

Martin Goodman, *Josephus's The Jewish War: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), pp. xi+186.

by *Steve Mason*

Princeton's "lives of great religious books" series includes biblical and talmudic volumes, the *I Ching* and *Gita*, the *Koran* and *Book of Mormon*. Why Josephus' *Jewish War* would find a place, and not (one assumes) Thucydides' *Peloponnesian* or Caesar's *Gallic War*, is not obvious, even if we all grant that this book later became religiously entangled in its rich 2000-year "biography." But categories hardly matter. If it took this series to entice the uniquely qualified Professor of Jewish Studies in Oxford to produce such a gem, we can only be grateful.

In just 140 small-format pages and four proper chapters, Goodman manages to canvas: Josephus' life and writings (pp. 1-17); the uses of his *Jewish War* among Christians from 100 to 600, Jews from 100 to 1450, and Christians from 600 to 1450 (pp. 18-44); Christians and Jews, separately, from 1450 to 1750 (pp. 45-70); and finally, under "Controversy," new doubts about Josephus and both scholarly and popular uses of the book among Christians and Jews (pp. 71-134). A brief epilogue (pp. 135-140) scouts the current scholarly scene, and a substantial appendix (pp. 141-159) offers translated passages from the *War* "with a life of their own." Back matter is as concise as the rest: just 13 pages of endnotes, two of bibliography, and ten for the general index.

Nothing like this book exists. It is a triumph. In the space that remains, I shall try to indicate why I say that, intermingling samples of the goods with remarks on Goodman's distinctive approach.

His treatment of the war, Josephus' role in it, and the resulting book (*The Jewish War*) could have elicited a fat volume, given Goodman's publication record in these areas. With laudable restraint, however, he crisply captures general trends in research (e.g., *War* was not commissioned by the Flavians, but Josephus wrote as a Jewish author), generously notes possibilities raised by others (e.g., Josephus may have used irony to safely criticize the regime; the lost Aramaic, once a focus of

research, may not even have existed), and stimulates the reader to further inquiry. Distinctive elements include Goodman's view that there was an "independent Jewish state" from 66 (p. 2), that Josephus' *Life* defends his support of Rome (p. 3), and that some passages in *War* "would have made sense only to Jewish readers" (p. 12).

Goodman's treatment of the period from 100 to 600 in Christian circles opens with the arresting claim that *War*'s early survival should be "credited entirely to the early Church" (p. 18). This is perhaps not quite so clear. Many historians, including this reviewer, find the verbal correspondences between Josephus and Tacitus (*Hist.* 5.12-13) so close as to indicate a literary relationship, and the grammarian Aelius Herodian (in Marcus Aurelius' reign) cited Josephus dozens of times as the assumed authority on eastern names. Eusebius' exploitation of Josephus' fame makes the best sense if he did not invent it. But thus far Goodman reflects common views. He departs from the majority in holding that the Latin Josephus of the fourth century, mentioned by Cassiodorus in the sixth, was the paraphrase we call Pseudo-Hegesippus and not the literal translation known from ninth century manuscripts (pp. 22-24). The great Byzantine scholar's awareness of a "marvelously clear" Latin translation of the Greek *War* in seven volumes relieves him of including that work in his translation project; his team produced only the *Antiquities* and *Apion*. Goodman doubts that Cassiodorus could have regarded the later-attested Latin as an acceptable translation, whereas Pseudo-Hegesippus meets a high literary standard. But that paraphrase has only five volumes, and no one could consider it a clear translation of Josephus' Greek.

The real punch in this chapter comes from Goodman's deft introduction of the *Sefer Yosippon*, a 10th century Hebrew work compiled from various Latin sources, featuring the Latin *Antiquities* and Pseudo-Hegesippus' mash-up of the *War* but replacing the latter's Christian embellishments with Jewish perspectives (pp. 31-35). This hugely important work remains under-studied (it still lacks a modern English translation), not least because of the variety of forms and the traditional confusion about its author: a fusion of Josephus and one of his incidental characters, Joseph ben Gorion (*War* 2.658). It is a singular virtue of Goodman's book that he stays with the *Yosippon* after introducing it, charting its

enormous influence in Jewish communities through the following centuries, and the confusion between it and Josephus' own work until modern times.

Deceptively simple, too, is Goodman's survey of the Greek and Latin manuscripts of Josephus from the latter half of the period covered by this chapter. Readers who get headaches trying to follow the trajectories of either *Yosippon* or the manuscript tradition will welcome this calming oasis, watered by expertise with nothing to prove.

The third chapter gives a valuable overview of the printed editions and translations of Josephus. Particularly helpful is Goodman's nuancing of a common scheme that sees Christians as pro-Josephus and Jews as anti-, first for religious and then for nationalist-Zionist reasons. In sharp and salutary contrast, this chapter shows Jewish communities much influenced by the *Yosippon* and generally proud of their ancient compatriot (or co-religionist) before the rise of nation-states. These important notes open a space for the minority view, respectful of Josephus, that Goodman finds also among early Zionists. Even among the majority of Zionists, who undoubtedly came to disparage Josephus as a traitor and coward, Goodman documents considerable respect for his indispensable histories.

One section of the fourth chapter, "the Book among the Jews", is glaringly disproportionate to the rest (pp. 90-134). It slows to provide several pages each on prominent movements (e.g., Wissenschaft des Judentums) and figures (*inter alios* I. Halevy, Z. Yavetz, K. Schulman, Z. H. Masliansky, L. Feuchtwanger, S. Guttman, Y. Yadin), whereas even important persons received a couple of lines in earlier sections. But this is not a complaint. Goodman's discussion of famous figures in relation to Josephus' *War* and the *Yosippon* is pure gold.

With respect to the current scholarly scene, Goodman does his customarily concise job in conveying the main issues. I feel obliged to challenge one point. In an appreciative nod to the Brill Josephus commentary, which I edit, he connects my work with one side of the "continuing controversy as to whether the correct translation of the Greek word *ioudaios* should be 'Jew' (referring to religion) or

‘Judaean’ (referring to place of origin), an issue of particular significance in the interpretation of [...] the Gospel of John” (p. 138). Beginning with the Series Preface to each commentary volume (2000-), however, I have stressed that I do not consider this a question of “correct translation”—a category mistake, it seems to me—but rather of coming closest to what ancient auditors heard in *Ioudaios* and words of its kind, which we normally transliterate as ethnic labels. I used this, indeed, as an example of scholarly diversity within the commentary project. Although I have noted other scholars’ interest in the Gospel of John’s *Ioudaioi*, such a marginal text plays no role in my arguments about ancient values and categories.

This little book is something to treasure. Anyone with sufficient interest in Jewish or western history will find it readable, informative, and stimulating of further investigation. Even advanced students or specialists in one of the many areas it covers will learn from the rest. We are much in Goodman’s debt.

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