

Ancient Jewish Court-Tales, Scriptural Adaptation, and Greco-Roman Discourses of Exemplarity: Joseph, Esther, and Agrippa I in Josephus' *Antiquitates Judaicae*

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Josephus¹ penchant for the figures of Joseph and Esther from the Jewish scriptures stands out on the basis of his own retellings of them in *Antiquitates Judaicae*.² There they are flawless paragons of virtue that exceed even their lofty original personas from the Hebrew Bible.³ They are both models of virtue

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- 1 Full discussion of the topics in this chapter can be found in Edwards, *Court of the Gentiles*, 29–56; 112–165, of which this essay is a condensed treatment.
 - 2 Josephus' account of Joseph encompasses *AJ* 2.9–200 while his account of Esther spans *AJ* 11.184–296.
 - 3 Josephus' tendencies in retelling the stories of Joseph and Esther in *AJ* have been amply documented. On Joseph in *AJ*, Franxman, *Genesis and the "Jewish Antiquities,"* 213–284; Niehoff, *Figure of Joseph*, 84–110; Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation*, 335–373; Feldman, *Judean Antiquities 1–4*, 130–186; Whitmarsh, "Josephus, Joseph, and the Greek Novel;" Bosman, "Joseph Narratives;" Tinklenberg Devega, "Man Who Fears God," 31–56; Nodet, *Antiquités Juives, Volume 1*. On Esther in *AJ*, see Feldman, *Studies*, 500–538; Kneebone, "Josephus' Esther and Diaspora Judaism," 165–182; Chalupa, "Book of Esther in Josephus;" Spilsbury and Seeman, *Judean Antiquities 11*, 51–87; Nodet, *Antiquités Juives, Volume v*. On Josephus' scriptural source text of the Joseph and Esther stories, see the limited discussion later in this chapter.

The form, contents, and language of Josephus' source text of the Jewish scriptures, broadly speaking, is highly debated and largely unresolvable, even though some features are reasonably clear. There is good reason to assume that, as a result of his priestly education in Jerusalem, Josephus was literate in Hebrew and Aramaic and possessed deep familiarity with the Jewish scriptures prior to the writing of *AJ* (Feldman, "Use, Authority, and Exegesis;" Mason, "Did Josephus Know His Bible;" but note the doubts of Satlow, "Josephus' Knowledge;" Schwartz, *Josephus and Judaeae Politics*, 22–44; Tuval, *From Jerusalem Priest*, 115–128). Although Josephus himself frames *AJ* as a translation project (*AJ* 1.5–6), there is ample evidence both that he struggled his entire life to gain competency in high-register literary Greek (*AJ* 20.263) as well as that he accessed large parts of the Jewish scriptures in existing Greek translation, modifying them to suit (e.g., the use of Greek 1 Edras rather than Hebrew Ezra/Nehemiah in Spilsbury and Seeman, *Judean Antiquities 11*, 5). Most scholars, including myself, assume that Josephus was competent in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, and that he possessed his scriptural sources and other Jewish traditions in some mixture of these languages (Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation*, 23–36; but note the singular use of Hebrew Ur-text proposed by Nodet, *Hebrew Bible*). Further precision is sometimes possible in specific

and heroes for Josephus, notable exemplars of Jews successfully navigating the highest reaches of Gentile power in the diaspora. But these powerful court-tales serve as inspiration, models, and archetypes for the composition of several non-scriptural accounts in *Antiquitates Judaicae*.⁴ In this chapter I will examine one account which is modeled in significant respects upon the figures of Joseph and Esther: Josephus' narrative of Agrippa I, which spans *Antiquitates Judaicae* 18–19.⁵ In this story of the life of Agrippa I and his various intrigues at the Roman court, Josephus casts Agrippa in the mold of Joseph and Esther in several unmistakable ways. Yet, at the same time, he subverts the parallels between Agrippa and those heroes of old as the king is portrayed as consistently falling short of their famed virtue.

My methodology in this chapter involves a three-part procedure. First, there is the search for simple parallels between the non-scriptural account and the scriptural archetype—that is, imitation and copying. Parallels are usually exhibited at the broader level of plot and characterization but sometimes extend to specific vocabulary. Then, I explore ways in which the expectations that these straightforward parallels establish for the reader are disturbed in one or more of three ways: (1) subversion involves the undermining of the reader's expectation; (2) inversion, on the other hand, entails the unexpected reversal or switching of one figure or action with the other; (3) and irony, lastly, depends on a disparity either between the reader's knowledge and the character's knowledge or between intended meaning and actual/resultant meaning. While I entertain the likelihood that Josephus composed his account of Agrippa I with these features in mind, that is not necessary for my thesis given that the most prominent ones are clearly recognizable and indisputably present irrespective of any putative authorial intent. It could also be argued that my approach expects quite a lot of Josephus' imagined reader; noticing subversion, inversion, and irony demands a relatively high level of familiarity with the Jewish scriptures in that it involves, first, a recognition of the parallel with the archetype (i.e., the stories of Joseph and Esther) and, then at a

cases but is not necessary for or relevant to this study. See fuller discussion in Edwards, *Court of the Gentiles*, 5–10.

4 Some of the scriptural allusions which I flesh out in this chapter are briefly noted by Schwartz, *Agrippa I*, 16–18.

5 Note that while Josephus' account of Agrippa I spans *AJ* 18.127–19.352, the entirety of 19.1–235 recounts the Roman conspiracy against Gaius, with Agrippa only entering the story again from 19.236. Agrippa I has most often been studied in the context of the Herodian dynasty, Roman Palestine, the Alexandrian crisis, and the reigns of the emperors Gaius and Claudius. For studies on Agrippa I in Josephus, see Krieger, "Darstellung König Agrippas I," 94–118; Kushnir-Stein, "Agrippa I in Josephus," 153–161; Schwartz, *Agrippa I*.

deeper level, the disruption of the parallel which results in a new and coherent reading of the narrative. To that point, we may justifiably postulate the recitation of literary works by Greco-Roman elites as part of the ongoing process of composition and “publication” as an opportunity for Josephus to close the gap between his readers’ background knowledge and that minimally required to recognize the elements of subversion, inversion, and irony in his narrative.⁶ However, while I undertake analysis from what might be termed a maximalist position, I do not harbor the expectation that each one of Josephus’ readers necessarily recognized every point and connection that I note herein.⁷ Finally, after demonstrating this procedure of subversive adaptation, I will show in my conclusion how this surprising feature of Josephus’ account of Agrippa I can be explained in light of Greco-Roman discourses of exemplarity. Here I appeal to Plutarch as a notable contemporary who, like Josephus, also utilized exploratory exemplarity in the narrative historiography of his *Parallel Lives* in order to exploit unexpected tensions, incongruities, and subversive elements so as to engage the reader in moral reflection and ethical judgement in response to the narrative. In what follows, the Greek text of Josephus that I cite is drawn from the Loeb edition in consultation with Niese’s critical edition, while all translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

6 Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture*, 42–56; Augoustakis, “Literary Culture;” Huitink and van Henten, “Publication of Flavius Josephus’ Works;” Edwards, *Court of the Gentiles*, 13–15.

7 Even among the relatively homogenous elite Greco-Roman audience which scholarship has reconstructed as Josephus’ immediate readership (see the dedication to Epaphroditus in *AJ* 1.8–9 and the discussion in Mason, “Should Anyone Wish to Enquire Further”), we must allow that his readers are to some degree variegated and diverse in terms of their prior background knowledge and their commitment to and interest in our author’s project. Despite the doubts of Nodet regarding a non-Jewish audience (“Josephus’ Attempt,” 103–104), the extent to which Josephus consistently explains Jewish customs and history in *AJ* as if he expects the reader to be fundamentally unfamiliar with their details confirms the essentially non-Jewish core of his anticipated readership. However, given the notoriety of Josephus in post-war Flavian Rome, it is difficult to imagine that other Jews in the capital would be unaware of our author’s profile and would not take an interest in a new work from him which purports to relate the whole of Jewish history and translate the entire Jewish scriptures. Certain explicit indicators indeed confirm that he expected Jews to read *AJ* as well, such as his petition for the leniency of the imagined Jewish reader for the decision to reorganize the scriptural ordering of Jewish laws so as to present a more comprehensible account (*AJ* 4.197). In this chapter I refer to Josephus’ immediate readership as “Greco-Roman” so as to include Romans as well as Greeks and other provincials living in Rome.

1 Agrippa I and the Figure of Joseph in *Antiquitates Judaicae*

Before analyzing specific scenes which portray Agrippa in the mold of the scriptural Joseph, it is important to highlight three editorial statements by Josephus which provide second-order reflection for the reader on the lessons learned from the life of Agrippa (*AJ* 18.127–129, 18.142, and 19.294–296). These comments show Josephus elaborating upon the significance of the figure of Agrippa and his many reversals of fortune and already interpreting him for the reader in a manner highly reminiscent of the figure of Joseph.

The first editorial comment occurs at the very beginning of Josephus' account of Agrippa I and just before he relates the genealogical data of the Herodian family (*AJ* 18.130–141). The reader is told (*AJ* 18.127–129) that narrating the life of Agrippa I can show “how neither greatness nor any other human strength is of benefit in meeting with success apart from piety towards the divine” (δίχρα τῶν πρὸς τὸ θεῖον εὐσεβειῶν), and that “it might lead in some way to the moral education of human nature (σωφρονισμῶ τοῦ ἀνθρωπείου) to learn of the ill fate of his [Herod's] offspring and also to narrate the figure of Agrippa, which is most worth marveling over—who from an altogether common station and against every expectation of those who knew him rose up to such a position of power.” While in many ways this statement could be applied to all the protagonists of all the scriptural court-tales,⁸ including Daniel and Esther, its perspective is particularly prominent in the Joseph story and in Josephus' retelling of it.⁹ Joseph is first a slave and then a prisoner. He alone of the three is especially remembered in the way that Josephus here summarizes Agrippa. I will show later in this chapter how Josephus also plays on parallels with the Esther story, but here it is in light of the Joseph narrative that his statement should be read.

The second editorial comment (*AJ* 18.142) occurs right after the Herodian genealogy mentioned above and just before the narrative proper begins (*AJ* 18.143ff.). Josephus' commentary here shows an emphasis on the changing

8 Broadly speaking, this is a programmatic agenda in *Antiquitates* as indicated by *AJ* 1.14 and explored by Attridge, *Interpretation of Biblical History*; Tuval, *From Jerusalem Priest*. See further discussion later in this chapter.

9 The figures of Esther and Daniel do attain remarkable prominence at court, but their prior positions are not at all stressed as being low and, to the contrary, are in many ways even enhanced. Esther, for instance, is given a suitably honorable pedigree from the start, especially in the Greek scriptural texts and in Josephus' retelling in *AJ* 11. Likewise, Daniel is specially groomed for court service from the outset and Josephus adds that he is already known to and admired by the king before his first court appearance. In short, then, neither of these two figures is emphatically of a low status even if they do ultimately rise much higher.

fortunes of Agrippa which ultimately terminate in success: “I now recount the rest—what fates (τύχαι) came upon Agrippa; how he made an escape from them as well as progressed to both the greatest honor (ἀξιωματός) and power.” The theme of escaping disaster only to reach an exalted status echoes the figure of Joseph, as does also Agrippa’s ἀξίωμα, which is reminiscent of Josephus’ application of the same term to Joseph in several places (*AJ* 2.97, 193).¹⁰

Similar sentiments are expressed in the third editorial comment, at *Antiquitates Judaicae* 19.294–96, much later in the narrative as Claudius confirms Agrippa upon his imperial accession. This scene fully resolves the tensions surrounding Agrippa’s fluctuations in status that drive so much of the plot. The reader is told that the gold chain that Gaius had given him upon his release from prison and elevation to kingship was retained as “a reminder of his dismal fate and a testimony of the reversal (μεταβολή) for better things” (*AJ* 19.294); “an example (δείγμα), both that greatness is able to fall as well as that God raises what has fallen” (*AJ* 19.294–295); and a reminder “that King Agrippa, on little account put into chains, was stripped of his former honor (ἀξίωμα) and, after a short time shackled, went out raised as king more splendid than before” (*AJ* 19.295–296). The particular terminology for “reversal” (μεταβολή) used for Agrippa is twice applied to scriptural Joseph in Josephus’ retelling in relation to the trials he experiences (*AJ* 2.40, 42), while the theme of falling and rising is also emphasized here several times. Further, Agrippa’s gold chain (χρυσὴν ἄλυσιν) is highly reminiscent of the gold collar (κλοιόν) given to Joseph by Pharaoh upon his release from prison (Old Greek Genesis 41:42).¹¹ In fact, I suggest that it is deliberately placed here so as to portray Agrippa here as a Joseph-like figure: both are framed by means of the shared experience of unjust imprisonment and ultimate vindication (with golden accoutrement).¹²

Beyond these brief editorial comments, the full-scale scenes in which Agrippa most clearly and explicitly echoes the figure of Joseph involve false

10 The term ἀξίωμα is absent in Old Greek Genesis, indicating that it is likely Josephus’ own addition to his retelling of the Joseph story.

11 The term κλοιόν is also used for collars worn by prisoners and therefore seems chosen specifically to represent an inversion of Joseph’s imprisoned state, just like Agrippa’s chain (ἄλυσιν). The Göttingen edition is used where I reference or cite the Greek text of Genesis. The extant Hebrew text of Genesis (Masoretic text) and the Greek translation of Genesis (Old Greek/LXX) are in principle distinct, with the latter reflecting a slightly different Hebrew *Vorlage*. However, while they do indeed vary at minor points (sometimes with significant impacts upon meaning), in practice they converge so closely that they may be treated as a single textual tradition for the purposes of this study.

12 Schwartz notes certain correspondences between the circumstances of the release from imprisonment of both Agrippa and Joseph (*Agrippa I*, 34, 55), but not the collar/chain gifted to each figure.

accusation of him and his resulting unjust imprisonment, during which time divine portents are interpreted as presaging his release and ultimate vindication.¹³ In *Antiquitates Judaicae* 18.168, Josephus reports that Agrippa once was out riding with Gaius when the former's freedman, Eutyclus, overheard him express the wish that "Tiberius might soon step aside and yield his rule to Gaius who was more worthy in every way."¹⁴ When Eutyclus was later imprisoned by Agrippa for theft, he retaliated by claiming to have information pertinent to the emperor's safety (*AJ* 18.170). Though Tiberius allowed the freedman to linger in prison for some time, at Agrippa's urging he investigated the charges more closely. Eutyclus then made the further false charge that he had heard Agrippa offer the idea that, once Gaius was installed as ruler, Tiberius' grandson (Gemellus) could easily be disposed of so as to present no obstacle (*AJ* 18.187). Upon hearing this Tiberius promptly had Agrippa imprisoned as well (*AJ* 18.188–191).

What is so striking about this sequence in relation to the story of Joseph is the grounds for imprisonment. Perhaps the most memorable aspect of Joseph's imprisonment is that it is based on a false accusation. In his own retelling of the Joseph story in *Antiquitates Judaicae*, Josephus consistently heightens the emphasis on the false accusation by creating an elaborate dialogue and scheme for Potiphar's wife, making it all the more galling when she takes recourse to falsely accusing the innocent Joseph who did nothing but resist her advances (*AJ* 2.41–59). Josephus is, then, quite keen to emphasize the falsity of the accusation and to imbue Joseph with the aura of a victim and martyr. In the same vein, the falsity of the accusation against Agrippa is a key element in the *Antiquitates Judaicae* version of the story; this stands in contrast to the parallel passage in *Bellum Judaicum*. The latter narrates no more than the report by one of Agrippa's servants to the emperor of an injudicious remark he had made, in which Tiberius' death and Gaius' accession are prayerfully expected (*BJ* 2.179–180). In this exceptionally brief parallel account in *Bellum Judaicum* there is no hint that the accusation is false. The most that the reader might infer is that the remark is incredibly ill-conceived and the resulting imprisonment an unsurprising reaction by the emperor. It is, therefore, significant that Josephus chose in *Antiquitates Judaicae* to add the extended scenario of false accusation and unjust imprisonment.

13 Several of the points of contact which follow were first noted (though not developed further) by Schwartz, *Agrippa I*, 34–35.

14 Note that in the parallel passage from the much shorter *BJ* account the setting of the conversation is not riding but dining (*BJ* 2.179).

The affinity between the false accusations against Agrippa and Joseph is not simple imitation, but rather exhibits a playfulness with the character of Agrippa. Where Joseph is entirely innocent of the charges against him and did nothing whatsoever to bring his fate upon him, the same cannot be said for Agrippa. Though he is, like Joseph, falsely accused, Josephus does not attempt to lessen the impropriety of Agrippa's actual remark. He in no way downplays it. Rather, he leaves the reader with a complicated character. Agrippa is certainly falsely accused as the reader well knows; the lie of the freedman is explicit and manifest in the *Antiquitates Judaicae* narrative. Yet, Agrippa did in fact come dangerously close to espousing precisely the sentiments which Eutychus attributed to him—so close, in fact, as to border on treason.

Unlike Joseph, then, Agrippa's misfortune seems to be at least a little bit a result of his own poor judgement. Therefore, he does not quite cast the stoic silhouette of the patiently enduring Joseph. Thus, Josephus characterizes Agrippa here—as throughout *Antiquitates Judaicae*—as a complex figure who, through his own shortcomings, lands himself in tight spots as often as he manages to squeeze out of them and regain prosperity. Agrippa's career is more complicated and ambiguous, then, than Joseph's. The basic affinity remains between Agrippa and Joseph, but it functions also to establish a foundation for the extra layer of complexity and ambiguity.

While imprisoned by Tiberius on charges of treason, Agrippa encounters a German fellow-prisoner who, upon seeing a bird land on a tree over Agrippa's head, predicts his imminent release by the workings of divine providence as well as his eventual death (*AJ* 18.195–204). This scene evidences affinities with Joseph's imprisonment in Genesis, in which the patriarch encounters two of Pharaoh's disgraced courtiers, a baker and cupbearer, whose dreams he interprets as signifying the former's death and the latter's release (*Gen* 40). The resemblance between the figures of Agrippa and Joseph here is unquestionable. First, both episodes are interpreted within the framework of divine providence, one of Josephus' favorite themes in *Antiquitates Judaicae*. In his retelling of the scriptural Joseph story, Josephus interprets for the reader that Joseph (*AJ* 2.60–61) “relied completely upon God” and was “confident that God who knew the reason for his disaster and the truth was stronger than those who bound him—which proof of the providence (προνοίας) [of God] he received straight away.” Some of the same moralizing tones are to be found in the scene of Agrippa's imprisonment. For instance, just as Josephus editorialized about Joseph's plight, the German prisoner also credits divine providence (τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν προνοίαν) with designing Agrippa's imminent release (*AJ* 18.197).

Second, the exchange between Agrippa and the German also stands out in relation to the Joseph story for the way that both narratives feature one

imprisoned and disgraced courtier interpreting divine signs to another concerning their release, return to court, and death. The German goes on to prophesy to Agrippa (*AJ* 18.200) that, after he is released, he will “advance to both the greatest honor and power” but must also remember that “when you see this bird another time your death will take place five days later.” This alludes to the two prophecies in *Antiquitates Judaicae* 2.64–73 / *Gen* 40:9–19 issued by Joseph to Pharaoh’s cupbearer (for restoration) and baker (for death). The sight of a bird above Agrippa’s head is the sign of his impending release and his eventual death, much as in the baker’s dream, where the bird is also the sign of his imminent death (*AJ* 2.71–73 / *Gen* 40:16–19).¹⁵ Then, when the German completes his prophecy to Agrippa, he begs the latter to remember him after his release (*AJ* 18.201–202), much like Joseph’s plea to the cupbearer to put in a good word for him to Pharaoh after he is released (*Gen* 40:14 / *AJ* 2.68).

While the whole scene is highly evocative of the Joseph story,¹⁶ the two protagonists are not connected by way of simple imitation or direct parallel but are, rather, inverted or reversed. In the case of the scriptural story, it is Joseph who skillfully divines the meaning of his fellow prisoners’ dreams; it is Joseph who interacts with two fallen courtiers and prophesies their opposing fates, one for good and the other for ill.¹⁷ In the account of Agrippa, however, it is not the protagonist who possesses skill in reading divine signs but a nameless non-Jewish prisoner. As a result, it is not Agrippa who plays the role of Joseph but, rather, the nameless German prisoner. Agrippa, meanwhile, takes on the function of both baker and cupbearer in that his release and his death are predicted by a fellow prisoner. There is a sort of irony here at which a reader with knowledge of the Joseph story could only smile: Agrippa is like a

15 Schwartz, *Agrippa* 1, 34.

16 There are also several other minor points of convergence and contrast between Joseph and Agrippa (Schwartz, *Agrippa* 1, 34). For instance, upon release both Joseph and Agrippa are treated to haircuts and a change of clothes (*AJ* 18.237 / *Gen* 41:14). On the other hand, although Agrippa is treated well during his imprisonment like Joseph, unlike the latter this is not attributed to virtue or God’s providential care. Instead, Agrippa receives preferential treatment due to the intervention of benefactors in the halls of power: Antonia the Younger, sister-in-law of Tiberius and mother of Claudius, arranges for his care (*AJ* 18.202–204 / *Gen* 39:20–23). As Matthews points out, Antonia functions as something of an inverse of Potiphar’s wife (*First Converts*, 31–32).

17 Joseph’s divinatory and oracular skill is even more forcefully emphasized in Josephus’ retelling (*AJ* 2.63, 65). It is likely that, for Josephus’ elite Roman audience, skills of an oracular/divinatory type were a priori closely linked to other fields of knowledge. Jovanović, for instance, shows that in Josephus’ retelling and in other ancient Joseph traditions, Joseph’s skills in divination sit comfortably alongside his φρόνησις and other prominent qualities as the stock in trade of the Hellenistic scientist (*Joseph of Genesis as Hellenistic Scientist*, 76–118).

less-commendable version of Joseph. Like Joseph, God providentially cares for Agrippa in designing his release, just as the German predicted, but it remains a mystery why this should be deserved in a figure so unlike his archetype.

2 Agrippa I and Esther in *Antiquitates Judaicae*

After Agrippa's post-imprisonment fate is secured through the banishment of Herod Antipas (also known as "the Tetrarch"), who contested his younger kinsman's elevated status under the new emperor Gaius Caligula (*AJ* 18.240–255), Josephus turns once again to Gaius and to his reign. Josephus' sole interest in Gaius is the emperor's attempt to erect his own statue in the Jewish temple in the wake of the violent unrest in Alexandria.¹⁸ While several broader aspects of the narrative allude to the Esther story, the key scene of Agrippa petitioning on behalf of the Jewish people at a banquet unmistakably echoes Queen Esther.¹⁹

Unlike the parallel passage in *Bellum Judaicum* 2.184, the framing of Gaius in *Antiquitates Judaicae* 18.256 mirrors the Persian king in the Esther story.²⁰ In *Bellum Judaicum* 2.184, no indication is given that Gaius administered the empire respectably for any length of time before his wickedness became manifest; he is entirely evil, right from the start. The Gaius of *Antiquitates Judaicae*, who rules well for the first year and at least a portion of the second, is a bit

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- 18 The unrest between the city's Greek and Jewish inhabitants led each side to send rival embassies to Rome to argue their case before Gaius personally. For brief but thorough surveys of the Alexandrian crisis, see Smallwood, *Jews under Roman Rule*, 235–255; Modrzejewski, *Jews of Egypt*, 161–183; Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 48–78. For a full-length study, see Gambetti, *Alexandrian Riots*. Josephus' extensive account of the conspiracy against and assassination of Gaius, which occupies the bulk of *AJ* 19, is a product of his preoccupation with Gaius' attempt to erect his image in the Jerusalem temple: the emperor's ignominious death is exactly the sort of fate which befalls those who behave so impiously.
- 19 My references to the scriptural Esther story are drawn from the Hebrew version (Masoretic text). There are, additionally, two distinct Greek translations of Esther (Alpha text and Old Greek/LXX) that differ from each other and from the Hebrew text in a multitude of ways large and small, but they are not relevant for the purposes of this study. For a discussion of the ancient versions of Esther and of their relationship to Josephus' retelling of the Esther story in *AJ* 11, see Edwards, *Court of the Gentiles*, 136.
- 20 The question of whether *BJ* was used generally as a basis for *AJ* or whether some common source was used for both has been much debated (see especially Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, 58–65). More recently, Krieger has shown conclusively and at length that, at least for *AJ* 18–20, Josephus rewrote his *BJ* account and added much new material (*Geschichtsschreibung*; English summary in Krieger, "Synoptic Approach to B 2:117–283 and A 18–20," 90–100).

different, and a bit more like the king in Esther. The Gaius of *Bellum Judaicum* bears no such resemblance to the Persian king of Esther.²¹ Likewise, the language used to describe Gaius' divine aspirations in *Bellum Judaicum* attributes initiative to the emperor himself, as opposed to *Antiquitates Judaicae*, where it is allowed that Gaius—though by no means absolved of responsibility—was in some measure moved by outside forces to take his regrettable course; non-Jewish peoples who initiated divine honors for him spurred on his own divine aspirations.²² This sounds a lot like the Persian king of Esther, who is goaded by a subordinate into taking anti-Jewish action (Esth 3:7–14 / *AJ* 11.209–220).

In *Antiquitates Judaicae*, the anti-Jewish subordinate is the Alexandrian figure Apion, who appears before Gaius to plead the cause of the city's Greek embassy in opposition to the Jewish one (*AJ* 18.257–260). Apion plays a role quite similar to that of Haman in the story of Esther. Apion is, in *Antiquitates Judaicae*, a central antagonist second only to Gaius himself. He is, however, absent from the parallel account in *Bellum Judaicum* 2.181ff along with, in fact, the entirety of the Alexandrian crisis.²³ On the other hand, in *Antiquitates Judaicae* the Jews come to Gaius' attention only after the slanderous denunciations of Apion, so that the anti-Jewish Alexandrian and the embassy he leads are directly responsible for instigating the anti-Jewish imperial action.

Although Philo's *Legatio* is believed to be the ultimate source for this section of *Antiquitates Judaicae*,²⁴ unlike Josephus, Philo never refers to Apion in his extant corpus, much less claims that he led the Alexandrian embassy. Instead, Philo introduces Isidorus as the leader of the Alexandrian embassy, but only near the end of the text.²⁵ Furthermore, Philo never claims that the

21 While the Persian king's portrayal is somewhat mixed in the scriptural version of the Esther story, Josephus in his own retelling perfunctorily rectifies this and distances the king from the anti-Jewish activities of his wicked servant Haman. See Feldman, *Studies*, 500–508; Kneebone, "Josephus' Esther and diaspora Judaism," 174–177; Edwards, *Court of the Gentiles*, 139–141.

22 Condemnations of Gaius' divine aspirations were commonplace and practically a trope among the emperors' biographers; on historical grounds they may be understood in light of Gaius' love of eastern culture and his affinity for Hellenistic models of kingship (Adams, *Roman Emperor Gaius*).

23 Josephus may have wished to avoid bringing to mind an instance of violent Jewish civic unrest so soon after the end of the Jewish War.

24 Schwartz, *Agrippa 1*, 18–23. He argues that Josephus also drew on Philo for his account in *BJ*, though much less extensively. On Josephus' use of Philo in his account of Agrippa I in *AJ*, see Schwartz, *Agrippa 1*, 11–33. On Josephus' use of Philo more broadly, see Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation*, 52–54; Sterling, "Man of the Highest Repute," 101–113.

25 *Legat.* 355. Elsewhere in *Legatio* the members/leaders of the Alexandrian delegation to Gaius are not named. The substitution by Josephus of Apion for Isidorus as head of

Alexandrian embassy caused Gaius to attempt to erect his image in the temple. Finally, for most of *Legatio*, blame for Gaius' alignment against the Jews and their embassy is cast upon Helicon, who is an Egyptian courtier in the imperial house, but not part of the Alexandrian embassy itself.²⁶ Similarly, the design to erect Gaius' image in the Jewish temple is attributed by Philo not to the Alexandrian embassy, as in Josephus, but to the machinations of other anti-Jewish interests.²⁷

The substitution of Apion for Isidorus is not due to a simple mistake or the use of some other source (from Apion himself or a third party).²⁸ The lone references to Apion in *Antiquitates Judaicae* 18.257 and 259 may indicate a first encounter between Josephus and his future rhetorical opponent in *Contra Apionem*.²⁹ That Apion is nowhere else mentioned in *Antiquitates Judaicae* where anti-Jewish charges are brought up—points where Josephus often deviates from the narrative at hand and engages in polemic with various

the embassy is also noted by Smallwood, "Philo and Josephus as Historians of the Same Events," 118–119; Smallwood, *Philonis Alexandrini*, 248–249, 319.

It frequently goes unnoticed or unmentioned that Josephus replaces Isidorus with Apion. Niehoff, for instance, although writing on Philo and his oeuvre, refers to Apion as the head of the Alexandrian embassy (Niehoff, *Philo*, 14 and throughout). The preference for Josephus' account over Philo's firsthand testimony on this point is never acknowledged or explained. On a general preference between the two accounts for Philo over Josephus, see Smallwood, *Philonis Alexandrini*, 32. For a rejection of this preference, see Schwartz, "On Drama and Authenticity in Philo and Josephus," 113–129. For a demurral to prefer one over the other, see McLaren, *Power and Politics*, 123.

26 *Legat.* 166–168; 178.

27 *Legat.* 198–206. Philo mentions Capito (a tax official), Helicon (a freedman, presumably Alexandrian, functioning as a courtier in the imperial house), and Apelles (an actor who was a personal friend and advisor of Gaius). On these figures, see Smallwood, *Philonis Alexandrini*, 246–247, 261, 264–265.

28 Harker notes the discrepancies between Josephus' and Philo's accounts and, therefore, assumes that Josephus cannot have used Philo—hypothesizing the use of a non-extant account composed by Apion himself (*Loyalty and Dissidence*, 34). Kerskeslager also suggests that Josephus used an account from Apion himself as his source ("Absence of Dionysios, Lampo, and Isidoros," 89). However, there is no need to assume that the differences preclude Josephus' use of Philo when the literary qualities of his account are considered, as I discuss below.

29 The *Contra Apionem* is Josephus' last work, written as a rejoinder to the objections that *AJ* apparently received in some quarters to the effect that his claims about the Jewish national past were controverted by the Greek historians (*CA* 1.1–3). Its date of composition is unknown other than sometime in the mid- or late-90's or possibly the very early second century CE. In addition to addressing Apion posthumously in *CA*, Josephus also quotes extensively from other Greek writers such as Manetho, Chaeremon, and Lysimachus in order to refute disparaging views of Jewish history, personages, and customs. For an introduction to *CA*, see Barclay, "Against Apion."

enemies of the Jews—indicates that he may not have previously been aware of or concerned with Apion. Josephus' willingness to substitute Apion for Isidorus may reflect, then, a nascent awareness that Apion constituted the greater threat in the long run and may also indicate an incipient interest in that figure—an interest which would soon grow to a degree such as to require writing an entire volume. As Smallwood notes, Apion was to Josephus “the typical anti-Semite.”³⁰ Yet, in light of the affinities he was creating between his account of Agrippa I and the Esther story, Josephus may also have substituted Apion as a result of the literary sensibility that this figure modelled the Jewish arch-enemy Haman much more closely than the relatively unknown figure of Isidorus.³¹ By the later first century CE the very name “Apion” raises to Josephus the same virulently and dangerously anti-Jewish associations as does the legendary “Haman.”

Additionally, Josephus establishes a definite causal connection between the Alexandrian embassy's charges in the scene before Gaius and the attempt to erect the emperor's image in the Jerusalem temple. As noted above, Philo does not make this connection, instead supplying other reasons for Gaius' action. It is likely that, as Schwartz suggests, Josephus' reason for omitting Philo's reference to the letter of Capito and the incident between the Jews and Greeks at Yavneh (*Legat.* 201–203), which provoke Gaius' plot in the Alexandrian's account of the crisis, is because it would seem to Josephus to justify the emperor's anti-Jewish action as a retaliatory response for the destruction of the altar erected to him—justification which Josephus is not at all prepared to allow.³² Josephus' alterations to Philo should be interpreted as a single and deliberate act to capitalize on a literary potentiality, with the result being the portrayal of the Alexandrian embassy—and Apion in particular—as directly instigating the emperor to take action against the Jewish people. By making Apion

30 Smallwood, *Philonis Alexandrini*, 319.

31 In contrast to Apion's comparative renown, Isidorus is poorly known and little knowledge of his background has been preserved. He appears in the fragmentary *Acta Alexandrinorum*, which can be consulted in Musurillo, *Acts of the Pagan Martyrs*. A recent analysis of this corpus, including the figure of Isidorus, can be found in Harker, *Loyalty and Dissidence*. A brief overview of the historical Apion, his career, and his posthumous reputation can be found in Barclay, *Against Apion*, 170n7.

Allen Kerkeslager argues on the basis of Philo and other evidence that Isidorus (along with Dionysius and Lampo) was neither particularly anti-Jewish nor an official ambassador for the Greek embassy, but rather a patriotic Alexandrian who functioned unofficially as a legal advocate and counselor for the embassy (“Absence of Dionysios, Lampo, and Isidoros”). If this is true, and if Josephus also knew this, then it further explains his substitution of Apion for Isidorus.

32 Schwartz, *Agrippa I*, 80–83.

the proximate cause of Gaius' anti-Jewish threat, Josephus was thereby able to echo the story of Esther in which the figure of Haman incites the king against the Jewish people.

After introducing the reign of Gaius, the charges of Apion, and the origin of the crisis against the Jews, Josephus then turns the narrative to focus on the repercussions of the crisis in Judea and Syria surrounding the figure of Petronius. Towards the end of this section Josephus returns to Agrippa and to his response to Gaius' anti-Jewish plot (*AJ* 18.289–297). Here, he narrates a dramatic banquet scene in which Agrippa speaks boldly with Gaius to preserve the Jewish people from harm (*AJ* 18. 289–296).³³ Resemblances with the famous banquet scene, at which Esther petitioned to revoke the murderous anti-Jewish decree of Haman, are conspicuous. They also help form a bedrock for more complex facets of Agrippa's characterization in light of scriptural archetypes.³⁴

The scene itself is the most prominent point of contact between these two stories: a banquet at which a momentous petition is made. However, other significant parallels between the two scenes are also present. Both protagonists, for instance, make their requests to revoke anti-Jewish imperial action in the midst of eating and drinking, when the monarch is relaxed and in a good mood. In Josephus' retelling of the Esther story, the reader is told that Esther's supplication takes place "in the midst of drinking" and "while the king [Ahasuerus] together with Haman was being entertained."³⁵ In the Agrippa story, similarly, the king's petition takes place as Gaius was "driven by wine and had his mind turned more cheery."³⁶ Additionally, when both figures finally issue their petitions it is only after first declining to disclose their request. In Josephus' version of the Esther story, the queen "delayed until the next day to voice her wish to him [King Ahasuerus]."³⁷ In the Agrippa story, the king demurs "although he was entirely ready to supply his request, he did not reveal his intention."³⁸ Finally, in both cases, the ruler expects for the petition to include a request for territory. In Josephus' retelling of the Esther story, the king reassures her that

33 Although Schwartz (*Agrippa 1*, 18–23) convincingly argues that the banquet scene is drawn from a hypothesized biography of Agrippa, which he names *Vita Agrippa*, it is also possible that Josephus invented it. Regardless, I treat the text in its final form as a Josephan composition irrespective of its origin in a putative source.

34 Several of the points of contact which follow were first noted (though not developed further) by Schwartz, *Agrippa 1*, 34–35.

35 *AJ* 11.242, 262.

36 *AJ* 18.291.

37 *AJ* 11.243.

38 *AJ* 18.294.

she “would not fail to obtain anything, not even should she wish to receive a share of his kingdom.”³⁹ Likewise, Gaius extends his offer to Agrippa “thinking that he would request either a large acquisition of neighboring territory or even the revenue of cities.”⁴⁰ No reader familiar with the Esther story could fail to note the remarkable role in which Agrippa is here cast.

As much as Agrippa resembles noble Esther in this banquet scene and is no doubt admirable for it, he also fails to reach that illustrious character’s heights of bravery and virtue. Esther goes to exceptional lengths to devise the plan of the banquet, to go to the king in private and make the invitation at great personal risk, and then, finally, to put forward the request itself after the second banquet. Agrippa, on the other hand, has motives that are far less benevolent and far more self-serving. As Josephus reports (*AJ* 18.289): “And at that time he [Agrippa] set up a banquet for him [Gaius] and had the intention to surpass all, both with respect to bearing the financial expenditure for those in attendance at the banquet as well as the provision for pleasure.”

Given that Josephus has already consistently portrayed Agrippa in *Antiquitates Judaicae* as over-spending recklessly to the point of bankruptcy in an effort to cultivate social contacts in the upper reaches of Roman society (*AJ* 18.143–46, 161–67), the motives assigned to him for the banquet are entirely appropriate within the larger narrative.⁴¹ Thus, there is not the slightest hint that Agrippa had planned to act out of his exalted position at court to avert the anti-Jewish plot. Although in the cases of both Esther and Agrippa the ruler prompts the protagonist to make a petition, Esther is characterized as elaborately planning the banquet precisely so as to elicit this scenario, while Agrippa

39 *AJ* 11.243.

40 *AJ* 18.293.

41 Agrippa’s reputation for overspending to the point of destitution may have persisted in some circles. In the *Acta Alexandrinorum*, at a point when Isidorus makes accusations to Claudius against Agrippa, he refers to him as a “three-penny (τρίωβολεῖος) Jew.” While the expression is obviously intended to be pejorative, its exact meaning is not known. But one likely meaning is to insultingly imply that the referent is poor. Hence, this could be taken as evidence that Agrippa’s financial predicaments were more widely known, at least in the Alexandrian circles where the *Acta* circulated. See the discussion in Modrzejewski, *Jews of Egypt*, 176–177. Alternatively, Kokkinos translates the term as “cheap Jew,” taking it as deriding Agrippa’s Jewishness as no more than a superficial veneer atop his Idumean ancestry and his upbringing in Rome (Kokkinos, *Herodian Dynasty*, 291).

But whether or not Josephus’ elite Greco-Roman readers would have previously associated Agrippa with prodigal spending, perpetual indebtedness, and lavish banqueting is more difficult to tell. Dio Cassius (59.8.2; 59.24.1; 60.8.2–3) associates the Jewish king closely with the hated Gaius, whose legacy suffered *damnatio memoriae*, but says nothing of finances or banquets. The only notice of substance (59.24.1) is, however, strongly negative, referring to Agrippa as one of Gaius’ “teachers of tyrants” (τυραννοδιδασκάλους).

is presented somewhat ironically—though nonetheless admirably—as merely taking advantage of an opportunity which he stumbled upon while trying to ingratiate himself to Roman aristocrats.⁴²

In a similar fashion Agrippa departs from his archetype in the ultimate failure of the petition. Esther is fully successful in convincing the king to revoke the murderous decree of Haman. Josephus at first leads his readers to expect the same outcome from Agrippa's petition as well. Gaius assents to Agrippa's request to relent and writes to Petronius to put the project on hold (*AJ* 18.298–301). However, no sooner is the reader assured that Agrippa is every bit as successful as Esther than this providential ending is derailed: Gaius receives a dilatory letter from Petronius in Syria and, thereupon, quickly decides in anger to continue on his original course. In Josephus' narrative, Agrippa's well-intentioned but unplanned petition is not what brings an end to Gaius' madness, but only the stalling tactics of a lone Roman legate and a senatorial conspiracy issuing in the emperor's assassination.

3 Summary of Analysis

Agrippa I is depicted in Josephus' *Antiquitates Judaicae* account as imitative of two of the most significant figures from the Jewish national past, Joseph and Esther. However, expectations for Agrippa are then subverted when the king fails to fully reach these figures' benchmarks. This element of subversion allows Josephus to bear out his interpretation of Agrippa I as a figure with a mixed legacy, a ruler who accomplished a great deal and far exceeded the rest of his grandfather Herod's immediate heirs, yet who also led a life punctuated by shocking nadirs and marked by self-interest. As Tuval has also pointed out, "Agrippa is often portrayed as a spendthrift and something of a rogue."⁴³ This interpretation of Agrippa is encapsulated in Josephus' account of his death in *Antiquitates Judaicae* 19.343–352, which brings together the themes which I have explored in this chapter and aptly closes the biography of a figure which spans nearly two whole books of *Antiquitates Judaicae*.

42 It may also be the case, as Kerkeslager ("Agrippa I and the Judeans of Alexandria," 49) argues concerning the king's actions in relation to the Alexandrian riots, that not merely the literary figure depicted in Josephus' *AJ* but also the historical Agrippa I "was motivated primarily by personal interests typical of other Roman elites." On locating Agrippa principally within a Roman rather than Jewish context, see Kokkinos, *Herodian Dynasty*, 291.

43 Tuval, *From Jerusalem Priest*, 238.

Just as the German prisoner predicted to Agrippa during his Joseph-like imprisonment following a false accusation, the same sign of a bird overhead that signaled the king's release would years later signal his impending death. This occurred when Agrippa was in Caesarea celebrating festivities in honor of the emperor and most unwisely accepted blasphemous flattery from the adoring crowds (*AJ* 19.345–346).⁴⁴ At the end of his life and at the peak of his rule, Agrippa once again brings ruin upon himself, this time by committing a grave impiety on account of vanity and ambition. The character of Agrippa conforms to a definite pattern. Much earlier in his life and at a point of great success in Rome, it was an injudicious remark which was the basis for a false accusation that landed him in prison. Although he was freed that time through the working of divine providence, he later failed to recall to whom he owed his success and Josephus makes clear that divine judgement is responsible for his death as well (*AJ* 19.347–348).

However, while the account of Agrippa's death represents some of Josephus' harshest and most explicit critique of the king, his evaluation of Agrippa I is both more nuanced and multi-faceted on the whole. Before narrating Agrippa's death, Josephus provides a summation of his life and reign which is altogether more positive (*AJ* 19.328–331).⁴⁵ Considering the juxtaposition of this positive appraisal with the unflattering account of Agrippa's death, we find that Josephus presents a highly nuanced portrait of Agrippa I. He pointedly focuses on Agrippa's vicissitudes over the years as well as the role of divine providence and the king's own choices in bringing about those successes and failures. We witnessed this across several important scenes from Agrippa's life in *Antiquitates Judaicae*, where the king is a hero in the mold of the Jewish icons Joseph and Esther, yet at the same time crucially falls short of their examples. One may justifiably ask what the purpose of this agenda could be—why should Josephus present Agrippa in such a way? While the entertainment value of rounded and complex characterization helps to explain Agrippa's portrayal in *Antiquitates Judaicae*,⁴⁶ I would like to suggest turning to Josephus' Greco-Roman context, specifically to discourses of exemplarity.

44 On Agrippa's death, see Kokkinos, *Herodian Dynasty*, 302–304. The story of his death is paralleled in Acts 12:19b–23.

45 Krieger notes that although there are grounds for assigning *AJ* 19.328–331 to a source (as in Schwartz, *Agrippa I*, 16), it represents Josephus' own view of Agrippa and is consonant with other material in his account of Agrippa in *AJ* (Krieger, "Darstellung König Agrippas I," 99).

46 Noted by Tuval, *From Jerusalem Priest*, 238n471. On Hellenistic Jewish literature more broadly as representing cultural confidence and the manipulation of literary traditions for the purposes of entertainment, see Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*; Gruen, *Diaspora*.

4 Greco-Roman Discourses of Exemplarity and Josephus⁴⁷

In its narrowest sense, exemplarity is a phenomenon circumscribed by the term *exemplum* (Greek synonyms: ὑπόδειγμα or παράδειγμα), which appears in the Greco-Roman intellectual tradition especially from the first century BCE onwards in a variety of social contexts and literary genres. This term appears in reference to stories of past figures, deeds, and events that are deployed for the reader's present utility, usually for instruction of a moral sort, but also pragmatic/practical (e.g., leadership or martial qualities).⁴⁸ The social and literary contexts in which *exempla* appear are varied but may be heuristically put under three broad headings:⁴⁹ rhetoric and public speech;⁵⁰ ethics and morality;⁵¹ and historiography and biography.⁵² Naturally, scholarly attention

47 For expanded discussion, see Edwards, *Court of the Gentiles*, 29–56.

48 Introductions to the topic of exemplarity, with a focus on the Roman period and Latin literature, can be found in Roller, *Models from the Past*; Langlands, *Exemplary Ethics*; contributions in Bell and Hansen, eds., *Role Models*. For exemplarity in Greek literature during the Roman imperial era, which is a more direct comparison to Josephus, see the discussion on Plutarch below as well as, more generally, Alewell, "Über das rhetorische Paradeigma;" Gowing, "Roman *exempla* tradition in imperial Greek historiography," 232–247.

49 This rubric is drawn from Roller, *Models from the Past*, 10–23. Roller refers to these three domains as "cultural contexts" where I prefer to describe them as "social contexts and literary genres." Furthermore, Roller does not explicitly refer to biography and would presumably subsume it under the historiographical context. One might also add to this trifold list of contexts a fourth setting constituted of rules and laws. See Langlands, "Rules and the Unruly," 103–123.

50 E.g., the speeches of Cicero, which were frequently public acts of rhetoric and oratory delivered before a live audience on specific occasions in first century BCE Rome before they were given textual form. In that context, *exempla* served as examples or proofs designed to persuade the audience to adopt the speaker's perspective or to take a particular course of action. See van der Blom, *Cicero's Role Models*; van der Blom, "Historical exempla," 49–67; Bücher, *Verargumentierte Geschichte*.

51 E.g., the *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia* (*Memorable Deeds and Sayings*), a first century CE Latin compilation of *exempla* by Valerius Maximus. Such collections of individual "case studies" illustrate the tendency of Roman ethical reasoning to eschew moral abstractions in favor of casuistic particularity. Despite this, *exempla* often conglomerate as groups that typify one sort of moral action or value in a way that is, effectively speaking, not entirely dissimilar to the abstract and theoretical moral reasoning of earlier classical and Hellenistic thinkers, such as the virtue ethics of Aristotle. On Valerius, see Skidmore, *Practical Ethics*. For a similar case of the use of *exempla* in ethical reasoning, see Seneca's *Ep.* 24. On the useful distinction between exemplary ethics and abstract moral reasoning, see Langlands, *Exemplary Ethics*, 124–126; 337–338, Roller, *Models from the Past*, 13–16.

52 Countless specific instances of *exempla* recur in late republican and early imperial historians and biographers such as Livy, Tacitus, and Suetonius as one component of their

has generally focused on instances in which the key Greek and Latin terms of exemplarity explicitly appear (i.e., *exemplum*).⁵³ Matthew Roller has added further precision by arguing for a formal model of exemplarity constituted by a consistent set of specific ordered features.⁵⁴ However, useful though the terminology and the model may be in identifying *loci classici*, exemplarity as a moralistic mode of discourse which draws upon the past is much richer than the fairly limited number of passages and authors circumscribed by these formal delimiters.⁵⁵ This is especially true of exemplary discourse in historiography and biography. Thus, although a sharp line cannot and should not be drawn between “historicist” and “exemplary” approaches to writing historiography,⁵⁶ it is certainly the case that pre-modern writers tended strongly towards the latter and so evidence a strong didactic and moralistic bent, Josephus included.⁵⁷ Cicero famously captured the impulse of his day to instruct through the example of the past in the oft-quoted aphorism *historia ... magistra vitae* (“history ... is life’s teacher”).⁵⁸ This raises the question of how to characterize and interpret stories which appear to have an exemplary function even when the terminology is not necessarily employed, a model such as Roller’s cannot be easily applied, and/or the moral lesson is not explicitly set out—even more, remains ambiguous and murky.

In place of “exemplarity,” then, many scholars have employed broader categories such as “moralism,” “moral didacticism,” “ethical discourse,” etc. for ancient historiography’s frequent use of past figures and events for the purposes of ethical instruction and moral reflection. However, “moralism” (and related terms) is, for me, a higher-order umbrella category that includes abstract and/or non-exemplary modes of moral instruction (e.g., moral

broader didactic agendas. See Chaplin, *Livy’s Exemplary History*; Alston, “History and Memory,” 147–159.

53 See especially Roller, *Models from the Past*; Langlands, *Exemplary Ethics*.

54 Roller, *Models from the Past*, 4–8. A similar definition is offered by Sinclair Bell (“Role Models in the Roman World,” 6).

55 For instance, although Langlands’ studies are almost exclusively limited to material that uses the term *exemplum*, she theorizes a broader system of “exemplary ethics” and acknowledges that “not every morally edifying tale from ancient Rome is an exemplum, not every memorable historical episode is rendered into exemplary form” (*Exemplary Ethics*, 4). See also Langlands, “Roman Exemplarity.”

56 On the distinction between these two approaches and the shift from (principally) the “exemplary” to (principally) the “historicist” during the Enlightenment, see Nadel, “Philosophy of History before Historicism,” 291–315; Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 26–42; and many of the contributions in Lianeri, ed., *Western Time of Ancient History*.

57 See Hau, *Moral History*.

58 Cic., *Orat.* 2.36.

abstraction, legal and rule-based reasoning, philosophy, allegory, logical arguments). Therefore, I continue to use the term “exemplarity” in the absence of both the explicit terminology of exemplarity and Roller’s model of exemplarity so as to highlight the fact that the mode of engagement with the reader is through the *example* set implicitly or explicitly by the narrative’s characters and events, and not through the many other non-exemplary forms which moral instruction can take. I take exemplarity to be a subset of moralism and a particular type of moral reasoning and instruction, then, and I use the term accordingly where others often refer to “moralism.” Correspondingly, I use the phrases “Greco-Roman discourses of exemplarity” and “exemplary discourse” to refer to those modes of moral formation especially characteristic of narrative historiography and biography in which past events, figures, and deeds are utilized as examples from which the reader can learn, regardless of whether or not the lesson is explicitly stated, Roller’s formal model may be applied, or the terminology of *exemplum*, παράδειγμα, or ὑπόδειγμα is present.⁵⁹

A further distinction is useful for explaining Josephus’ practices of subversively adapting scriptural figures as documented in this chapter. A number of scholars on Plutarch’s biographical works have distinguished between two different modes of ethical discourse which both use past figures and their deeds as examples of behavior to be imitated or avoided.⁶⁰ (As I defended above, where they tend to use the term “moralism” I prefer the term “exemplarity.”) First, there is the use of past figures and events in a fashion best described as didactic, prescriptive, expository, or protreptic. In this type, the author explicitly holds out the actors in the narrative as positive or negative examples of moral behavior which the reader ought to imitate or avoid. The explicit terminology of exemplarity may occur in select cases, and Roller’s model may be appropriate on some occasions, but not necessarily every time. There are, for instance, many places in *Antiquitates Judaicae* in which Josephus presents prescriptive examples in his narratives, explicitly evaluating the stories he tells and the behaviors of the figures in them for the reader’s moral education. Josephus was likely inspired in part by his immediate model for *Antiquitates Judaicae*, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, with which he shares a number of broad

59 Thus, I use the phrase “Greco-Roman discourses of exemplarity” in a way roughly synonymous with “role models in the Roman world” as proposed by Sinclair Bell, “Role Models,” 1–39. However, I eschew the term “role model” as it is generally limited to contexts of positive emulation whereas exemplarity is not.

60 For the fundamental (if artificial and blurry) distinction into two types and the various terminologies employed, see Pelling, *Plutarch and History*, 237–251; Duff, *Plutarch’s Lives*, 68–71; Duff, “Plutarch’s Readers,” 3–18; Duff, “Plutarch’s *Lives* and the Critical Reader,” 59–82; Stadter, “Rhetoric of Virtue,” 493–510; Chrysanthou, *Plutarch’s Parallel Lives*.

features.⁶¹ Josephus states openly in a programmatic statement in the preface to *Antiquitates Judaicae* that he aims to presents Jewish customs, written accounts, and history as divinely ordered and as every bit as worthy as—or more than—the Greeks and the Romans:

On the whole, what anyone who wishes to review history might especially learn is that those who follow the will of God and do not dare to transgress that which has been soundly legislated prosper in all things beyond belief and are offered happiness from God as their prize. Contrastingly, to whoever should depart from a precise concern over these things, the passable becomes impassable, and any good thing they should eagerly do turns into irreparable misfortune. Consequently, here and now I exhort the readers of these books to turn their mind to God and test whether our legislator [Moses] comprehended his [God's] nature in a worthy manner and always attributed to him deeds befitting his power by guarding the account concerning him as undefiled by every indecency which is found in other mythologies.⁶²

Josephus proceeds to prove this to the reader by reviewing the Jews' past figures and events and divine responses to them, even using at times the explicit terminology of exemplarity in the same fundamental manner as other Greco-Roman historians (e.g., *AJ* 1.19; 7.142; 8.196; 13.198).⁶³

Much more frequently, however, Josephus explicitly uses a figure, deed, or story in *Antiquitates Judaicae* to teach a moral or pragmatic lesson without employing the terminology of exemplarity, a phenomenon usually studied in the past under the broad rubric of Josephus' "moralizing tendency"⁶⁴ or in the context of his pattern of consistently elevating scriptural figures as virtuous models,⁶⁵ but more recently treated from the perspective of exemplarity as delineated by Roller's model.⁶⁶ One example of this protreptic or expository exemplarity is found in a passage that I have already treated above. At

61 Cowan, "Tale of Two *Antiquities*."

62 *AJ* 1.14–15. Hence Sterling's designation of *AJ* as a work of apologetic historiography (*Historiography and Self-Definition*).

63 When explicit terminology of exemplarity is used, the term παράδειγμα is almost exclusively found in *AJ* whereas the term ὑπόδειγμα is exclusively found in *BJ*.

64 Attridge, *Interpretation of Biblical History*.

65 The "portraits" of scriptural figures in *AJ* collected in Feldman, *Studies*; Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation*.

66 Several scholars have appropriated Roller's model in order to detect exemplarity in Josephus even where the explicit terminology is absent. See Reed, "Construction and Subversion of Patriarchal Perfection," 185–212; Petitfils, *Mos Christianorum*, 87–140.

the outset of his account of Agrippa I in *Antiquitates Judaicae* (AJ 18.127–129), Josephus supplies to the reader a justification for the fact that he will detail the king's life at great length on the basis that it will show "how neither greatness nor any other human strength is of benefit in meeting with success apart from piety towards the divine" and because "it might lead in some way to the moral education of human nature." Clearly, therefore, a concept of expository exemplarity is both useful and appropriate for application to *Antiquitates Judaicae* regardless of the key terms or models that scholars have used to narrowly delimit exemplarity, primarily in the Latin literary tradition.

But it is the non-expository type of exemplary discourse which I find crucial for understanding why Josephus tells the story of Agrippa I through a rich but subversive dialogue with the scriptural figures of Esther and Joseph. This second type of exemplary discourse, which is altogether more subtle, multifaceted, and nuanced, can be termed "descriptive," "exploratory" (my preferred term), or "experimental."⁶⁷ As I noted above, this type of exemplary discourse is usually treated from the broader perspective of moralism and has been developed primarily in research on Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*. This point of origin is a result of the fact that, as Timothy Duff has noted, "most Lives provide very little explicit guidance as to how to understand the moral position of their subjects or of the actions narrated. Plutarch rarely intervenes into the narrative to point out where right and wrong lie."⁶⁸ This is a feature which I find highly suggestive and significant for interpreting Josephus' accounts in this study, because although some aspects of Agrippa's behavior come in for explicit judgement by Josephus, by contrast, the decidedly ambiguous shading of Agrippa in comparison to the outstanding virtue of Esther and Joseph is never stated explicitly.

On the basis of exploratory exemplarity, then, I theorize that Josephus' procedure as delineated in this chapter—subversively adapting scriptural figures and accounts—can be read as creating disruptions that invite reflection upon the moral qualities of the protagonists with respect to their archetypes. This is

67 See note 60 above.

68 Duff, *Plutarch's Lives*, 55. The ambivalence and ambiguity of Plutarch's narratives as to how his subjects are to function as examples for the reader carries over into the *synkrisis*, which are the formal evaluations that conclude most of the Lives after the narrative proper ends (excepting *Pyrrhus-Marius*, *Phocion-Cato the Younger*, *Themistocles-Camillus*, and *Alexander-Caesar*). They weigh each pair of subjects in turn and do contain explicit moral judgements, but they do not provide a summation and the final verdicts do not always appear to align with the depiction in the narratives themselves of the subjects and their deeds. For analysis of the *synkrisis*, see Duff, *Plutarch's Lives*, 252–286; Swain, "Plutarchan Synkrisis;" Larmour, "Synkrisis;" Boulogne, "ΣΥΝΚΡΙΣΕΙΣ de Plutarque."

similar to those “moments of tension” which Chrysanthou describes Plutarch exploiting in his *Parallel Lives*:

Plutarch presents his readers with incongruous elements ... that are not compatible with what readers already know or have assumed from the preceding or wider narrative. These “moments of tension” ... are capable of drawing readers, through their subsequent surprise, into reflecting on and re-evaluating the various threads in a bid to pass their own moral judgement on the men of the biographies. This is also the case when readers confront gaps or silences in the text, temporal displacements, and evocations of past and future, or when they may recognise intertextuality. All these devices prove highly effective in increasing readers’ engagement with moral evaluation, sensitising them to exploratory parallels and wider contexts that inform their act of judging in many challenging ways.⁶⁹

The fact that the concept of exploratory exemplarity has been successfully utilized in research into Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives*, in particular, makes it especially appealing to borrow for application to Josephus. There are, however, several specific reasons to entertain the possibility that Plutarch and Josephus engage in similar kinds of exemplary discourse in their writings.

First, Plutarch and Josephus are very near contemporaries, with Plutarch being only around ten years younger than Josephus, and both writing works under the Flavian emperors.⁷⁰ It is, therefore, entirely justifiable to seek in Josephus some of the same practices, habits, and trends that we find in Plutarch. While Plutarch did not write in Rome like Josephus, he made multiple trips there and, like Josephus, had close and ongoing contacts in the capital.⁷¹ Second, Josephus’ *Antiquitates Judaicae* can be read as largely consisting of a series of biographies of illustrious individuals (e.g., Abraham, Joseph, Moses, etc.),⁷² in which light *Antiquitates Judaicae* stands much closer to Plutarch’s

69 Chrysanthou, *Plutarch’s Parallel Lives*, 2. For a similar perspective, see also Duff, *Plutarch’s Lives*, 52–71.

70 Josephus wrote exclusively under the Flavians (excepting perhaps *Contra Apionem*), while Plutarch wrote only minimally under the Flavians and mostly under Nerva and Trajan (Jones, “Towards a Chronology of Plutarch’s Works”).

71 On Plutarch’s contacts in Rome, see Stadter, *Plutarch and his Roman Readers*, esp. 6–12; Stadter, “Plutarch and Rome,” 13–31. On Josephus’ Roman context, see the contributions in Edmondson, Mason, and Rives, eds., *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome*.

72 On *AJ* as essentially a series of connected biographies, see Mason, “Introduction to the *Judean Antiquities*,” *Judean Antiquities* 1–4, xxxii; Feldman, *Josephus’s Interpretation*, 74–75; Schwartz, “Many Sources But a Single Author,” 37.

Parallel Lives than it might otherwise appear. Third, I have shown in this chapter that Josephus establishes Agrippa I as a figure parallel to scriptural Joseph and Esther, thus constructing for the reader an implicit set of parallel lives not entirely dissimilar from Plutarch's work. Understanding Plutarch's techniques of exploratory exemplarity, therefore, may go a long way towards clarifying the nature and purpose of Josephus' somewhat peculiar account of Agrippa I.⁷³

5 Conclusion

In my view, the kind of culturally-contemporary discourses of exemplarity that Plutarch used supplies an explanation for why Josephus provides both positive and negative depictions of Agrippa I in *Antiquitates Judaicae* and gives a thoroughly mixed assessment of his reign. In particular, it provides a coherent explanation for Josephus' decision to cast Agrippa in the mold of Joseph and Esther in an implicit comparison which subversively leaves him falling short of them both. When Agrippa is portrayed so much like Joseph and Esther but then fails to attain to their heights of virtue, the reader is invited to wrestle with the cause and to evaluate his actions for themselves.

Even more, juxtaposing Esther and Joseph with Agrippa in an implied comparison allows Josephus to provoke (but not necessarily answer) exploratory moral reflection on questions such as: Has contemporary morality qualitatively declined in comparison to the exemplars of the distant past? If tyrants such as Esther's Persian king have appeared throughout history, are there lessons from the past regarding exercising virtue and conducting an honorable life under tyrannical emperors such as Gaius? Given Agrippa's failures and successes, especially in relation to the models of Joseph and Esther, what is the proper balance of ambition and virtue? Are the moral exemplars of the past, like Joseph and Esther, no more than ideals that are fundamentally unreachable? Or are they models of what is actually obtainable in the present?

Josephus' nuanced portrait of Agrippa I in *Antiquitates Judaicae* rings loudly in his final statement on the king (*AJ* 19.352) that "his ambition was unsurpassing" (ἦν δὲ ἀφειδές αὐτοῦ τὸ φιλότιμον). With this evaluation Josephus ends his account of Agrippa I, appropriately underlining one of the themes he highlighted throughout. As the reader surmises, the king who is portrayed in

73 The same is true of Josephus' account of the Tobiad family in *AJ* 12.158–236. On the parallels between the figure of Joseph and Josephus' Tobiads, which function in the same manner as those documented for the Agrippa story in this chapter, see Edwards, *Court of the Gentiles*, 57–111.

circumstances of imprisonment like Joseph, or at a banquet urgently petitioning the ruler on the Jews' behalf like Esther, is also shown to have entered these roles by means quite unlike these scriptural archetypes—through “unsparing ambition.”

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