sup> Josephus reinterprets that charter history so as to qualify in crucial ways what freedom can plausibly mean.

In the spirit of his contemporary Plutarch, who advised statesmen to offer the populace a version of the nation’s past cleansed of inappropriately inspiring military escapades (*Mor.* 814c, 824d), the Hasmonean scion Josephus (*Vit.* 1) retells the story of the greatest generation in a way that precludes any naive equation of self-rule with absolute independence. In his account the hero Judah Maccabee, at the very inception of his revolt (*Bj* 1.38)—contrast 1 Maccabees (8:1–32)—was anxious to make a treaty with Rome, the new major power from the west. In the main speech that he writes for his own character later in the work, Josephus takes this theme back to the Persian period. Bonding with his audience by mentioning the dark ἐν Βαβυλῶνι δουλεία (“slavery in Babylon”), he surprisingly declares that ὁ λαὸς...οὐ πρότερον εἰς ἐλευθερίαν ἀνεχαίτισεν (“the people only raised its head toward liberty”) under the guidance of another foreign ruler, the Persian Cyrus: προυπέμφθησαν γοῦν ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ, καὶ πάλιν τὸν αὐτῶν σύμμαχον ἐνεωκόρουν (“Yes indeed! *It was through him* that they were sent out [to Judea] and once again worshiped their [divine] ally in a temple,” *Bj* 5.389). Further on Josephus invokes the Romans

<sup>13</sup> Schwartz (2002) 65–82 offers insight on the theme in the service of a source-critical treatment.

<sup>14</sup> See Farmer (1957) 147–55; Hengel (1989) 149–55, 171–3 (history of scholarship), 377.

as Judea's current foreign protectors against tyrants (5.396). Thus, the nation's most glorious days of self-rule *never* amounted to absolute independence; the Hasmoneans, understanding statesmanship like all proper statesmen, carved out a niche for the national dignity in the framework of alliances with world powers.

Book 2 of the *Bellum Judaicum* is shot through with the language of freedom and slavery. Josephus describes deceivers and bandits who in the mid-50s:

... συναχθέντες πολλοὺς εἰς ἀπόστασιν ἐνήγηον καὶ πρὸς ἐλευθερίαν παρεκρότουσαν θάνατον ἐπιτιμῶντες τοῖς πειθαρχοῦσιν τῇ Ῥωμαίων ἡγεμονίᾳ καὶ πρὸς βίαν ἀφαιρήσεσθαι λέγοντες τοὺς ἔκουσίῳ δουλεύειν προαιρουμένους.

(Joseph. *Bj* 2.264)

... were inciting many to defection and cajoling them toward "freedom," threatening death to those who submitted to the *imperium* of the Romans and saying that they would forcibly eliminate those who willingly chose slavery.

The marvelous contradiction in the tyrants' refusal to accept the free choice of others—for a putative "slavery"—and their willingness to impose "freedom" by force is a prominent theme in the *Bellum Judaicum* (cf. 2.443).

These notices anticipate a series of exchanges in the *Bellum Judaicum*'s pivotal section, the middle of book 4. There the former high priest Ananus is struggling to wrest control of Jerusalem from the Zealots. In a speech that repeatedly laments the role of tyrants in city, he remarks:

ἀλλ' ὁ νῦν πρὸς Ῥωμαίους πόλεμος, ἐὼ διελέγχειν πότερον λυσιτελεῖς ὢν καὶ σύμφορος ἢ τοῦναντίον, τίνα δ' οὖν ἔχει πρόφασιν; οὐ τὴν ἐλευθερίαν; εἶτα τοὺς τῆς οἰκουμένης δεσπότης μὴ φέροντες τῶν ὁμοφύλων τυράννων ἀνεξόμεθα;

(Joseph. *Bj* 4.177–8)

Yet there is now a war against Rome—I leave aside the question, which it is: profitable and advantageous or the opposite—but what is its pretext? Is it not 'freedom'? If, then, we are not tolerating even the masters of the inhabited earth, are we going to put up with tyrants who are mere compatriots?

The rhetoric becomes complicated when the Idumeans arrive outside the city, summoned by the Zealots to help secure the "freedom" of the city over against Ananus and the aristocrats (4.228, 245–6), who try to refuse them entry. Not grasping the real situation inside the city (known to the literary audience), the Idumean leader launches into an

attack on Ananus and his group for trying to keep out those who are committed only to freedom (273, 275), while they themselves exercise tyranny over the populace within—and yet pretend that they are victims of tyranny. The Idumean asks in exasperation, τίς ἄν ἐνέγκαι τὴν εἰρωνεΐαν τῶν λόγων; (“who can tolerate such irony of language?”, 279). Irony indeed!

Near the end of the work, completing the symmetry, Josephus makes the same point in nearly the same words about the σικάριοι (“assassins”) of Masada:

... συνέστησαν ἐπὶ τοὺς ὑπακούειν Ῥωμαίων θέλοντας καὶ πάντα τρόπον ὡς πολεμίοις προσεφέροντο, τὰς μὲν κτήσεις ἀρπάζοντες καὶ περιελάνοντες, ταῖς δ' οἰκήκεσιν αὐτῶν πῦρ ἐνιέντες· οὐδὲν γὰρ ἄλλοφύλων αὐτοὺς ἔφασκον διαφέρειν οὕτως ἀγεννῶς τὴν περιμάχητον Ἰουδαίοις ἐλευθερίαν προεμένους καὶ δουλείαν αἰρεῖσθαι τὴν ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίοις ἀνωμολογηκότας.

(Joseph. *Bj* 7.254–6)

...they banded together against those who wished to submit to Rome and in every way regarded them as enemies: seizing their goods, rounding up their cattle, and setting fire to their homes; for, they asserted, they were in no way different from foreigners, who so ignobly forfeited the Judeans' hard-won freedom and openly admitted that they chose slavery under the Romans.

The tyrants compel their compatriots to embrace their particular vision of freedom.<sup>15</sup>

Without the same ironic tinge, the *Bellum Judaicum's* three great speeches invest heavily in the freedom-slavery dialectic. The speeches of King Agrippa II and Josephus make the cold political point that Judea has indeed lost its freedom—in the rebels' sense of independence—long ago. But all the other great nations of the Roman world, which enjoy far superior resources for mounting resistance and sustaining independence, have capitulated also. Rebellion now is foolish (2.348–9, 355–6, 361, 373–6; 5.365–6, 389, 396). The speech of Eleazar son of Yair at Masada aptly closes out the freedom-slavery theme by calling for his comrades, in Stoic fashion, to take their own lives as the ultimate act of freedom, rather than face slavery under the Romans (7.335, 386; cf. 3.366–8). The moral is clear: no matter how enticing the prospect

<sup>15</sup> Similarly, in his famous speech at Iotapata, Josephus' character ridicules his compatriots' willingness to compel mass suicide as an act of “freedom” to prevent slavery (3.366–8).

of radical freedom may appear, as a political program it is literally a dead end.

Like his contemporaries,<sup>16</sup> Josephus has frequent recourse to the principle that rule by an outside power, now Rome, offers the best protection against native tyrants and internal civil strife. This principle was exemplified by the Roman general Titus Flamininus, “liberator of Greece,” a figure important for both Josephus’ model Polybius (18.46.14) and his contemporary Plutarch: ἀλλόφυλοι δ’ ἄνδρες . . . τοῖς μεγίστοις κινδύνοις καὶ πόνοις ἐξελόμενοι τὴν Ἑλλάδα δεσποτῶν χαλεπῶν καὶ τυράννων ἐλευθεροῦσι (“foreign men . . . have through the greatest dangers and labors rescued Greece, setting her free from harsh despots and tyrants,” *Flam.* 11.7; cf. *Comp. Phil. Flam.* 1.2). Similarly Josephus often remarks that the Romans, though ἀλλόφυλοι (“foreigners”), show more concern about the Judeans’ welfare than do the home-grown tyrants, whose personal ambition blinds them to the suffering they cause (*Bῆ* 1.27; 4.397; 5.18–9, 363; 6.102). This need not be read as Flavian or even Roman propaganda, for it is aristocratic political wisdom: the best hope for freedom—from the disease of domestic political rivalry—lay in what others might naively characterize as slavery (to the Romans).

With these issues in mind we may turn to the Herodian succession story in *Bellum Judaicum* 2, which intermingles all of these issues: monarchy, tyranny, succession, and political freedom. The presumptive heir Archelaus (1.667–70), aged 19, must undertake the long journey to Rome, to hear the decision of the world ruler Augustus (2.1–2). Two delegations from Judea also arrive in the capital, however, to challenge his claim. The first comprises other members of the Herodian family, who already hate the young man. Josephus claims that they were προηγουμένως ἕκαστος αὐτονομίας ἐπεθύμει στρατηγῶ Ῥωμαίων διοικουμένης, εἰ δ’ τοῦτο διαμαρτάνοι, βασιλεύειν Ἀντίπαν ἤθελεν (“each longing for self-government, preferably, supervised by a Roman commander; but should this fail, they wanted Antipas [Archelaus’ 17-year-old brother] to be king,” 22). The apparent paradox of self-government under a Roman commander is clarified by a later delegation of Judean elders who, with the approval of the Syrian governor Quintilius Varus and the aid of 8,000 Judeans residing in Rome,

<sup>16</sup> For Polybius: Eckstein (1995) 194–236; for the Second Sophistic: Oliver (1953) 874 on Aristides; Swain (1996) 145–83 in general; Salmeri (2000) 53–92 on Dio Chrysostom.

make a concerted bid *περὶ τῆς τοῦ ἔθνους αὐτονομίας* (“for the self-government of the nation,” 80):

δεῖσθαι δὲ Ῥωμαίων ἐλεῆσαι τὰ τε τῆς Ἰουδαίας λείψανα καὶ μὴ τὸ περισσὸν αὐτῆς ὑπορρίψαι τοῖς ὠμῶς σπαράττουσιν, συνάψαντας δὲ τῇ Συρίᾳ τὴν χώραν αὐτῶν διοικεῖν ἐπ’ ἰδίους ἡγεμόσιν· ἐπιδείξεσθαι γάρ, ὡς οἱ νῦν στασιώδεις διαβαλλόμενοι καὶ πολεμικοὶ φέρειν οἶδασιν μετρίους ἡγεμόνας.

(Joseph. *Bj* 2.90–1)

They begged the Romans to have mercy on the remains of Judea and not to toss away what was left of it to those who were savagely mauling it, but after joining their region to Syria to administer it by means of their own [Roman] governors. For this would demonstrate that those now being maligned as insurgent and bellicose know how to tolerate mild governors.

The context (84–90) shows that those guilty of savagely mauling the nation include at least the tyrant-monarch Archelaus and his father King Herod. The phrase might also encompass others who have been vying for the diadem in Archelaus’ absence (55–79; further below). However that may be, the delegates’ plea is clear: they wish to be incorporated into the province of Syria, with leave to follow their own laws under a native aristocracy. Anticipating the aristocratic leaders during the war against Rome, they understand freedom primarily as liberation from local despots, and consider aristocratic self-government best achieved under Roman rule.

The delegates’ appeal to be freed from local monarchic pretenders is highly significant for the narrative as a whole. First, it recalls a turning point in book 1, when the Pompeian Gabinius reorganized the government of Judea (*c.* 57 BCE) along just such lines, on his authority as proconsul of Syria. Denying the last Hasmonean rivals their royal ambitions, Gabinius *καθίστατο τὴν ἄλλην πολιτείαν ἐπὶ προστασίᾳ τῶν ἀρίστων* (“established another constitution, under the primacy [or patronage] of the *aristoi*,” 169). Josephus comments, *ἀσμένως δὲ τῆς ἐξ ἑνὸς ἐπικρατείας ἐλευθερωθέντες τὸ λοιπὸν ἀριστοκρατία διφκοῦντο* (“[The Judeans] were gladly freed from domination by one person and were governed in the sequel by an aristocracy,” 70). The embassy before Augustus, then, is pleading to return to this model after the interruption by Herod, and to prevent the continuation of monarchical experiments with the successor Archelaus.

It is telling that Josephus’ elders assume the moderate character of Syrian governors: they express no desire for Judea to be constituted a

province with its own governor. The governorship of Syria, with its legions, resources, and strategic importance in relation to Armenia and Parthia, was a great prize and a mark of honor for the highest-ranking senators. In the ensuing narrative, set under the principate, Josephus will describe successive *legati Augusti pro praetore* with obvious respect: P. Quinctilius Varus (2.16–7, 75–7), Publius Petronius (192–203), Ummidius Quadratus (239–44), and Cestius Gallus (280–1). They are men of status and aristocratic character.

In sharp contrast are both the Roman monarchs who loom large in the decades leading up to the war, and the equestrian “procurators” they send out to Judea. As we have seen, Josephus features the disgraced *principes* Gaius and Nero. He dilates on their heinous characters and behavior in relation to Judea—as in Rome. Gaius cut off the nobility of his own land, and extended the impiety to Judea (2.184), which was rescued only by the heroic statesmanship of Petronius, the Syrian legate (192–203). Nero murdered family members, and attacked the nobility (250); he also entrusted the Roman state to the most reprobate freedmen, Nymphidius and Tigellinus (4.491–5). And the men the emperors sent to govern Judea were from the bottom of the barrel. Josephus makes a point of this at his mention of the first (in 6 CE): Coronius, ἐπίτροπος τῆς ἰπικῆς... τάξεως... μέχρι τοῦ κτείνειν... ἐξουσίαν (“a procurator of the equestrian order [came with] authority that extended to killing,” 2.117)—a combination of low status and power that proves disastrous under later incumbents (169, 223, 247: “Felix, the brother of Pallas” sent by Claudius), especially some of Nero’s agents (272, 277). Thus, the Judean delegates’ hope for native aristocracy under a moderate senator in Syria, proposed to Augustus, will come to nothing.

This is conspicuous because in the *Antiquitates Judaicae* parallel (17.355, 18.1–2) Judea is in fact incorporated into Syria, not made a separate province as in *Bellum Judaicum*, and there are good reasons to think that this was the historical arrangement of 6 CE.<sup>17</sup> Before Claudius, further, the agent in charge of Judean affairs under the Syrian legate was a *praefectus* and not a *procurator*.<sup>18</sup> In the *Bellum Judaicum* Josephus

<sup>17</sup> So Cotton (1999) 77–8 n. 14. These arguments have been developed from literary evidence in Mason (2008).

<sup>18</sup> Sherwin-White (1978) 6; Schürer (1979–1987) 1.358–60; Brunt (1990) 163–87. This was strikingly confirmed for the case of Pontius Pilatus (19–37 CE) by an inscription from Caesarea Maritima published in 1961, which reads in part [*Pon*]tius Pilatus [*Praef*]ectus Iuda[ea]e (“Pontius Pilatus, Prefect of Judaea”). See Frova (1961) 419–34.

disguises these facts, making Judea a separate province and belittling its equestrian governors with the title of procurator (at first mention), highlighting their weakness of character and maladministration—in keeping with the model of the dastardly ἐπίτροπος,<sup>19</sup> Sabinus, whose actions generated the civil war that required suppression by Varus in 4 BCE (2.16–8, 41).<sup>20</sup>

*Herod's Heirs: Deserving the Diadem*

Thus far it might appear that Josephus or the delegations to Augustus advocate a standard Greek position for the Judeans vis-à-vis Rome, one without implications for the situation in Rome, where Josephus writes. We should reject this limitation. First, as we have seen, the *Bellum Judaicum* develops ongoing parallels between Judean and Roman society on salient issues of governance (e.g., civil war, tyranny, succession). Secondly, the rhetoric of freedom and slavery, so rich for discussing the relations of other nations with Rome, had wide currency also in Roman aristocratic discourse on the principate (see also Tac. *Hist.* 1.16; *Ann.* 1.7, 8, 46; *Agr.* 3.1),<sup>21</sup> and this application was also in Josephus' lexicon.<sup>22</sup> Among Roman opponents of the principate, the related questions of monarchy and hereditary succession treated so fully by Josephus turn up repeatedly. Under Vespasian, for example, Hostilianus is said to have incessantly inveighed against monarchy *per se* (Cass. Dio 66.12.1), while Helvidius Priscus challenged the *princeps* for planning a hereditary succession (Cass. Dio 66.13.2; see below). Thirdly, Josephus deposits these burning questions of Herodian monarchy and succession on Augustus' doorstep, the Palatine.

<sup>19</sup> That the Judean procurators were praesidial (in Josephus' account), whereas Sabinus was a *procurator Augusti*, is hardly relevant for the rhetorical effect of this juxtaposition.

<sup>20</sup> On the social status of governors: Tac. *Hist.* 5.9, *Ann.* 14.32–3; Lendon (1997) 222–4.

<sup>21</sup> Plass (1988) 3–68; Roller (2001) 214–33. Epict. *Diatr.* 4.1.12–4 presents Caesar's position as πάντων κύριος (“master of all”) as pre-empting all other claims to freedom, even on the part of a consul; cf. Penwill (2003) 362–7. Keitel (1984) shows that the *Annals* consider the principate an extension of civil war, the city of Rome under a *princeps* an *urbs capta* (“captured city”).

<sup>22</sup> After Gaius' death, the senate will no longer tolerate δουλείαν ἐκούσιον οὐχ ὑπομενεῖν (“voluntary slavery,” *Bῆ* 2.209; cf. *Aῖ* 19.167–70, 181).

Josephus arranges the story, characteristically, in a concentric “A-B-A” pattern. After the arrival of Archelaus and his challengers (*Bj* 2.14–23), Augustus convenes a *consilium* (“advisory meeting,” 25) and the various parties make their speeches for or against his candidacy (26–37). Just when the *princeps* appears ready to make a decision, however (38–9), Josephus cuts away to Judea to describe a bloody civil war there (in 4 BCE), reliably suppressed by Varus,<sup>23</sup> legate of Syria, with three legions (39–79). Then the story returns to Rome for a further hearing in the temple of Apollo on the Palatine, with the delegation of Judean elders now present. Caesar’s final decision (80): Archelaus will be ethnarch, while his brothers Antipas and Philip will govern lesser territories as tetrarchs (93–100). For all the anxiety shown by Augustus, this is plainly a bad decision: Archelaus will immediately (in story time, passing over a decade) prove a tyrant and require banishment by the same emperor (111), whereas Antipas and Philip will govern peacefully for about four decades each. Immediately after Caesar’s decision, Josephus breaks the story to describe yet another pretender to Herod’s throne, whom he tags “Pseudalexander” (101–10).

We might wonder why Josephus imposes this artful structure, whether the rebellion interlude has a bearing on the Herodian succession issue, and most importantly, whether he intends a connection between the succession story and current Roman affairs.

Let us take the structural question first. It is not difficult to see connections between the rebel leaders in Judea and the contenders for the Judean throne in Rome. Josephus has already implied (*Bj* 1) that the identity of Herod’s eventual heir will be largely a matter of fortune. Only at the very end did the king change his will to nominate Archelaus, and this constant alteration is the basis for the appeal by Antipas, who was designated king in an earlier version. The whole problem of selecting a successor sounds uncomfortably capricious—like Tiberius’ efforts in *Antiquitates Judaicae* 18.

One of the first things Josephus relates about the heir-apparent Archelaus concerns a diadem. As proof of his resolve to avoid any appearance of presumption, Archelaus claims that when his soldiers fastened a diadem on him in Jericho, he refused to accept it in advance

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<sup>23</sup> The audience knew, of course, that the same Varus would lead three legions to destruction in the Teutoburg forest in 9 CE. The Varian disaster receives mention at *Tac. Ann.* 1.3, 43, 55, 57–62, 65, 71; 2.41, 45.

of Augustus' decision (*Bj* 2.2–3). Although there seems every reason to trust this claim at this point in the story, the orator representing the opponents of Archelaus before Augustus will cite the same incident for the opposite purpose: to insist that the presumptive heir had planted secret agents to fasten the diadem upon him (27), and that this was in line with a long list of actions demonstrating his impertinence:

νῦν ἴκει παρὰ τοῦ δεσπότου σκιὰν αἰτησόμενος βασιλείας, ἧς ἤρπασεν ἑαυτῷ τὸ σῶμα, καὶ ποιῶν οὐ τῶν πραγμάτων ἀλλὰ τῶν ὀνομάτων κύριον Καίσαρα.

(Joseph. *Bj* 2.28)

Now he comes here, to claim from his master the mere shadow of kingship, of which he has already seized for himself the substance, thus making Caesar lord not of actual things but only of titles!

Since neither the narrator nor the orator responding for Archelaus, Nicolaus of Damascus (34–6), bothers to rebut this diadem charge, the audience is artfully left uncertain as to what really happened, an uncertainty that deepens the sense of rhetorical mischief. None of the candidates for kingship has any evident merit: all of them use cunning and guile to stake their claims.

Donning a diadem as the ultimate mark of infringement on Caesar's prerogative was a resonant scenario in the 70s. This issue had been the subject of protracted negotiations with Parthia over the kingship of Armenia. In the landmark compromise of 63 CE, Corbulo had arranged that Tiridates (brother of Vologeses I) would be allowed to rule Armenia with Roman consent on the proviso that he voluntarily relinquish his diadem and receive it at the hands of Nero—some years later (Cass. Dio 62.23.3, 63.4.1). In a different vein, Suetonius relates that Titus had once worn a diadem in Memphis, Egypt, while consecrating the bull Apis (*Tit.* 5.3). Although our reporter is quick to note that this was *de rigueur* for the ritual, he mentions the consternation that resulted: Titus had to race to Rome to reassure his father of his fidelity, that in spite of rumors he had no intention of revolt. Finally, in the preceding volume of the *Bellum Judaicum*, as we have seen, King Herod had to lay aside his diadem, granted by Antony, in order to receive it again from the victor of Actium (*Bj* 1.387–93; cf. 1.451). Assuming the diadem was a sensitive matter, Josephus portrays the royal heirs as eager to wear the strip while at the same time keenly aware of the power relations involved: they can only accept the symbol of ultimate royal prerogative from the hands of a greater sovereign.

The pathetic character of this condition—men utterly without virtue striving mightily to secure a piece of cloth from the master of the world, which only proclaims their weakness—receives contrapuntal emphasis in the middle (“B”) section of the narrative, where Josephus reverts to Judean affairs. There he identifies two of the rebel leaders in 4 BCE: a royal slave named Simon from across the Jordan River (*Bj* 2.57), and a shepherd named Athrongeus (60). Both of these men, though from the lowest imaginable classes, reportedly wrapped the diadem on themselves. The slave based his claim to royalty on his physical size and beautiful form. Curiously, Tacitus mentions only this figure: *post mortem Herodis, nihil expectato Caesare, Simo quidam regium nomen inuaserat* (“after Herod’s death, and without waiting on Caesar, a certain Simon seized the royal title,” *Hist.* 5.9). Tacitus’ report raises the question whether Josephus’ attribution of slave status is mere slander. Athrongeus, for his part, relied on his strength and courage. The shepherd had four brothers with the same qualities, whom he appointed στρατηγοὶ (“generals”), while αὐτὸς δὲ καθάπερ βασιλεὺς τῶν σεμνοτέρων ἤπτετο πραγμάτων (“he dealt with weightier affairs, just as if he were a king,” *Bj* 2.61).

This is fairly sharp sarcasm. Josephus the partisan of aristocracy, by nesting one story inside the other, puts *all* those who seek monarchical power on more or less the same plane: whether based on heredity, physical size, or some other accident, their claims are equally arbitrary. Virtue and character do not come into view. With such men, the allure of absolute power pre-empts any motive of concern for the people. The diadem is a particularly useful symbol of their power-lust because of its physical absurdity, captured well in a remark of Dio Chrysostom: *κἂν μὲν ἕτερός τις μὴ κατεαγῶς τὴν κεφαλὴν διαδήσῃται, καταγελάτῃ· τοῖς δὲ βασιλεῦσι πρέπειν δοκεῖ καὶ πολλαὶ μυριάδες τεθνήκασιν ὑπὲρ τούτου τοῦ ῥάκου* (“if anyone else has his head bound, without a fracture, he is ridiculed; yet for the kings it is thought to be fitting, and countless thousands of men have died for this scrap of cloth,” *Or.* 66.5).

Josephus’ mockery of unworthy power-seekers is reinforced by the story that immediately follows Augustus’ verdict on the Herodian succession. Yet another ambitious young slave, urged on by an older conspirator, conceived the idea of passing himself off as Herod’s murdered son Alexander, with the explanation that those assigned to murder the king’s sons had substituted other bodies and secretly let the heirs go free (*Bj* 2.101–2). On the strength of a certain physical resemblance to Alexander, he imposed upon the Judean communities of Crete, Melos,

Puteoli, and finally Rome to speed him on his way to Augustus and claim the kingship. Josephus delights in recounting how completely those who claimed to know Alexander were duped by the impostor. The *princeps*, however, was having none of it: he consigned “Pseudalexander” to the rowers and executed his evil counselor (106–10). The man’s comical name—shades of Menander—enhances the sarcastic tone.

From an aristocratic point of view, such a tale exposes the root problem with hereditary monarchy. Alas, the masses are quite happy to throw their unstinting support behind any man, even a slave bearing a superficial resemblance to some dead royal. For elite Romans, Nero was a bad enough example of misguided popularity (Tac. *Hist.* 1.4, 16), but Tacitus reports that after his death *many* pretenders to his identity and throne emerged (*Hist.* 2.8). Three are known: one who appeared in 69 and attracted a following on the Greek island of Cynthos, about sixty miles from Pseudalexander’s gullible Melians—Josephus shared with some Romans a contempt for the Greeks (Tac. *Hist.* 2.8, Cass. Dio 64.9.3); Terentius Maximus, during Titus’ reign (Cass. Dio 66.19.3); and a *provocateur* under Domitian supported by the Parthians (Tac. *Hist.* 1.2, Suet. *Ner.* 57.3). Josephus’ Pseudalexander not only drives home the absurdity of the succession project, but he evokes the pining for a lost Julio-Claudian ruler at his own time of writing.

Until now, only the “bad emperors” and their equestrians have come across as despicable in Josephus’ narrative. Augustus is exempt, as almost everywhere in Roman literature, as a leader of great wisdom and generosity. That is as it must be: any overt criticism of the current regime would be foolish; of the revered Augustus, counter-productive. But this does not mean that Josephus refrains from refracted commentary on Augustus and also current affairs. For the irony of the entire succession story is that the hearings to determine who should wear the diadem in Judea are decided by the super-sovereign of the inhabited earth (that is, of both Roman and Parthian empires), who was famous in Rome for his own dynastic problems.

Augustus’ peerless character as administrator and executive was legendary, but his problems in finding—and keeping—a worthy heir were also notorious. He hopefully gave his daughter Iulia in marriage first to his nephew M. Claudius Marcellus, then after Marcellus’ death to his friend M. Vipsanius Agrippa, then after Agrippa’s death to his wife’s son by a previous marriage (Tiberius Claudius Nero), requiring the last two men to divorce for the purpose and hoping in each case to initiate a personal, not official, line of succession. The failure of the

first two husbands and the sons of the second marriage (Lucius and Gaius) to survive, however, along with the reported moral collapse and exile of the long-suffering Iulia, wrought havoc with Augustus' plans, until his eventual, resigned embrace of the equally reluctant Tiberius. Syme comments: "The final and peaceful result was not attained without dissensions in the cabinet, several political crises and several political murders;"<sup>24</sup> his chapter on the Augustan succession reveals a process even more tangled than even the listing of candidates above would suggest.<sup>25</sup>

That Josephus intends irony in expatiating on the Herodian succession hearings before Augustus is suggested by otherwise pointless, yet evidently purposeful, details in his description of the scene:

προσκεψάμενος δὲ ὁ Καῖσαρ τὰ παρ' ἀμφοῖν κατ' ἰδίαν... συνέδριον μὲν ἀθροίζει τῶν ἐν τέλει Ῥωμαίων, ἐν ᾧ καὶ τὸν ἐξ Ἀγρίππα καὶ Ἰουλίας τῆς θυγατρὸς θετὸν παῖδα Γάιον πρῶτως ἐκάθισεν, ἀποδίδωσι δὲ λόγον αὐτοῖς.

(Joseph. *Bj* 2.25)

Now after Caesar had first considered in private the claims of both sides... he assembled a council of the Romans who were in office, in which for the first time he also seated Gaius, the son adopted from Agrippa and Iulia his daughter, and he gave over the floor to them [the Herodian rivals].

Striking here is the concentration of personal names and relationships with no clear explanation. Josephus presumes audience knowledge. Neither Iulia nor Gaius will appear again in the *Bellum Judaicum*; Marcus Agrippa has figured in book 1, though even there his first appearances received no introduction (118, 400). Why does Josephus bother to mention the three here in a parenthetical clause? The adjective θετός ("adopted") stands out as the significant qualifier. For a Roman audience, it evokes Augustus' dashed succession plans, in the person of his beloved Gaius.

Gaius Iulius Caesar (20 BCE–4 CE) and his younger brother Lucius were adopted by their grandfather in 17 BCE and groomed from infancy for eventual succession of some kind. The story time here (4 BCE) was an auspicious moment in Gaius' life: the year before he assumed the toga of manhood at 15, and had been then designated future consul; he was also *princeps iuventutis* ("first among the knights"), a token of future

<sup>24</sup> Syme (1939) 415.

<sup>25</sup> Syme (1939) 419–39.

glory. At the age of 19 (1 BCE) he would be given consular authority to negotiate with the Parthian king over Armenia, where the Parthians had installed Tigranes. Although the young man apparently resolved the dispute diplomatically, he would not live to inherit Augustus' wealth or status. He became consul as planned in 1 CE but, wounded the following year, he died in Lycia in 4 CE (Suet. *Aug.* 26, 29, 64–5, 67, 93; Tac. *Ann.* 1.3; Cass. Dio 54.8, 54.18, 55.9). Since the East was Gaius' sphere of activity, his attendance at this meeting of easterners contending for "sovereignty" on the Palatine is all the more charged.

A Roman audience could not but feel the pathos of this moment: Augustus, mercilessly harassed in his dynastic hopes by *atrox fortuna* ("bitter fortune"), patiently hearing the claimants to succession of a loyal client king in Judea. But it would all come to naught, on both sides. Augustus' problems were far from over, and his choice for Judea turns out to be a disaster (*BJ* 2.111).

#### *Vespasian's Issue: The Flavian Succession*

A crucial component of Vespasian's program was his dynastic ambition. Like his paradigmatic predecessor, Augustus, Vespasian would claim success in vanquishing an eastern menace, issue *capta* coins to mark this watershed, and take credit for ending a virulent and costly civil war—even if all these threats had been far less intense, durable, and costly than those faced by the first *princeps*. Both rulers promised the Roman people a golden age of peace; both took the rare step of ceremonially closing the Temple of Janus in celebration;<sup>26</sup> and both initiated massive building projects—*ex manubiis* ("from the spoils of [the recent] war," *Res Gestae* 21)<sup>27</sup>—to reshape the city of Rome and permanently memorialize their achievements.<sup>28</sup>

Both men supposed that the best guarantee of stability for a bright new era lay in planning for succession. Just as Augustus in 29 BCE celebrated his triple triumph with his adolescent nephew and heir-apparent Marcellus riding prominently alongside, so a century later Vespasian would include in his magnificent triumph both his older son and Jeru-

<sup>26</sup> Augustus closed it three times, claiming it had been closed only twice before (*Res Gestae* 13).

<sup>27</sup> For Vespasian: Alföldy (1995) 195–226.

<sup>28</sup> Waters (1963) 198–218; Levick (1999) 66–73; Cody (2002) 103–23.

salem's conqueror, Titus—with him in the *quadriga* (“chariot”)—and the teenaged Domitian, following on a white stallion. For Augustus the disclosure of a dynastic intention may have been fraught with peril in principle, given the novelty of his arrangement with the senate, the basis of his powers in his personal *auctoritas*, and the absurdity of monarchical succession when there was no official monarchy.<sup>29</sup> Yet his clear efforts to identify a successor seem to have been largely welcomed by an anxious senate. Augustus' promotion of Marcellus, ostentatious advancement of Gaius and Lucius (*Res Gestae* 14), and ultimately his elevation of Tiberius, to share almost all of his powers, made his dynastic intention patent—even if the implications for Roman government had yet to be sorted out. The familial scene in the south frieze of the *Ara Pacis* (9 BCE), various remarks about his heirs in the *Res Gestae* (e.g., 20, 22), and a programmatic statement about placing the *res publica* on a new foundation for posterity<sup>30</sup> combine with other evidence to show that Augustus viewed himself as *princeps* with dynastic strings attached.

Amid the shockingly rapid replacement of *principes* through 68–9 CE and their feeble efforts to identify successors in their bids to gain popular and military confidence,<sup>31</sup> Vespasian's grown sons were patent advantages for his own claim. For one thing, it was more difficult to assassinate three men than one. For another, heredity precluded the rivalries and disappointments that adoption or election of an heir would inevitably entail.<sup>32</sup> A victorious general who arrived with an heir of proven *virtus* (“courage”) as well as a spare held obvious promise for future stability.<sup>33</sup> Josephus' report, quoted at the head of this essay, about Vespasian's advantage over Vitellius on this score is matched by Mucianus' speech of encouragement to Vespasian according to Tacit-

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<sup>29</sup> Parsi (1963) 2–12; Syme (1939) 415; Waters (1963) 198–9. Gruen (2005) 33–50 forcefully develops these points, arguing that Augustus carefully cultivated the powers of *tribunicia potestas* (“tribunician power”) and special *imperium*, with which he could gradually associate a worthy colleague, without connection with any republican office.

<sup>30</sup> *Ita mihi saluam ac sospitem rem p. sistere in sua sede liceat atque eius rei fructum percipere, quem peto, ut optimi status auctor dicar et moriens ut feram mecum spem, mansura in uestigio suo fundamenta rei p. quae iecero* (“may it be permitted me to establish the commonwealth on a safe and secure basis, and also to enjoy its fruit, which I seek; but only if I may be renowned as author of the best possible form, so that when I die I may take with me the hope that the foundations of the commonwealth that I have laid will stand firm in the sequel,” Suet. *Aug.* 28.2).

<sup>31</sup> See Waters (1963) 206.

<sup>32</sup> So Waters (1963) 206.

<sup>33</sup> See Levick (1999) 184.

tus: *tuae domui triumphale nomen, duo iuvenes, capax iam imperii alter et primis militiae annis apud Germanicos quoque exercitus clarus* (“your house has the renown of a triumph, and two young men—the one already a worthy partner in *imperium*, who even in his earliest military years was celebrated among the German armies,” *Hist.* 2.77) Vespasian seems to have been convinced: he is elsewhere reported to have emerged from an interview with the meddlesome praetor Helvidius Priscus (see above), who had challenged the principle of hereditary succession, defiantly exclaiming through tears, ἐμὲ μὲν υἱὸς διαδέξεται, ἢ οὐδεὶς ἄλλος (“my son will succeed me, or no one will!”), Cass. Dio 66.12.1).<sup>34</sup>

Evidence abounds that, from his first stirrings of imperial ambition, Vespasian began grooming Titus as his inevitable successor and guarantor of stability.<sup>35</sup> He shared the ordinary consulship with Titus an unprecedented seven times in his ten-year reign (in 70, 72, 74, 75, 76, 77, and 79; Suet. *Titus* 6),<sup>36</sup> with Domitian in 71. In the last four of these years Domitian was suffect, and in 71 ordinary consul. Upon his return from Judea in 71, Titus received the crucial *tribunicia potestas* (index of senatorial approval, enabling a smooth succession),<sup>37</sup> fourteen salutations as *imperator* during his father’s reign, and a level of *imperium* close to that of his father (shades of M. Vipsanius Agrippa); he also shared the censorship with Vespasian for a year (Suet. *Titus* 6).<sup>38</sup> Both sons appeared as *principes iuuentutis* (*principes-in-waiting*) in Augustan style, on Vespasian’s coins. The hyperbolic character of Titus’ honors under Vespasian is noted by Levick, who remarks on the contradiction inherent in being *princeps iuuentutis* while already serving as consul.<sup>39</sup> Ruth Taylor has argued that Valerius Flaccus wrote his *Argonautica* in large measure to flatter Vespasian and his dynastic ambitions, and to link Vespasian as Jason with Augustus as Hercules.<sup>40</sup>

Yet there were cracks, surely as obvious to Josephus’ Roman contemporaries as they are to us, in this charming picture of a virtuous and

<sup>34</sup> See Malitz (1985) 242–3.

<sup>35</sup> On the following, see Jones (1984) 77–113.

<sup>36</sup> For analysis Gallivan (1981) 187–9; on Suetonius, Jones and Milns (2002) 102. Such imperial domination of the consulate, the highest position open to senators and a necessary stage in the *cursus honorum* (“progression of honors”), caused resentment (Plin. *Pan.* 58.4).

<sup>37</sup> Jones (1984) 80.

<sup>38</sup> Jones and Milns (2002) 61, 102.

<sup>39</sup> Levick (1999) 187.

<sup>40</sup> Taylor (1994) 215, 222–4.

duly prepared hereditary succession. In spite of Augustus' hopes for future stability, a perpetual succession crisis had become the Achilles' heel of the Julio-Claudian house. After that dynasty dissolved in the chaos of 68–9, even the emergence of a new and promising *princeps* with natural offspring must have left residual anxiety. First, there was the glaring problem of Titus' character, popular views of which are reported with surprising detail by a witness who wishes to deny any basis to them. Before acquiring absolute control, but while already holding many instruments of power, Titus was widely considered a ruthless Praetorian Prefect (Suet. *Titus* 6), libidinous and corrupt in his social and financial dealings (*Titus* 7). Secondly, we have substantial independent evidence of intense rivalry between Domitian and his older brother, even while Vespasian lived. Although the reportage is no doubt colored by our reporters' animosity toward the memory of Domitian, it would be reckless to dismiss all the evidence as *ex post facto* revision. It could not have been obvious to observers of the time, possibly even to Vespasian,<sup>41</sup> that the Flavian succession would be a smooth and tranquil affair.

Thirdly, in a dissertation that will no doubt become an important book, Leoni has argued persuasively that during his brief reign Titus abandoned Vespasian's effort to establish the familial succession, attempting instead a rapprochement with the senate by opting for a successor who was *optimus* ("best") rather than merely kin.<sup>42</sup> Although the brevity of Titus' reign makes firm conclusions hazardous, such a motive would best explain his conspicuous failure to share *imperium* with Domitian as Vespasian had shared it with him. His reluctance to groom his brother was a noticeable shift from original hopes for orderly succession from Vespasian to his two sons. Leoni argues that Titus wished to reprimarize the illusion of a *libertas senatus* ("freedom of the senate").<sup>43</sup>

Although Vespasian began with the firm and explicit intention of establishing a dynasty, elite observers throughout the 70s and 80s must have had remaining concerns about the outcome. The issue did not go away. Josephus wrote much of his *Bellum Judaicum* under Vespasian, but seems to have completed it under Titus's brief reign, which may

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<sup>41</sup> Waters (1963) 216.

<sup>42</sup> Leoni (2000) 101–7.

<sup>43</sup> Leoni (2000) 106.

have begun a new direction in the selection of a *princeps* though it did not overturn the monarchic principle.

### *Conclusion*

By the time of Josephus, Roman governance had for decades been an undeclared monarchy, though from Galba onwards the mechanism of succession to supreme office was again an open question. The main options were heredity, adoption of an heir (from within the larger family or from outside), acclamation by the army, selection of the “best man” by the senate, or military coup. Every option but senatorial selection and inheritance by grown sons had been discredited by the Julio-Claudian experiment or the civil war following. These two appeared the most desirable solutions, to different groups, in the 70s. Although Vespasian came to power in a military coup, like his immediate predecessors, he wasted no time in vaunting an assured succession, through his sons, that would preclude such bloodshed in the future.

It is curious that Josephus, in a work about the recent Judean-Roman war and, incidentally, the Flavian rise to power, should devote such considerable space to the problem of succession. In both the *Bellum Judaicum* and the *Antiquitates Judaicae* he accompanies his advocacy of senatorial aristocracy (for Judea) with a sustained critique of monarchy and especially hereditary succession. In both works, crucially, Josephus connects this critique explicitly and implicitly with Roman affairs from Julius Caesar through the Julio-Claudians.

In evaluating the possible intentions and effects in Rome of Josephus’ critique, we recall first that it was a well-worn tactic of “safe criticism” to target not the current regime, but other figures with conspicuously similar traits: one’s audience could be trusted to make the link (Demetr. *Eloc.* 292–3).<sup>44</sup> Josephus’ treatment of Herod and heirs, along with the earlier Roman *principes* and pretenders (both Judean and Roman), provided ample material for reflection on the current problem. That Josephus intended such safe criticism is likely because he employs other techniques from the same manual, such as hyperbolic praise of current rulers. His Titus is endowed with so much *πρόνοια* (“forethought”) and *ἔλεος* (“gentle commiseration”) that he appears an improbable

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<sup>44</sup> Ahl (1984a) 190, 206.

humanist and even incompetent general, frequently tricked by the wily Judeans (*Bḡ* 4.84–120; 5.316, 329; 6.12, 29–32, 78–9, 152–6, 183–4, 190, 214–28, 356). An embarrassing episode in the young Domitian’s life is transformed, with savage satire, into a glorious achievement (7.85–8). In general, Josephus proves himself a dab hand at barbed or figured speech—irony, *double entendre*, and sarcasm. He is one of the heavier users of *ieron*-language,<sup>45</sup> always alive to σχήματα (“figures”) and προφάσεις (“pretexts”).<sup>46</sup>

But what exactly was his point with the critique of monarchy and succession? Such tensions as existed between senate and *princeps* appear to have sprung from *ad hoc* and personal causes; there is little indication of a coherent opposition to the monarchy, much less a movement for the return of the republic,<sup>47</sup> thus of a group for whom Josephus’ analysis might have been significantly motivating. Evidence does exist for the senate’s assertion of its prerogative in selecting the *optimus princeps*. Josephus has the consuls of 41 demand the right *either* to recover the old aristocratic constitution *or* to choose themselves τὸν ἄξιον τῆς ἡγεμονίας (“the man most worthy of rule,” *Bḡ* 2.205)—both options acceptable as consonant with their *libertas*. Galba’s adoption of Licinianus Piso was a deliberate effort to choose as heir the best man—member of a prominent senatorial family, son of a consul and victim of Nero (*Tac. Hist.* 1.15–6)—and Helvidius’ apparent insistence upon adoption of the best man, which angered Vespasian (*Cass. Dio* 66.12.1), was an assertion of senatorial prerogative. Indeed, Trajan will adopt the Spaniard Hadrian, forced by others (if not the senate) to break new ground in choosing the “best” candidate.<sup>48</sup> Leoni’s hypothesis that Titus had also begun to move in this direction when his life abruptly ended is tantalizing for the question of Josephus’ motives and influence. Since Josephus published his *Bellum Judaicum* during that same brief interval of Titus’ reign, it is just conceivable that he influenced the *princeps* in making a fuller accommodation of the senate. That influence would not have come from the text of the *Bellum Judaicum* (a cumbersome instrument for making an argument), of course, but rather from conversations on

<sup>45</sup> Josephus has sixteen occurrences, thirteen in the *War*, about the same number as Plutarch and significantly more than all other historians and philosophers but Aristotle.

<sup>46</sup> Mason (2005) 243–88.

<sup>47</sup> See, e.g., Raaflaub (1987) 56–63 and the approving responses of leading scholars in that volume.

<sup>48</sup> Grainger (2003) 70–100.

issues that the *Bellum Judaicum* shows were of interest to Josephus. One might even argue that Josephus' much more elaborate and overt return to the problem of monarchical succession in the *Antiquitates Judaicae* was elicited by the circumstances of Domitian's Rome in 93 CE.

Enticing though such speculation may be, we need not seek such a specific purpose in these relatively minor supporting themes of Josephus' narrative. His critique of hereditary succession and monarchy was timely and relevant, but it was also safe—aimed at the Hasmoneans, Herodians, and Julio-Claudians. It was serious, but executed with a light touch. It seems, at least, that Josephus wished to engage a similarly minded aristocratic audience in his adopted city, to impress them with his credentials and subtlety as a writer, to insinuate the shared values of Roman and Judean elites, and so to maintain a place in post-war Rome for the conquered ἔθνος (“people”) he represented. Historical narrative does not make good propaganda, but it does allow infinite latitude to play, suggestion, evocation, and irony. Since Josephus is the most prolific author from Flavian Rome whose works have survived intact, and the only historian, his *oeuvre* invites closer attention from these perspectives.<sup>49</sup>

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