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"To be or to be thought to be": The *Testimonium Flavianum* (again)

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Abstract:

Recent research on the textual tradition of Latin versions of the *Testimonium Flavianum* prompts another enquiry into the original text and the transmission of the famous passage. It is suggested here that the Greek/Latin versions highlight a western/eastern early history of the *Testimonium* and that in turn directs our attention back to the original circumstances of its composition and publication in the city of Rome in the later years of the first century. Restored to its original historical context, the *Testimonium* emerges as a carefully crafted attack upon the post-Pauline community of Christ-followers in the city.

Keywords: *Testimonium Flavianum*, Josephus, Rome, Jerome

## 1. Introduction

Despite his fame and notoriety, Flavius Josephus never managed to attain serious literary fame in Rome. His assertions that emperors signed off on his *War*, that copies were despatched to the great libraries of Rome, and that a patron of standing sponsored the *Antiquities* have more than a hint of suspicion about them.<sup>1</sup> None of the great ancient historians of the Roman empire show any signs of having read his work.<sup>2</sup> But later

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<sup>1</sup> Josephus, *Vita* 51; *A.J.* 1.8-9.

<sup>2</sup> Suetonius, *Vesp.* 5.6 described him only as "a noble captive", omitting any reference to his literary activity. Cf. Dio Cassius, *Rom. Hist.* 66.1.4 (Epitome of Book 65) where the only fact

Christians, by contrast, thought he had been *famous* in Rome. Eusebius described him as ‘the most famous not only among his fellow countrymen but among the Romans too’; a statue had even been erected to him in the city.<sup>3</sup> To Jerome he was ‘the Greek Livy’ and Ps.-Hegesippus referred to him as a person whom the Jews thought ‘very great’.<sup>4</sup> The most arresting evidence for the attraction of Josephus to late antique and medieval Christian readers occurs in a famous passage in the eighteenth book of his *Antiquities*:

(63) Γίνεται δὲ κατὰ τοῦτον τὸν χρόνον Ἰησοῦς σοφὸς ἀνὴρ, εἶγε ἄνδρα αὐτὸν λέγειν χρή. ἦν γὰρ παραδόξων ἔργων ποιητής, διδάσκαλος ἀνθρώπων τῶν ἡδονῇ τάληθῃ δεχομένων, καὶ πολλοὺς μὲν Ἰουδαίους, πολλοὺς δὲ καὶ τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ ἐπηγάγετο. ὁ χριστὸς οὗτος ἦν.

(64) καὶ αὐτὸν ἐνδείξει τῶν πρώτων ἀνδρῶν παρ’ ἡμῖν σταυρῷ ἐπιτετιμηκότος Πιλάτου οὐκ ἐπαύσαντο οἱ τὸ πρῶτον ἀγαπήσαντες. ἐφάνη γὰρ αὐτοῖς τρίτην ἔχων ἡμέραν πάλιν ζῶν τῶν θείων προφητῶν ταῦτά τε καὶ ἄλλα μυρία περὶ αὐτοῦ θαυμάσια εἰρηκότων. εἰς ἔτι τε νῦν τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἀπὸ τοῦδε ὀνομασμένον οὐκ ἐπέλιπε τὸ φῶλον.

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worth recording about Josephus was that he had prophesied that Vespasian would become emperor.

<sup>3</sup> Eusebius, *H.E.* 3.9.3.

<sup>4</sup> Jerome, *Epistula ad Eustochium* 22.35.8. Sozomen, *H.E.* 1.1.5 claimed he was very famous among Jews and Romans. Chrysostom, *Adv. Jud.* 5.8 said he was considered by the Jews to be very reliable. For the high reputation of Josephus in late antiquity and into the medieval period, see H. Schreckenberg, *Die Flavius-Josephus-Tradition in Antike und Mittelalter* (Leiden: Brill, 1972) and R.M. Pollard, "The *De Excidio* of 'Hegesippus' and the reception of Josephus in the Early Middle Ages", *Viator* 46.2 (2015) 65-100.

About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Messiah. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvellous things about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.<sup>5</sup>

This brief passage of Josephus' *Antiquities* is the most ploughed-over controversy relating to the Jewish historian's work. There have been those prepared to accept the *textus receptus in toto* or, alternatively, to reject it completely as a later interpolation.<sup>6</sup> But most scholars discussing the passage have taken their place between these two poles. In essence, the debate has concentrated on four particular propositions made in the *textus receptus*:

(i) εἶγε ἄνδρα αὐτὸν λέγειν χρῆ

(ii) διδάσκαλος ἀνθρώπων τῶν ἡδονῇ τάλιθῃ δεχομένων

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<sup>5</sup> A.J. 18.63-64, translated by Feldman.

<sup>6</sup> See A. Whealey, "The *Testimonium Flavianum*" in H.H. Chapman, Z. Rodgers, eds., *A Companion to Josephus* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015) 345-355; J. Carleton Paget, "Some Observations on Josephus and Christianity", *JThS* 52 (2001) 539-624; E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, revised and edited by G. Vermes, F. Millar (3 vols.; Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1973) 1: 428-430 for a convenient list of the upholders and deniers of authenticity.

(iii) ὁ χριστὸς οὗτος ἦν

(iv) ἐφάνη γὰρ αὐτοῖς τρίτην ἔχων ἡμέραν πάλιν ζῶν

A long and inconclusive scholarly debate over the admissibility of these reported assertions has been raging since the Enlightenment.<sup>7</sup>

The earliest Christian readers of Josephus considered him to be a credible but avowedly *Jewish* writer with nothing of note to say about Jesus of Nazareth. A number of significant second-century writers, including Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Minucius Felix and Irenaeus make no mention of any *Testimonium*.<sup>8</sup> The first Christian writer whom we can see apparently using the text of Josephus is Origen in the third century. In his commentary on *Lamentations*, Origen said of Josephus: “although not far from the truth [he] did not believe in Jesus as the Christ”, an affirmation that was repeated in his *contra Celsum*.<sup>9</sup>

When Origen came to write his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, he wrote (in commentary on *Matthew* 13. 54-6 with its reference to the brothers and sisters of Jesus):

“...what is extraordinary is that although Josephus did not hold Jesus to be the Christ, he nevertheless witnessed to the righteousness of James.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See above all A. Whealey, *Josephus on Jesus. The Testimonium Flavianum Controversy from Late Antiquity to Modern Times* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Tertullian, *Apol.* 19.6 has him only as “the native vindicator (*vindex*) of the ancient history of his people.”

<sup>9</sup> *Comm. In Matt.* 10.17. Cf. *C. Cels.* 1.47.

<sup>10</sup> *Comm. in Matt.* 10.17. Cf. *C. Cels.* 1.47.

This is clearly a reference to the other famous passage of *Antiquities* to mention Jesus at 20.200.<sup>11</sup> But if Origen had read the *testimonium* as we have it, how could he ignore the claims made within it that Origen himself seems to deny to Josephus?<sup>12</sup>

The first Christian writer to *quote* Josephus is bishop Eusebius of Caesarea. The *testimonium* was cited three times by Eusebius; in chronological order, in his *Demonstratio Evangelica*, *Historia Ecclesiastica* and *Theophania* respectively.<sup>13</sup> In the *Ecclesiastical History*, the most popular of Eusebius' works, he quotes the *textus receptus* of Josephus in the context of discussing the death of John the Baptist. Eusebius gave the impression that Josephus had linked the two men but Josephus actually made no connection between them. But here again, the apparently impressive claims of the *textus receptus* of Josephus elicited no comment from Eusebius, the bishop describing him merely as "one of the more intelligent Jews."<sup>14</sup> Many scholars have concluded that, taken together, Origen's outright statement that Josephus was not a believer and Eusebius' failure to make more of the passage constitute a *prima facie* case that neither of them had before them the version of the *Testimonium Flavianum* as we have received it. This suggests the existence of a different and earlier version. But sometime between the death of Origen and a later copying of the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius, somebody *altered* at least one copy either of the text of Josephus or of

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<sup>11</sup> See below 000.

<sup>12</sup> For a counter to explanations based on the context of Origen's references to Josephus, see Carleton Paget, "Some Observations", 558-559.

<sup>13</sup> *Demonstratio* 3.5.102-3; *H.E.* 1.11.7-8; *Theophany* 5.44.562.

<sup>14</sup> *H.E.* 2.23 and 1.5.

the *Ecclesiastical History*, or both.<sup>15</sup> When Sozomen read the *textus receptus* of Josephus/Eusebius in the fifth century, he promoted the passage to the opening remarks of his work and exhibited an altogether stronger enthusiasm for it than that shown by Eusebius: “[Josephus] who was a priest, and was most distinguished among Jews and Romans, may be regarded as a noteworthy witness to the truth concerning Christ; for he hesitates to call Him a man since He wrought marvellous works, and was a teacher of truthful doctrines, but openly calls him Christ; that He was condemned to the death of the cross, and appeared alive again the third day. Nor was Josephus ignorant of numberless other wonderful predictions uttered beforehand.”<sup>16</sup>

## 2. The transmission of the text<sup>17</sup>

The “direct” manuscript tradition of Josephus’ original Greek *Antiquities* evidences a striking consistency: starting with the earliest manuscript from the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the *Testimonium* is overwhelmingly as we have received it.<sup>18</sup> One of the surviving manuscripts of

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<sup>15</sup> Those who consider Eusebius himself to be the editor of the *Testimonium* include: S. Zeitlin, "The Christ Passage in Josephus", *JQR* 18 (1927/8) 231-255; K.A. Olson, "Eusebius and the *Testimonium Flavianum*", *CBQ* 61 (1999) 305-322. See Carleton Paget, "Some Observations", 562-565.

<sup>16</sup> *H.E.* 1.1.

<sup>17</sup> This section owes much to T. Leoni, "The Text of Josephus’ Works: an overview", *JSJ* 40 (2009) 149-184.

<sup>18</sup> The variants conveniently set out by D.B. Levenson, T.R. Martin, "The Latin Translations of Josephus on Jesus, John the Baptist, and James: critical texts of the Latin translation of the *Antiquities* and Rufinus’ translation of Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* based on manuscripts and early printed editions", *JSJ* 45 (2014) 1–79 at 20-22.

Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, however (codex A), in the 15<sup>th</sup> century Codex Parisinus Graecus, contains a small but significant variation. In its first line of the *Testimonium*, the indefinite pronoun τις is included: "About this time there lived 'one' or 'a certain' Jesus...".<sup>19</sup> As Carleton Paget rightly suggests, this is a very strange word for a Christian scribe to have put *in* but it is a rather obvious word to leave *out*, as he puts it, "not least because the word could be construed as carrying a potentially contemptuous, or at least disrespectful meaning" – a point to which we will return.<sup>20</sup>

It is with regard to the transmission of *Latin* translations of the *testimonium*, however, that the most important recent work has been undertaken. Levenson and Martin have finally subjected to scrutiny the Latin translations of Josephus' comments on Jesus, John the Baptist and James the brother of Jesus, including those excerpted in Rufinus' Latin translation of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*.<sup>21</sup> What they describe as "the most interesting discovery contributing to the debate about the authenticity of the *Testimonium*" was the appearance of the phrase "et credebatur esse Christus" in two early manuscripts of Rufinus' translation of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*.<sup>22</sup> "In the earlier manuscript (*which is in fact the earliest one we have seen* [*italics mine*]) this phrase is written at the bottom of the page correcting the

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<sup>19</sup> Codex bibl. Ambrosianae F 128. See at:

[http://www.tertullian.org/rpearse/manuscripts/AmbrosianusF128\\_testimonium\\_flavianum.png](http://www.tertullian.org/rpearse/manuscripts/AmbrosianusF128_testimonium_flavianum.png)

<sup>g</sup>. See Levenson and Martin, "The Latin Translations of Josephus", 20 n.115 for a number of other later manuscripts reproducing the word.

<sup>20</sup> Carleton Paget, "Some Observations" 565. See **000** below.

<sup>21</sup> Levenson and Martin, "The Latin Translations of Josephus".

<sup>22</sup> One (Clm 6383) of late 8<sup>th</sup>/early 9<sup>th</sup> century; the other (Clm 6381) of 9<sup>th</sup> century date:

Levenson and Martin, "The Latin Translations of Josephus" 59; cf. 25.



standard reading *hic erat* in the text itself.”<sup>23</sup> But the reading is of course only “standard” when compared to manuscripts, Greek and Latin, of *later* date. And the manuscript in question is not the earliest to contain the phrase, only the earliest manuscript of *Rufinus*; a version of the passage actually appears in a 7<sup>th</sup> or early 8<sup>th</sup> century manuscript version of Jerome’s *de viris illustribus*.<sup>24</sup> An even earlier version of the *Testimonium* also appears as an identifiable close paraphrase in two sixth-century manuscripts of Ps.-Hegesippus’ *De excidio urbis hierosolymitana*. The passage there included neither the phrase “he was the Christ” nor “he was believed to be the Christ”, showing that what Ps.-Hegesippus had read in his copy of

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<sup>23</sup> Levenson and Martin, "The Latin Translations of Josephus" 59.

<sup>24</sup> *De Vir. ill.* 13: "Eodem tempore fuit Jesus vir sapiens, si tamen virum oportet eum dicere. Erat enim mirabilium patrator operum, et doctor eorum, qui libenter vera suscipiunt: plurimos quoque tam de Judaeis quam de gentibus sui habuit sectatores, **et credebatur esse Christus**. Cumque invidia nostrorum Principum, cruci eum Pilatus addixisset, nihilominus qui primum dilexerant, perseveraverunt. Apparuit enim eis tertia die vivens. Multa et haec alia mirabilia carminibus Prophetarum de eo vaticinantibus, et usque hodie Christianorum gens ab hoc sortita vocabulum, non defecit": "In this same time was Jesus, a wise man, if indeed it be lawful to call him man. For he was a worker of wonderful miracles, and a teacher of those who freely receive the truth. He had very many adherents also, both of the Jews and of the Gentiles, and **was believed to be** Christ, and when through the envy of our chief men Pilate had crucified him, nevertheless those who had loved him at first continued to the end, for he appeared to them the third day alive. Many things, both these and other wonderful things are in the songs of the prophets who prophesied concerning him and the sect of Christians, so named from Him, exists to the present day." According to R. McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004) 223, the earliest manuscripts are *BAV reg.lat. 2077* and *Paris BnF lat. 12161*.

*Antiquities/Jewish War* could not be made to serve his apologetic purposes.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, it seemed that Ps. Hegesippus had a copy of the *Antiquities* to hand, deploying it quite differently from other Christian writers.<sup>26</sup> These are the manuscripts closest in time and, more importantly here, *space*, to the publication of Josephus' *Antiquities*.

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<sup>25</sup> *Ambrosianus C. 105 inf.* and *Casellanus. De Excidio* II. Xii, ed. Ussani 163-4: "About [these events] the Jews themselves bear witness, Josephus a writer of histories saying, that there was in that time a wise man, if it is proper however, he said, to call a man the creator of marvellous works, who appeared living to his disciples after three days of his death in accordance with the writings of the prophets, who prophesied both this and innumerable other things full of miracles about him from which began the community of Christians and penetrated into every tribe of men nor has any nation of the Roman world remained, which was left without worship of him." For the character of the *De Excidio*, see Pollard, "The *De Excidio*", 76-79 esp. 78: "These changes [from Josephus' "original" passage] make it clear that the *De Excidio* was not a mere translation but written by a *historiographus* in his own right, someone who felt he was writing a new history *based on* Josephus."

<sup>26</sup> Whealey, "The *Testimonium Flavianum*", 347: "It is clear that Pseudo-Hegesippus' *Testimonium* is derived directly from a copy of Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities* rather than from the works of Eusebius or another Christian writer, for Pseudo-Hegesippus used two passages from Book 18 of *Jewish Antiquities*, ignored by Eusebius and other Christian writers, which follow either immediately before or shortly after the *Testimonium* (*De Excidio* 2. 4 // *Ant.* 18. 65-80; *De Excidio* 2.5 // *Ant.* 18. 85-87)."

The earliest surviving *text* in either Greek or Latin of the *Testimonium* is thus that provided by Jerome in the 7<sup>th</sup>/early 8<sup>th</sup> century manuscript of *de viris illustribus*.<sup>27</sup> Levenson and Martin, commenting on the corrected manuscript version of the *Testimonium* in Rufinus' Latin translation of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, state: "The correction is almost certainly drawn from Jerome's translation of the *Testimonium* and, therefore, does not reflect a reading in a Greek text."<sup>28</sup> But this makes the appearance of the phrase at all a baffling problem, as they concede: "It does, however, provide a clear case of a Christian writer changing the explicit claim that Jesus was the Christ to a more ambiguous assertion, a procedure that scholars have doubted a Christian writer would ever do."<sup>29</sup> In what plausible circumstances would a Christian author intervene in this way? Levenson and Martin are exercised in seeking a convincing explanation for Jerome's striking phrase: "It remains a bit puzzling why a presumably pious scribe would prefer a text that did not explicitly acknowledge Jesus as Christ. Perhaps the best explanation is that he respected the authority of Jerome, whose version of the *Testimonium* was well known from his popular book recording the lives of famous men."<sup>30</sup> But this brings us back to Jerome: why would *he* have inserted the *credebatur*? Some have thought that he balked at the phrase "he was the Christ" that he found in his version of the *testimonium*; it was unthinkable that a Jew like Josephus

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<sup>27</sup> A. Whealey, "The *Testimonium Flavianum* in Syriac and Arabic", *JTS* 54.4 (2008) 573-590 at 581 dates the manuscripts even earlier, to the "sixth or seventh century". The earliest surviving manuscript in any language is the fifth-century Syriac translation of Eusebius' *Theophania* (British Library Add MS 12150), see 000 above. No Greek version of the work survives. See above 000 and below 000.

<sup>28</sup> Levenson and Martin, "The Latin Translations of Josephus" 59.

<sup>29</sup> Levenson and Martin, "The Latin Translations of Josephus" 59.

<sup>30</sup> Levenson and Martin, "The Latin Translations of Josephus" 26.

could possibly have entertained such an idea.<sup>31</sup> But if we remain undistracted by the late date of the Greek manuscripts and adhere to the chronology of the Latin, an alternative suggests itself. As Pollard has recently suggested, in calling for a new edition of the Latin Josephus: “..the Latin manuscripts are generally much earlier than the surviving copies of the Greek original, meaning that we need to know the Latin before we can restore Josephus’ Greek.”<sup>32</sup>

So what was it that Jerome and Ps-Hegesippus had originally read? At the outset of the *de viris*, Jerome paid tribute to his sources: “I must acknowledge that Eusebius Pamphilius in the ten books of his Church History has been of the utmost assistance, and the works of various among those of whom we are to write often testify to the *aetas* of their authors.”<sup>33</sup> What Jerome clearly meant was that Eusebius had been a valuable source for the composition of the whole work, perhaps especially for those early famous men long before his own time. There is, however, no reason to think that Eusebius was necessarily Jerome’s source for *Josephus*.<sup>34</sup> Josephus had, unlike many of the famous men being mentioned,

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<sup>31</sup> R. Eisler, *Iesous Basileus ou Basileusas : die messianische Unabhängigkeitsbewegung vom Auftreten Johannes des Täuflers bis zum Untergang Jakobs des Gerechten, nach der neuerschlossenen Eroberung von Jerusalem des Flavius Josephus und den christlichen Quellen* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1929) 68.n. 2 and Thackery’s comment reported there: “Even Jerome found this last phrase [“he was the Christ”] incomprehensible on such lips and altered it in his translation.”

<sup>32</sup> Pollard, “The *De Excidio*” 72.

<sup>33</sup> *De viris ill. Praef.*: “...et singulorum de quibus scripturi sumus, volumina aetates auctorum suorum saepe testentur.”

<sup>34</sup> The fact that Jerome referred to the popular pseudo-Josephan claim that Jerusalem had fallen because of the murder of James – just as Eusebius had done – does not prove Jerome’s

produced his own works which were demonstrably in circulation. As we have seen, the earliest surviving manuscripts recycling the *Testimonium* were Latin translations/paraphrases. What if the Greek texts that Jerome quoted and Ps. Hegesippus paraphrased were obtained *in Rome*? It would in fact be remarkable if Jerome, given his estimation of Josephus, should have come across the Jewish historian's work only after leaving the city of Rome. He had in fact known and was long a borrower of books from learned Jews in the city.<sup>35</sup> Lucinius, writing to Jerome in Bethlehem c. 398 thought that the great man had made a Latin translation of Josephus, prompting Jerome to confess that he had neither the talent nor the time to translate such a masterpiece.<sup>36</sup> A passage mentioning Jesus of Nazareth in one of them would have been memorable to all parties. These observations prompt us to consider what has been long overlooked in the debate on the *Testimonium*: the context and outlook of its author in the city of Rome.

### 3. 'Figured' speech and Josephus' Rome

Because of the poor opinion of Josephus held historically by scholars, the possibility of any kind of sophistication of expression in the *Testimonium* (as in his work generally) has had few supporters and has only recently come to be considered as a serious area of enquiry.<sup>37</sup> This in turn has influenced those seeking to reconstruct his text. In 2014, Bermejo-

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dependence on Eusebius (Carleton Paget "Some Observations" 571); the same juxtaposition of the death of James and Josephus' witness to Jesus can be seen in Origen, *C. Cels.* 1.47.

<sup>35</sup> Jerome, *Letter* 36.

<sup>36</sup> *Letter* 71. 5 (Jerome responding to Lucinius).

<sup>37</sup> Above all, see S. Mason, "Reading on and Between the Lines," in *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text* (ed. A.J. Boyle, W.J. Dominik; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 559-589; S. Mason,

Rubio challenged the long-standing belief of those sceptical about the *textus receptus* that its tone was implausibly positive and that it must at the very least have been “neutral” in character. He suggested that “theological and apologetic constraints have substantially conditioned the history of research on the *TF* [*Testimonium Flavianum*]”<sup>38</sup> As he rightly pointed out, the demand for a ‘neutral’ *Testimonium* is, however, a serious assumption; the failure of the earliest Christian authors to mention the passage proves only that they chose not to deploy it for their own apologetic purposes. They found Josephus *mentioning* Jesus but he did not strike them as a person who understood him. Origen, as we have seen, thought Josephus close to but not quite at this understanding.<sup>39</sup>

Freed from the need to find a “neutral” *testimonium*, we can re-visit some rather neglected earlier ideas on the passage. In 1927 Clyde Pharr, setting the *Testimonium* in its textual context, contended that the reference to “other tumults” a few lines further on in

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"Figured Speech and Irony in T. Flavius Josephus", in *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (ed. J. Edmondson, S. Mason, J. Rives; Oxford: OUP, 2005) 243-288; A. Vicent Cernuda, "El Testimonio Flaviano, alarde de solpada ironi", *EB* 55 (1997) 355-85; 479-508.

<sup>38</sup> F. Bermejo-Rubio, "Was the Hypothetical *Vorlage* of the *Testimonium Flavianum* a “Neutral” Text? Challenging the Common Wisdom on *Antiquitates Judaicae* 18. 63-64," *JSJ* 45 (2014), 326-365 at 363.

<sup>39</sup> Bermejo-Rubio was similarly nuanced in his characterisation of what he understood to be the anonymous later Christian interpolator: Bermejo-Rubio "the Hypothetical *Vorlage*" 362: "The Christian author who tampered with the passage of *Antiquities* must have regarded his own work not as a forgery carried out with *mauvaise foi*, but rather as a very necessary *diorthosis*; his emendations were probably not considered to be a violent, cynical replacement of the original, but rather the correction of a previous mistake and the fair restoration of the “true” text".

*Antiquities* 18 indicated that in its original form the *testimonium* had connected the Jesus movement to the tumults in question.<sup>40</sup> They were, respectively, the seduction of the Roman matron Paulina and the tale of the credulous woman (Fulvia) duped by an unscrupulous Jew.<sup>41</sup> For Pharr, the power of the *Testimonium* was that it stood as the first of three examples of gross religious *naiveté*. He thought that the original *Testimonium* had therefore contained a disparaging reference to the miraculous birth of Jesus: “a caption of this section might well be, according to Josephus, “The Three Gullible Women”, to wit Mary the mother of Jesus, Paulina, and Fulvia.”<sup>42</sup>

In 1976 A.A. Bell picked up the parodic reading of Pharr and supported it by appealing to Pseudo-Hegesippus’ *De Excidio*. The latter’s insertion of the Paulina story explicitly mentioned her subsequent pregnancy (a detail not recorded in the *textus receptus* of the *Testimonium*) and added her belief that she was carrying the child of a god. On this reading, the original form of the *testimonium* contained a derogatory reference to the supposed virgin birth of Jesus, making it the earliest literary denunciation of Christianity.<sup>43</sup>

In 1997, Antonio Vicent Cernuda argued that the key vocabulary: Jesus the “σοφὸς ἀνὴρ”, the “ποιητής”, the “διδάσκαλος”, and his followers as recipients of “τάληθῃ” were each of them exquisitely ambiguous terms that could be found in both negative and positive

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<sup>40</sup> C. Pharr, "The Testimony of Josephus to Christianity," *AJPh* 48 (1927) 137-147 at 143.

<sup>41</sup> *A.J.* 18. 65-80; 81-84.

<sup>42</sup> Pharr "The Testimony of Josephus" 145.

<sup>43</sup> A.A. Bell, "Josephus the Satirist? A Clue to the Original Form of the *Testimonium Flavianum*," *JQR* 67 (1976) 16-22 at 19-20. This was suggested as a possibility earlier by E. Bammel, "Zum Testimonium Flavianum," in *Josephus-Studien: Untersuchungen zu Josephus, d. antiken Judentum u.d. Neuen Testament: Otto Michel z. 70 Geburtstag gewidmet* (ed. O. Betz, K. Hacker, M. Hengel; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1974) 2-22.

contexts elsewhere in Josephus' work. Viewed through this lens, Josephus became an artful commentator steering a course between his friends the emperor Domitian and the pro-Christian Flavius Clemens.<sup>44</sup> The idea that Josephus' text could be read ironically, as it stood, marked a new direction in reading the *Testimonium*. But Vicent Cernuda distractingly invoked the unverifiable context of Domitian and Flavius Clemens as associates of Josephus. What was required was a more plausible exposition of the historical context of delivery. This was all the more necessary since without such a context the ironic reading was open to the criticism that irony, being in the eye of the beholder, can be seen anywhere.<sup>45</sup> But the lasting value of Pharr, Bell, and Vicent Cernuda was to afford Josephus the capacity to speak in different voices, as circumstances required – one of them being the contemptuous.

Two important papers by Steve Mason, however, have usefully shifted the search for irony from the author to the reader. Mason, reflecting on Frederick Ahl's influential essay on "the art of safe criticism" practised by Greek and Latin writers living under the shadow of tyranny, applied its implications to Josephus. Mason argues for a comprehensive reassessment of Josephus as a practitioner of "figured", "refracted" or "encoded" speech.<sup>46</sup> Some of the most prominent themes in the historian's work now emerge as sophisticated critiques and commentary on Josephus' own times: the great theme of the *Jewish War* that the Jews had brought disaster upon themselves could in fact be read as an undercutting of the bombastic triumphalism of the Flavians, making the work "a subversive history that displaces the Romans as victors in any meaningful sense."<sup>47</sup> The famous set-pieces covering the

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<sup>44</sup> Vicent Cernuda, "El Testimonio Flaviano".

<sup>45</sup> Carleton Paget "Some Observations" 587-588.

<sup>46</sup> "Figured Speech and Irony" 248.

<sup>47</sup> "Figured Speech and Irony" 267. Cf. Mason, "Reading on and Between the Lines" 589 [on the *Antiquities*]: "[Josephus] wished not only to praise the Judaeian constitution before his



accession of emperors Gaius and Claudius prompted readers to reflect upon the loss of aristocratic government and its overshadowing by tyranny – the *Leitmotif* of Domitian's reign.<sup>48</sup> Josephus' game of cat-and-mouse with his Jewish enemies in Jerusalem as detailed in his *Vita* "when the audience shares knowledge with the author and character Josephus, of which the delegation members are confidently unaware, we have an impressive ironic situation akin to that of new Comedy."<sup>49</sup>

Comprehension of this new Josephus, according to Mason, proceeds from an appreciation of two important perspectives on the part of readers: "text-dependent" irony, where readers have before them knowledge already conveyed to them elsewhere in the text and "audience-dependent" irony where broader public knowledge contributes to the comprehension of the author's words. Between them, these two important essays have put our comprehension of Josephus as a writer on a new footing. There follow, moreover, some important implications for understanding the import of Josephus' original *Testimonium*. But in order to understand them, it is necessary to take Mason's ideas a little further. His primary interest was in how the texts of Josephus might be *read*. But if we accept Mason's idea of "audience-dependent" irony, it becomes necessary to consider how they might have been *heard*.

#### 4. Hearing the *testimonium*

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Roman audience, but also to comment on Roman affairs as directly as any writer would dare at this point in Domitian's reign." See now too J.S. McLaren, "The Jews in Rome during the Flavian Period", *Antichthon* 47 (2013) 156-172 at 164-172.

<sup>48</sup> A.J. 18. 205-304; 19. 1-226. Mason "Figured Speech and Irony 273-275.

<sup>49</sup> Mason, "Figured Speech and Irony" 281 re: *Vita* 202 ff.

As no less a figure than Cicero put it: “if truth is the foundation, rhetoric is the superstructure of history.”<sup>50</sup> According to E. J. Kenney in *The Cambridge History of Latin Literature*:

“In general it may be taken for granted that throughout antiquity books were written to be read aloud, and that even private reading took on some of the characteristics of a modulated declamation. It might be said without undue exaggeration that a book of poetry or artistic prose was not simply a text in the modern sense but something like a score for public or private performance.”<sup>51</sup>

*Recitatio* marked the formal publication of the work.<sup>52</sup> Taken together with the importance attributed by Mason to ‘audience-dependent’ irony, it is therefore worth considering who Josephus’ listeners might have been and what they might have brought to the reading (out) of the *Testimonium*.

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<sup>50</sup> Cicero, *De Or.* 2.63. See Tacitus, *Ann.* 4.34 for the reputed eloquence of Livy.

<sup>51</sup> E.J. Kenney, "Books and readers in the Roman world" in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature vol. II: Latin* (ed. E.J. Kenney, W.V. Hausen, W. V.; Cambridge: CUP, 1982) 12. See A.K. Gavrilov, "Reading Techniques in Classical Antiquity," *CQ* 47 (1997) 56-73. Cf. A.N. Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny. A Historical and Social Commentary* (Oxford: OUP, 1966) 115: "All classical literature was written to be read aloud, and the *recitatio* is the logical development of the symposium and the public performances of classical Greece."

<sup>52</sup> W.V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, Ma.: HUP, 1989) 225-226 on Tacitus' *Dialogus* 3. This is not to diminish the importance of private reading too, on which see H.N. Parker, "Books and reading Latin Poetry", in *Ancient Literacies: The Culture of Reading in Greece and Rome* (ed. W.A. Johnson, H.N. Parker; Oxford: OUP, 2009) 186-225.

In the generation after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in A.D. 70 there was a demonstrable interest in Jewish matters in the Rome.<sup>53</sup> Josephus was only one of a number of writers to discuss the Jews and the war that had destroyed their holy city. The war with the Jews also prompted dramatic changes in the landscape of Rome around these writers.<sup>54</sup> From the sale of the spoils of the Temple in Jerusalem a vast new amphitheatre rose in the centre of Rome under the rule of a new, Flavian, dynasty.<sup>55</sup> Also funding it was a new tax on all Jews, a pointed diversion to the treasury of Rome of what they had previously paid to the Temple in Jerusalem.<sup>56</sup> And for more than half a decade Titus enjoyed an intimate

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<sup>53</sup> See e.g. Edmondson, Mason, Rives, *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome*; McLaren, "The Jews in Rome"; M.D. Goodman, *Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious history of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: OUP, 1994) 60-90 rightly plays down proselytism.

<sup>54</sup> The writers included Vespasian himself in his *commentarii*, Marcus Antonius Julianus (possibly a procurator of Judaea during the war of 66-70) and Josephus' arch-enemy Justus of Tiberias. On these writers, see Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People* 1:32-37.

<sup>55</sup> For the compelling new reading of *CIL* 6. 40454a = *AE* 1995, 111b erected at the 'Colosseum' and adopted here, see A. Alföldi, "Bauinschrift aus dem Colosseum", *ZPE* 109 (1995) 195-226; F.G.B. Millar, "Last Year in Jerusalem: Monuments of the Jewish War in Rome" in Edmondson, Mason, Rives, *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* 101-128.

<sup>56</sup> See J.B. Rives, "Flavian Religious policy and the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple", in Edmondson, Mason, Rives, *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (2005) 145-166.

relationship with the Herodian princess Berenike, to the point where a marriage between them became unsettlingly likely.<sup>57</sup>

In the wake of the destruction of the Temple some fundamental questions presented themselves to the Jews: what did the loss of the Temple entail for the future of the traditional forms of worship? With the tasks of the priests and high-priests in Jerusalem discontinued, who was to offer religious leadership? And what did the events of recent years mean for the comprehension of Israel's bond with its God? Josephus' *Antiquities* was the largest and most literary contribution to answering these questions.

But as pious Jews reflected on the future of their way of life, there were followers of Jesus of Nazareth in the Rome who had for more than half a century been proclaiming him as a man who had changed the course of history and who offered a unique kind of salvation.<sup>58</sup> Many of those preaching about Jesus had done so first and continued to do so to the Jews of Rome; famously, under Claudius in the 40s the city authorities already had to deal with

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<sup>57</sup> Suetonius, *Tit.* 7. 1; Dio Cassius *Rom. Hist.* 66. 15. 3-5 (Epitome of Book 65); 66.8.1a1; Tacitus, *Hist.* 2.2. See J. Wilker, *Für Rom und Jerusalem. Die herodianische Dynastie im 1. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Antike, 2007) 449-454.

<sup>58</sup> It is worth bearing in mind that Josephus may have had more than one opportunity to hear these kinds of ideas in Rome. In the 60s, he had travelled to the city as a representative of his people (*Vita* 13-16). If his time there did not actually overlap with that of Paul, he is nevertheless highly likely to have learned that there were problems among the Jews of Rome because of subversive and unwelcome teaching. And Agrippa II, famously one of Josephus' correspondents after he had become a permanent resident of Rome in the 70s, had certainly heard Paul's teachings in the course of his famous interrogation of the 'apostle to the gentiles' (*Acts* 26:1-32).

trouble in the Jewish community.<sup>59</sup> Among the most energetic of these Christian preachers was Paul of Tarsus, whose letter to the “Romans” reveals the kind of thinking that was causing the trouble. Written between 55 and 57, it contained the famous claim of Paul to be an apostle to the “gentiles”.<sup>60</sup> But much of letter is an appeal couched in strikingly Jewish terms.<sup>61</sup> In his letters Paul quotes the scriptures of the Jews roughly 100 times; these

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<sup>59</sup> Suetonius, *Claud.* 25. 4, with its famous reference to trouble "impulsore Chresto". Dio Cassius, *Rom. Hist.* 60.6.6 calls into question the idea of a comprehensive expulsion mentioned in the former. Cf. *Acts* 18:2. P. Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the first two centuries* (London: Continuum, 2003), 12 thinks the original unrest was prompted by the attempt of followers of Jesus to proclaim him in at least one of the synagogues of Rome.

<sup>60</sup> *Romans* 11:13. For the biographical context, see J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: a critical life* (Oxford: OUP, 1996) 332.

<sup>61</sup> There is a long-running scholarly debate over the ethnic identity of the letter's recipients. See K.P. Donfried, *The Romans debate* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991). More recently, R. Jewett *Romans: a commentary* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2007) 70 proposes that 'problematic relations between a Gentile majority and Jewish minority are in view throughout the letter.' A.J. Hultgren, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: a commentary* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2011) 9-10 characterizes the community addressed as exhibiting: "...a more conservative ethos and theological position than what one finds in congregations founded by Paul himself. Its oldest nucleus would have consisted of Hellenistic Jewish Christians who had been shaped largely by the Jerusalem community, who held the latter in high regard, and who, to some degree at least, continued contacts with the church in Jerusalem." S. Mason, "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel" (*Rom.* 1:16): The Gospel and the First Readers of Romans", in S.

quotations are frequent in *Romans*, *1* and *2 Corinthians* and *Galatians*. In his letter to the “Romans” alone, however, he invoked the Jewish scriptures at least 50 times.<sup>62</sup> Because Paul was engaging with the Jewish community in the city, he needed to be at his most informed when communicating with its members.<sup>63</sup> Paul identified people who adhered to the Law of Moses but who did not possess the special ‘faith’ that had followed on from the death of Jesus. Some Jews would have found Paul’s claims deeply disturbing, like that made in Rom. 7:6:

“Now we are discharged from the Law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are as slaves, not under the old written code but in the new life of the spirit.”<sup>64</sup>

When Nero identified the Christians of Rome as a nefarious presence in the city a few years later, it is not difficult to imagine that many Roman Jews were happy to see the Christians go to their deaths, given these blasphemous views.<sup>65</sup>

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Mason, ed., *Josephus, Judaea, and Christian Origins* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2009) 303-328, at 303-305 has a brief overview of the ‘Romans debate’.

<sup>62</sup> There is some dispute over the precise figure. See E.E. Ellis, *Paul’s Use of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1957) Appendix II; cf. R.N. Longenecker, *Introducing Romans: critical issues in Paul’s most famous letter* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2011).

<sup>63</sup> *Rom* 7:1: ‘I am speaking to those who know the Law.’ See Mason, “For I am not ashamed” 303-328 who also stresses the importance of the Jewish/Judaean audience.

<sup>64</sup> According to Jewett *Commentary ad loc.*: “To define salvation so explicitly in terms of freedom from the law represents a radical break from traditional Judaism as Paul had experienced it.”

One critical question – framed earlier by Paul - presented itself to the Christians and, consequently, to the Jews with whom they were in contact: had the Law been superseded by the extraordinary events Paul reported from Judaea as well as his own remarkable experiences?

“What then are we to say? Gentiles, who did not strive for righteousness, have attained it, that is, righteousness through faith; but Israel who did strive for the righteousness that is based on the Law, did not succeed in fulfilling that Law.”<sup>65</sup>

For those who had taken up the views of Paul of Tarsus, the relationship between historic Temple-based worship and what Paul claimed were startling new gifts and blessings from God gave greater urgency to the need to resolve the respective identities of Judaism and Christianity.

But it was no straightforward process. At around the same time as Josephus' *Antiquities* were being written, Clement of Rome wrote a letter of rebuke to the Christians of

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<sup>65</sup> Mason, "For I am not ashamed", 312-14 thinks that empress Poppaea Sabina, a *theosebēs* (A.J. 20.195) may have played a role in distinguishing Jews from Christians.

<sup>66</sup> *Rom* 9:30. An “outrageous irony...from the perspective of Jewish orthodoxy of the Pharisaic type” according to Jewett *Commentary* 610. Cf. Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 33.4-5: "By reading the writings of Flavius Josephus and Antonius Julianus, you shall know that by their wickedness they deserved this fortune, and that nothing happened to them which had not before been predicted, if they persisted in their obstinacy." And ultimately Eusebius *H.E.* 2.6 attributing to Josephus the view that "the calamities which overtook the nation began with the time of Pilate and the crimes against the saviour." See Carleton Paget "Some observations" 541 n. 12 for further references.

Corinth, where the community's leaders had been displaced by a rival group. Clement appealed to them to respect structure as God-given:

“Brothers, let each of us be pleasing to God by keeping to our special assignments with a good conscience, not violating the established rule of his ministry, acting in reverence. The sacrifices made daily, or for vows, or for sin and transgression are not offered everywhere, brothers, but in Jerusalem alone; and even there a sacrifice is not made in just any place, but before the sanctuary on the altar, after the sacrificial animal has been inspected for blemishes by both the high priest and the ministers mentioned earlier. Thus, those who do anything contrary to his plan bear the penalty of death. You see, brothers, the more knowledge we have been deemed worthy to receive, the more we are subject to danger.”<sup>67</sup>

Modern debate has focussed on whether the passage is to be read literally – as a call for a dedicated Christian priesthood - or metaphorically, as a general defence of good order in community.<sup>68</sup> But Clement's appeal can only have had resonance for those familiar with the literature of the Jews, literature that recorded the Jerusalem temple's historic standing as well as the identity and duties of those who had served in it. The passage is a reminder of the continuing currency among Christ-followers, even as late as the end of the first-century, of

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<sup>67</sup> *1 Clement* 40.1-4.

<sup>68</sup> See e.g. J.G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London: SCM, 2006) 335: "*1 Clement* 40-41 describes the obligation of religious service in typological language drawn from the OT and Jewish cult: not just sacrifices but the High Priest, priests and Levites, *and* laity (*klerikos*). But how much this too was intended to be understood in a transferred or metaphorical sense, and how much was intended in a literal sense remains in dispute."



detailed knowledge of the late Second Temple.<sup>69</sup> In this situation, the publication of Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* was a protracted process of profound significance that some at least of those calling themselves "Christians" could hardly afford to ignore.

### 5. The *Testimonium* in context

Some have been uneasy about the position of the *Testimonium Flavianum* within its immediate context in Josephus' *Antiquities*. As we have seen, it is sandwiched between an account of Pontius Pilate's conflict with the Jews of Judaea over the building of an aqueduct and a story set in Rome of a noble lady duped by some unscrupulous priests of Isis into sleeping overnight in the temple of the god where she was seduced by a Roman knight disguised as the god.<sup>70</sup> According to Josephus, when Tiberius learned of the deception of the latter he had the priests of Isis crucified and their temple thrown down. After the *testimonium*, the text of Josephus reads "about this time another outrage threw the Jews into an uproar; and simultaneously certain actions of a scandalous nature occurred in connection with the temple of Isis in Rome. I shall first give an account of the daring deed of the followers of Isis and

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<sup>69</sup> Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus* 76: 'The author himself probably did not come from Judaism. As a gentile Christian, Clement takes up Jewish traditions that were alive in the urban Christian community....*Christians from the sphere of influence of the synagogues*, Jewish Christians as well as Gentile Christians, exercised an astonishing influence on the formation of theology in urban Roman Christianity in the first century [*italics Lampe's*].'

<sup>70</sup> A.J. 18.55-62; 65-80.

shall then come back to the fate of the Jews.”<sup>71</sup> This passage invites us to look at what follows *after* Josephus’ story of the noble lady Paulina.

What follows is the story of another woman of rank who was duped, this time by an unscrupulous *Jew*, a man described by Josephus as “a complete scoundrel who had fled his own country because he was accused of transgressing certain laws and feared punishment on this account...at this time he was resident in Rome and played the part of an interpreter of the mosaic law and its wisdom.”<sup>72</sup> The outrage in question was the expulsion of the Jews from Rome when news of the scandal reached the emperor Tiberius. Josephus’ concluding words are “and so because of the wickedness of four men the Jews were banished from the city.”<sup>73</sup> The point of the story is that irresponsible perverters of the Law of Moses who intervene in the lives of high-born Romans can bring the wrath of the state down upon the whole community. Was there a message here for Josephus’ listeners? A famous passage from the *epitome* of Dio Cassius may be admitted: “And the same year [CE 96] Domitian slew, along with many others, Flavius Clemens the consul, although he was a cousin and had to wife Flavia Domitilla, who was also a relative of the emperor’s. The charge brought against them both was that of atheism, a charge on which many others who drifted into Jewish ways were condemned.”<sup>74</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea was later to claim in his *Ecclesiastical History* that Flavius Clemens was a *Christian* – a claim which, justifiably, few serious historians accept. It is important nevertheless to acknowledge, as we saw earlier, that Josephus’ Rome was characterised by a marked interest in Jewish ideas. And there were peddlers of Jewish ideas

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<sup>71</sup> A.J. 18.65 (trans. Feldman).

<sup>72</sup> A.J. 18.81-2.

<sup>73</sup> A.J. 18.84.

<sup>74</sup> Dio Cassius, *Rom. Hist.* 67.14.1-2 (Epitome of Book 67).

who were promoting them in the city where Josephus now offered his cautionary tales on how the reckless and unscrupulous came to terrible ends and brought disaster on the Jewish community in the city.

So if we return to the structure of Josephus' stories, the *Testimonium Flavianum* comes first, another "disaster" of the Jews is referred to, but first the story of the wretched priests of Isis is told. Josephus proceeds with the shocking story that people calling themselves *Jews* could be just as bad. And what introduces these stories is the *testimonium*.

## 6. Delivering the *Testimonium*

So when Josephus, priest of the temple, Pharisee and veteran of the war with Rome, got to his feet in some public hall in Rome in the 90s - and he is likely to have wanted to deliver this statement in person<sup>75</sup> - he did so as the self-appointed spokesman for a people, a history and a culture.<sup>76</sup> It is not impossible that some followers of Jesus were listening; some who had overseen the persecutions of Nero were also present, as well as Jews unswervingly loyal to the Law of Moses.

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<sup>75</sup> Parker "Books and reading" 205 states that *recitationes* were normally performed by slaves and freedmen. Pace J.J. Price, "The Provincial Historian in Rome", in J. Sievers, G. Lembi, eds., *Josephus and Jewish History in Flavian Rome and Beyond* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 101-118, at 105 on A.J. 20. 263, there is no reason to think that possessing an accent was a barrier to recitation. And of course, Josephus may have sat: Pliny *Letters* 19.1.

<sup>76</sup> Grandeur of setting need not, of course, have been available; the Roman *auditorium* is to be understood as oscillating between physical and conceptual space according to E. Fantham, *Roman Literary Culture from Cicero to Apuleius* (London: Johns Hopkins, 1996) 211-221.

“About this time there arose<sup>77</sup> (one) Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the ‘truth’ gladly. He won over<sup>78</sup> many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was believed to be the ‘anointed one’. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvellous things about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared”.<sup>79</sup>

More than one recent commentator has noticed the “clipped and condensed form” of the passage.<sup>80</sup> From his full physical and moral height, Josephus began to refer to “(one) Jesus”. He continued with the neutral-sounding “wise man” but quickly began to chip away

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<sup>77</sup> Γίνεται δὲ. The phrase is used elsewhere to introduce the manifestation of tumult: *A.J.* 18.310; 20. 118; 20.173. Cf. *B.J.* 1.99; 4.208. Some have wanted to restore *stasis* or *thorubos*: "there arose a tumult; (one) Jesus, a 'wise' man...". See Carleton Paget, "Some observations" 573.

<sup>78</sup> ἐπηγάγετο, as J.P Meier, *A Marginal Jew: rethinking the historical Jesus* (New Haven: Yale, 1991) 78 n. 34 points out, can be understood to mean "seduced, led astray"; in Meier's words: "once again, Josephus may be engaging in a studied ambiguity." See e.g., *A.J.* 1.207; 6.196; 11.199; 17.327.

<sup>79</sup> *A.J.* 18.63-64.

<sup>80</sup> Carleton Paget, "Some observations" 581. Cf. Meier, *A Marginal Jew* 61 who located his own emendations in the context "of what is otherwise a concise text carefully written in a fairly neutral – or even purposely ambiguous – tone."

at the idea. “[I]f one ought to call him a man” is an ironic reference to what was already a matter of some difficulty for Christians: what manner of creature was Jesus: a man, a superman or a god?<sup>81</sup> The resonance, and the dismissal, was more powerful because of course the preternatural “wise man” – from Socrates to Xenocrates - was a quite familiar concept already - to polytheists.<sup>82</sup> People who accept the truth “gladly” (*hedone* – “with pleasure”) were the gullible and the lazy; those who would not take the time to study the Law properly (Jews) or do the hard thinking required by Greek philosophy. The word is overwhelmingly used in a negative sense by Josephus – as by Christians.<sup>83</sup> And of course, people like this were to be found among both Jews and Greeks. Meier’s interpretation of the claim as “naïve

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<sup>81</sup> A point that pagan enemies of Christianity would presently exploit. See R.L Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans saw them* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1984) 104-106 on Celsus.

<sup>82</sup> See U. Victor, "Das *Testimonium Flavianum*: ein authentischer Text des Josephus", *NT* 52 (2010) 72-82, at 75-76 with n.8 whose observations I accept but apply in a more strongly negative sense. For the *theios aner* and Greek tradition see L.L. Grabbe, *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian* (London: SCM, 1992) 522.

<sup>83</sup> Compare *A.J.* 17.329; 18.6, 70, 236; 19.127, 185. For a sole positive usage: *A.J.* 18. 59 of the Jews *in extremis* protesting against Pilate. See Carleton Paget, "Some observations" 585; and Bermejo-Rubio "the hypothetical *Vorlage*" 354. See too Mason’s reading of *Vita* 367 where Josephus anticipates the challenge that Agrippa II did not really esteem the historian’s works: "He was not flattering my finished history with ‘truth’, for that would not have occurred to him; nor was he being ironic (*oude eironeumenos*), as you will claim, for he was beyond such bad character": Mason, "Figured speech" 284.

retrojection” as applied to the earliest Christian movement arguably fails to see Josephus’ reference to his *own* time and audience.<sup>84</sup>

According to Josephus, these people believed that Jesus was “the Anointed One”. The word *Christos* occurs precisely twice in Josephus, here, and in his description of a painted (*christon*) wall in the palace of Solomon.<sup>85</sup> His use of the substantive adjective with its definite article shows his adoption of the language of the Christians themselves and of Paul specifically.<sup>86</sup> The phrase “was believed to be”, which Jerome read in the fourth century, had probably already been removed from Greek manuscripts circulating in the east. But its presence in the Roman text that Jerome read and recalled shows how Josephus, by means of the statement, challenged his audience to reflect: what *kind* of people believed such things?

The Hebrew term “messiah” (*mashiach*) is very rare in Jewish literature of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE – 1<sup>st</sup> century CE.<sup>87</sup> Searching for it is frequently undertaken by those looking

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<sup>84</sup> Meier, *A Marginal Jew* 64-65.

<sup>85</sup> *A.J.* 8.137.

<sup>86</sup> ‘The Gospel of Christ’ at *Rom* 1:9; 15:19; *1 Cor* 9.:12; *2 Cor* 2:12; 9:13; 10:14; *Gal* 1:7; *Phil* 1:27; *1 Thess* 3:2; *2 Thess* 1:8. The phrase ‘in Christ’ occurs 83 times in the Pauline *corpus* (61 times if *Ephesians* and the Pastoral letters are excluded); a ‘distinctively Pauline feature’ according to J.D.G Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (London: T&T Clark, 1998) 396.

<sup>87</sup> E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 B.C.E. – 66 C.E* (London: SCM, 1992) 295-298 on the ‘strikingly few’ references to a messiah in 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE – 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E. literature.

through the prism of the New Testament.<sup>88</sup> In Josephus' day, it was to be found most enthusiastically deployed by the sectarians at Qumran who, as Josephus knew well, had lived literally and theologically at the margins of Jewish society.<sup>89</sup> Similarly, apparently messianic references in intertestamental texts like *The Psalms of Solomon*, *4 Ezra* and *1 Enoch*, each emanating from writers who attained no particular authority in either Judaism or Christianity.<sup>90</sup> "Messianic" figures in first-century Judaea get very short shrift elsewhere in Josephus' works where they were denounced without equivocation as dangerous trouble-makers.<sup>91</sup> By contrast, people who *were* engaged in the hard work of living religiously referred to in the *Testimonium* as "men of the highest standing among us" – a stratum of Jewish society to which Josephus of course belonged – had prevailed upon Pilate to put this dangerous man to death. They had acted from high principle. Christians were nevertheless claiming that Jesus had appeared to them after death. What was altogether more troubling however was that they were also claiming that the prophets had foretold the appearance and mission of this man. The statement was "clearly a Christian profession of faith", according to Meier; specifically it was an echo of the kind of claim made in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (15. 5): "...and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in

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<sup>88</sup> L.L. Grabbe, *An Introduction to Second Temple Judaism* (London: T&T Clark, 2010) 80: "One of the methodological failings in so many treatments is to speak of 'messianism' or 'messianic expectation' in texts which do not use the word Messiah in any way. Some of these passages may be relevant, but this is very much a subjective judgement."

<sup>89</sup> See *CD* 12.23–13.1 with 1QS9.11 famously posing the unanswered question of whether the Qumranites anticipated one messiah or two.

<sup>90</sup> See Grabbe, *Introduction* 80-83; 103-105.

<sup>91</sup> E.g. *B.J.* 2.433 (*Menahem*); *B.J.* 2.60 (*Athronges*); *B.J.* 2.599; 3.450. References to each of whom uses *tis*. *A.J.* 20. 97-98 (*Theudas*); 167-172 ('the Egyptian').

accordance with the scriptures...”.<sup>92</sup> But as any credible student of Judaism would know, the very idea was a perversion of the role of the Jewish prophets, a role that Josephus had been labouring for years to set out in his *Antiquities* – a very long and not a short story. The recent *Jewish Annotated New Testament*’s commentary on *1 Corinthians* 15. 4 (“and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures”) offers the splendidly Josephan sentiment: “which passages Paul invokes are unclear”, joining a host of experts on Second Temple Judaism in assigning such beliefs to the very margins of the Jewish community – Josephus was telling his listeners that people like himself held the centre ground.<sup>93</sup> The reference to Christians as *still* not having disappeared had a particular resonance for frustrated pious Jews who recalled Nero’s action against the Christians – and the fact that they were still, technically, an illegal association. Depressingly, trouble-makers were still to be found. There was no shortage of unscrupulous quackery in the world, and Josephus proceeded to the two notorious stories about scoundrels who preyed upon the ingenuousness of respectable Romans – stories designed to resonate strongly with those living in Rome where this reading was taking place.

All of this explains why, when Josephus came to his second reference to Jesus, the passage in which he mentioned James, he was, naturally enough, even briefer. He had already said all he wanted to say some weeks or months earlier. Feldman rendered it as:

“And so he [Ananus the High Priest] convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus who was called the

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<sup>92</sup> See Meier, *A Marginal Jew* 61 with n. 29.

<sup>93</sup> A.-J. Levine, M.Z. Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (Oxford: OUP, 2011) 310 (Shira Lander the commentator).



Christ, and certain others. He accused them of having transgressed the law and delivered them up to be stoned.”<sup>94</sup>

But the phrase Feldman has rendered “who was called the Christ” in Greek is *legomenou Christou* which can of course *also* be translated by the phrase “the so-called Christ” which is how it is to be read, consonant with the tone of Josephus’ earlier [ἐνομιζέτο/ἐπιστεύετο εἶναι] and Jerome’s *credebatur*.

## 7. Conclusions

The controversy over the *testimonium* has been conceived as a textual phenomenon *par excellence*. But if more attention is paid to the *Roman* context in which the text first appeared and to the precise chronology of the earliest copies of the key documents available to us, then the nature of the problem changes significantly. “Greek” and “Latin” versions give way to “Roman” and “eastern” versions. To put things more explicitly, Jerome and Ps.-Hegesippus had access to a text that came from the city of Rome where, not implausibly, Josephus had from the outset said that multiple copies could be found. As he also said, copies of his work made their way East in various forms that certainly included the circulation of the Greek *Antiquities*. Jerome’s quotation of the “Roman” reading preserves Josephus’ original text. Later copyists of this text demonstrably did not feel the need to intervene to ‘correct’ the *de vir. ill.* due to the nature of the work and the unremarkable position of the quotation there. The correction of the text of the *Antiquities* was a decision taken by a reader of the “eastern” *Antiquities*, probably sometime after the first publication of Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History*.<sup>95</sup> This reader or readers intervened to suppress two words: *tis* and the phrase “he was

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<sup>94</sup> A.J. 20.200.

<sup>95</sup> An intriguing possibility follows on from the research of Shlomo Pines, *An Arabic Version of the Testimonium Flavianum and its Implications* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences

believed to be” [ἐνομιζέτο/ἐπιστεύετο εἶναι].<sup>96</sup> Perhaps more plausibly, this eastern reader intervened first to correct Eusebius’ ecclesiastical history, an intervention that had inevitable consequences for subsequent copies of the *Antiquities*.

The authority of this “eastern” *testimonium*, once it had made its way into the highly popular *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius, swiftly eclipsed the “Roman” by the time Rufinus made his Latin translation of Eusebius. Cassiodorus’ Latin *Antiquities* simply lifted the whole passage from Rufinus’ Eusebius.<sup>97</sup> But it was not an entirely straightforward process. Copies of Josephus’ original continued to circulate in the East where they failed to make an impression on a succession of Christian readers from Chrysostom to Photius.<sup>98</sup> In the west,

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and Humanities, 1971) 40-43. Comparing versions of the *testimonium* in Arabic (produced by Agapius of Hierapolis, 10<sup>th</sup> century) and Syriac (Michael the Syrian, 12<sup>th</sup> century) Pines detected a ‘contamination’ of Michael’s text by Agapius’ and an earlier Syriac version upon which Agapius had relied. Is it possible that this ‘independent’ source derived from one of the un-emended copies of *Antiquities*? Cf. Whealey, "The *Testimonium Flavianum*" 351 who argues instead for the differences being explained by one work (Agapius) being in character a paraphrase while the other (Michael) offered a translation.

<sup>96</sup> The resulting reading has the additional virtue of minimising the interference with the ancient text. See Meier, *A Marginal Jew* 67 on attempts to reconstruct Josephus’ original reading: "A basic rule of method is that, all things being equal, the simplest explanation that covers the largest amount of data is to be preferred." And see Bermejo-Rubio’s nuanced insight into the motivations of the *emendator* quoted above 000.

<sup>97</sup> Whealey, "The *Testimonium Flavianum*" 346.

<sup>98</sup> And *contra* Carleton Paget, "Some observations" 561: "The silence of some post-Eusebian writers poses a greater problem, particularly if we assume, which in most cases we must,

the stray *tis* of the Codex Parisinus and the “et credebatur esse Christus” of the two early manuscripts of Rufinus reveal the faint traces of the transition from the original text.

The admission of the relevance of geography prompts us to look again at the civic context of the publication of Josephus’ *Antiquities*. A. A. Bell in 1976 made the then very tentative suggestion that Josephus’ tales of Roman aristocratic women might be read as ironic references to the activity of Paul of Tarsus, similarly connected to devoted pious women and also under obligation to collect money for conveying to Jerusalem.<sup>99</sup> One of the conclusions of this paper is that Bell was correct, but not for the reasons he thought. The pious dupes were illustrations of what Josephus had already stated with contemptuous irony. The fact that later readers have so often balked at accepting the authenticity of the *Testimonium* is a tribute to how accurately Josephus exposed the objects of this contempt, above all the Roman devotees of Paul of Tarsus.<sup>100</sup>

Finally, historic emphasis on the *text* of Josephus has led to the underappreciation of his *voice*. The *Testimonium* was delivered at a time and in a place. It might even be possible to imagine that some pious Roman Jew listening to Josephus utter the words of the

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knowledge of the existence of a more positive form of the *TF* at the time they wrote.” Cf.

Whealey, “The *Testimonium Flavianum*” 346, however, who stresses that we need not always expect readers of the *textus receptus* to have been determined to make capital out of its apparent claims.

<sup>99</sup> Bell, “Josephus the satirist?” 21.

<sup>100</sup> Meier, *A Marginal Jew* 83 n. 42: “When we consider the number of words and constructions in the core of the *Testimonium* that are not found in the NT, the total agreement of the interpolations with the vocabulary of the NT is striking.”

*Testimonium Flavianum* - perhaps a gloomy rabbi casting a baleful eye over others in the room - began to think to himself: “Do you know what? This man deserves a statue.”

### **Postscript:**

Josephus a little further on in his 18<sup>th</sup> book of the *Antiquities* makes reference to John the Baptizer and his activities.<sup>101</sup> Josephus does not connect John with Jesus of Nazareth (There are good grounds for thinking that Paul of Tarsus had never even heard of John). Josephus’ treatment of John has not attracted the kind of scrutiny that the *Testimonium Flavianum* has. Its language and propositions are not regarded as controversial. According to Josephus John was unequivocally a good man; his practice of baptising his followers was a moral movement aimed at purifying them; and he was unjustly put to death by Herod Antipas (the Herod of the trial of Jesus). The difference between John and Jesus was the fact that John did not come into conflict with the leading Jews, as Jesus had done; and his followers were not making the kind of absurd and blasphemous claims about him as the followers of Jesus. In the context of the case being made here, Josephus may have known that Christians were connecting Jesus to John. He may have known in particular that the connection between the two was causing Christians considerable trouble. The subsequent Christian Gospels made strenuous attempts to subordinate John to Jesus. Josephus, however, separated them off by declining to comment on the connection, liberating John in his own right as a decent and holy man.

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<sup>101</sup> 18. 116-9.