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Josephus' Adaptation of the Athaliah Narratives

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Abstract

Athaliah in Josephus is rarely studied. This paper thus seeks to build on Christopher Begg's text-critical work by discussing the literary effect of Josephus' embellishments to the Athaliah narratives. Athaliah in Josephus is shown to be more explicitly foreign and illegitimate than in the biblical texts, but also a more dynamic, rounded character.

Keywords

Athaliah – Josephus – Antiquities 9 – 2 Kgs 11//2 Chr 22–23

1 Introduction

In the HB, the northern Israelite princess Athaliah married into the southern kingdom of Judah as part of an alliance between the two kingdoms (2 Kgs 8:18).¹ Following her husband, king Joram's death (2 Kgs 8:23–24) and that of her son, king Ahaziah (2 Kgs 9:27–29), she apparently went on a murderous spree, killing "all the royal seed" of Judah and installing herself as queen (2 Kgs 11:1).

1 On the Omride-Judahite alliance, see Sergi, "The Omride Dynasty."

Although the HB presents Athaliah as a corrupting (2 Kgs 8:18, 26–27) and murderous (2 Kgs 11:1) presence in Judah, most modern scholarship views her portrayal as polemical, rather than historically accurate.² Whether the biblical polemic was motivated by her foreignness, her gender, or general political shifts is unclear.³ In a similar vein, Josephus' portrayal of women has been a focal point of scholarly attention, yet his adaptation of the Athaliah narratives (*Ant.* 9.140–156) has often been overlooked.⁴ When scholars discuss queens in Josephus, the Second Temple period queens Alexandra and Esther dominate (despite the latter being a consort rather than a monarch), while studies of Josephus' biblical women tend to either gloss over Athaliah briefly or focus their attention solely on other characters.⁵ Christopher Begg's extensive text-critical commentaries on the passage are the exception rather than the rule.⁶

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- 2 This is mostly because the length of her reign (six years) would have been impossible without internal support (see Kuloba, "Athaliah," 148–150; Park, 2 *Kings*, 146–148; and note Jehoiada's command [2 Kgs 11:15] that "any who follow her" should be put to death), but also because she may have needed a male heir if she ruled as a regent (see Sergi, "Queenship," 105–109). In addition, the claim that she killed "all the royal seed" (2 Kgs 11:1) sits awkwardly with the claim that Jehu killed forty-two brothers of king Ahaziah at Beth-Eked (2 Kgs 10:13–14). For discourse analysis of the Athaliah narratives (2 Kgs 11:1–20//2 Chr 22:10–23:21), see Bench, *Coup of Jehoiada*. For literary-historical approaches, see Solvang, "A Woman's Place"; Na'aman, "Queen Athaliah"; Sergi, "Queenship"; Knauf, "The Queens' Story"; and, earlier, Levin, *Königin Atalja*. For rhetorical approaches, see Dutcher-Walls, "Athaliah"; idem, *Narrative Art*; Barré, *Political Persuasion*, and on queen mothers, see Brewer-Boydston, *Queen Mothers*. Branch, "Traacherous Queen," and Kuloba, "Athaliah," offer close textual readings while Lipka, "Jezebel's Masculinity"; MacWilliam, "Illicit Masculinity," highlight the importance of gender studies for the portrayal of queens in Kings.
- 3 In truth the catalyst could have been any of these factors, or due to other reasons unknown to us today. While it is highly likely that Athaliah's gender played a part in the polemic against her (see, e.g., Quine, "Masculine Queens") recent work on polemical reinterpretations of 9th–8th century BCE dynastic politics (see Sergi, "The Omride Dynasty"; Quine, "Theopolitics") demonstrate that viewing the Athaliah polemic as purely motivated by her gender may be too simplistic and, notably, the only other woman to rule Judah/Judea as monarch—Alexandra—does not receive the same level of polemic (though Josephus affords her a mixed legacy; see Liebowitz, "Ambivalent Attitude"; Scales and Quine, "Athaliah and Alexandra"). While gender may inform the polemic against Athaliah, the situation is complex, and it may be better to view the cause of the polemic as potentially related to a developing spectrum of gender-ideologies in conjunction with other political views.
- 4 See especially, Halpern-Amaru, "Portraits"; Feldman, "Hellenizations"; Ilan, "Flavius Josephus"; Ilan, "Josephus and Nicolaus"; Ilan, "Josephus on Women"; Liebowitz, "Ambivalent Attitude"; Mayer-Schärtel, *Frauenbild des Josephus*.
- 5 E.g., Liebowitz, "Esther and Alexandra"; idem, "New Perspective"; Lambers-Petry, "Shelomzion ha-malka"; and especially Ilan, *Silencing the Queen*, 43–46, 47–60; Liebowitz, "Ambivalent Attitude," 192; Halpern-Amaru, "Portraits," 165–166; Mayer-Schärtel, *Frauenbild des Josephus*, 62.
- 6 See Begg, "Athaliah's Coup"; idem, *Later Monarchy*, 167–187; Begg and Spilsbury, *Antiquities*, 159–162.

Therein, Begg identifies many of Josephus' embellishments to the Athaliah narratives, some of which come from rewritten sources, and some which are only known from Josephus himself.⁷ The purpose of this article, therefore, is to discuss the literary effect of Josephus' changes to the Athaliah narratives, and their impact on the reception of Athaliah and the formation of this tradition. The following utilises Begg's four-fold division of the Athaliah narrative (Preliminaries, Jehoiada's Measures, Athaliah's End, Sequels) and analyses the implications of Josephus' additions in each.⁸ In Preliminaries we demonstrate that his additions render Athaliah more foreign and explicitly illegitimate than she is in the biblical texts, while in Jehoiada's Measures they dramatise the story and increase the tensions for the audience. In Athaliah's End, we show that Josephus expands Athaliah's entrance to the temple, associates her with a force of soldiers and has Jehoiada order her destruction at the Wadi Kidron. Finally, in Sequels, we argue that Josephus returns to the theme of Athaliah-as-foreigner and presents her as intimately involved with the construction of the Baal temple. Ultimately, Josephus presents Athaliah as more foreign, negative, and unambiguously illegitimate than she is portrayed in the HB. The biblical authors' polemic is amplified in *Antiquities*, which has implications for scholarly views of women in Josephus and the reception of Athaliah.

2 Preliminaries (*Ant.* 9.140–142; 2 Kgs 11:1–3//2 Chr 22:10–12)

Athaliah enters events in dramatic fashion: “now when Athaliah, Ahaziah's mother, saw that her son was dead, she set about to destroy all the royal seed of the house of Judah” (2 Kgs 11:1//2 Chr 22:10).⁹ While the biblical sources are similar, *Ant.* 9.140 makes some significant changes which emphasise Athaliah's foreignness:

7 See Begg, *Later Monarchy*, 185–187. His sources include the MT, LXX^B, and LXX^L versions of Kings and Chronicles. Some of the embellishments that do not match the known textual sources may come from other, unknown sources, but this cannot be verified. Further, when examining the language of the closest parallel texts (2 Kings and 2 Chronicles LXX), it appears that Josephus rarely adopts the exact language or terminology of his known sources—specific verbs and nouns parallel to 2 Kings//2 Chronicles LXX are as follows: βασιλ-έα/ευσ/ειον (9.140, 147, 149, 152, 153, 156), βασιλεύω (9.142), εκατοντάρχης (9.143, 148, 151, 156), φυλακή (9.146), ὄπλον (9.148), ἀκούσω (9.150), πύλη (9.152), οἶκος, κατασκάπτω, ἀποκτείνω (9.154), ἱεὺς, ὀλοκαύτωσις, νόμος (9.155), λαός, καθίζω, θρόνον, πόλις and ἡσυχάζω (9.156).

8 Due to limitations of space, we focus only on major additions which are of ideological, theological, or historical significance; for minor additions see Begg, *Later Monarchy*, 167–187.

9 Chronicles adds the לְבֵית יְהוּדָה.

Ἄθλια δ' ἡ Ἀχάβου θυγάτηρ ἀκούσασα τὴν τ' Ἰωράμου τ' ἀδελφοῦ τελευτὴν καὶ τὴν Ὀχοζία τοῦ παιδὸς καὶ τοῦ γένους τῶν βασιλέων τὴν ἀπώλειαν ἐσπούδαξε μὴδὲνα τῶν ἐκ τοῦ Δαυίδου καταλιπεῖν οἴκου, πᾶν δ' ἐξαφανίσει τὸ γένος, ὡς ἂν μὴδὲ εἰς ἐξ αὐτοῦ βασιλεὺς ἔτι γένοιτο

When Othlia,¹⁰ the daughter of Achab, heard of the deaths of her brother Joram, and of Ochozias her son,¹¹ and the annihilation of the royal family she became solicitous to leave no one of the house of David and to exterminate the whole family in order that there be no king from it.¹²

The biblical sources evidence confusion over Athaliah's parentage, calling her daughter of Ahab (2 Kgs 8:18//2 Chr 21:6 MT) and daughter of Omri (2 Kgs 8:26//2 Chr 22:2 MT), but Josephus states clearly that she was daughter of Ahab.¹³ Historically speaking, whether she was the daughter of Omri/Ahab is not particularly important—either way, she was related to both. Literarily speaking, the connection to Ahab was likely a weightier rhetorical tool for it was he whom the biblical authors vilified, and his mention forms an *inclusio* in *Ant.* 9.140, 154, emphasising Athaliah's relation to him. The death of “her brother Joram” and “of the royal family” also emphasise Athaliah's Israelite roots—and thus, foreignness to Judah—as the motivation for her murderous actions.¹⁴ While the biblical texts associate Athaliah's connection to the house of Ahab with doing evil in the eyes of Yhwh (2 Kgs 8:18, 27//2 Chr 21:6; 22:3–4),

10 Josephus consistently uses Ὀθλία(ς/ν) (aside from 9.96 where he uses Γοθολία, emended to Ὀθλία in Marcus, LCL [Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*: see his comments on 50 n. 4 and 51 n. g]) to refer to the queen. This Ὀθλία(ς/ν) is an otherwise unattested transliteration of יהויה/יהויה. The letters οθλ are an unusual combination, seen in few extant inscriptions, e.g., Delta I, 669,271 (Bernard); IGLSyr 13,1: 9444 (Sartre)—thanks to Lindsey Askin for this observation. Their fragmentary nature, however, unfortunately limits their usefulness. The Greek translations of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles meanwhile, always render her name as Γοθολία(ς/ν). The transliteration of Hebrew *ayin* by Greek gamma is a known phenomenon (e.g., Stone, *Armenian Apocrypha*, 47 n. 119), yet why Josephus does not follow it is unclear. Perhaps notably, the male name יהויה in Ezra 8:7; 1 Chr 8:26 is rendered as Αθελία and Ογοθολία in the LXX but as these genealogies are absent from *Antiquities*, we cannot evaluate their impact on Josephus' rendering of Athaliah.

11 The online edition of Josephus, *Ant.* 9.140 (Marcus, LCL) reads “her wicked son Ochozias,” though “wicked” there seems to be an error caused by the transition from hard copy—online material.

12 Begg and Spilsbury, *Antiquities*, 159; cf. Begg, *Later Monarchy*, 167–168.

13 Some Greek manuscripts record Αμβρ(ε) instead of Αχραβ; see 2 Chr 22:2 BHS; Rahlfs and Hanhart, *Septuaginta*, 711. Josephus previously calls her daughter of Ahab in *Ant.* 8.398; 9.96; see further discussion in Katzenstein, “Parents”; Klein, “Athaliah.”

14 Although the “royal family” could refer to the Judahite royal family killed in 2 Kgs 10:13–14 (*Ant.* 9.130–131), the reference to Joram suggests that the seventy sons of Ahab killed by Jehu are in view (2 Kgs 10:1–11; *Ant.* 9.125–129).

their accounts of her slaughter and reign cite only her son's death (the Judahite king) as the catalyst (2 Kgs 11:1//2 Chr 22:10).¹⁵ In all likelihood, by the time she became queen, Athaliah had lived most of her life in Judah, yet Josephus views her foreign allegiances as the driving force in her actions throughout her life.¹⁶ Furthermore, the biblical texts state that Athaliah “set about to destroy the royal seed”—an odd phrase that may suggest allusion to the irony of a mother destroying children or, perhaps, an obfuscation of the fact that she did not kill *all* (any?) of the royal house.¹⁷ Josephus formalises this conflict, however, stating that Athaliah attempted to destroy the “house of David ... in order that there be no king from it” (*Ant.* 9.140b).¹⁸ This portrayal renders Athaliah more directly comparable to (and worse than) the male usurpers in biblical history, who also eradicated *a royal house*, leaving *no surviving heir*.¹⁹ Begg also notes that the verb used of Athaliah's extermination (ἐξαρφάνισαι) recalls its earlier usage in *Ant.* 9.96 where Yhwh did not want to utterly destroy the house of David.²⁰ Athaliah's actions are thus in direct opposition to Yhwh. Even in the

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- 15 In Chronicles, the connection between the “house of Ahab” and Athaliah is particularly strong and appears more dynamic and pervasive. Thus, 2 Chr 22:3 states that Ahaziah “walked in the ways of the house of Ahab” because of Athaliah's counsel (כִּי אָמְנוּ הַיְהוָה יוֹעֵצָתוֹ לְהַרְשִׁיעַ). In Kings, “house of Ahab” is primarily mentioned with reference to the northern kingdom and Jehu's coup (2 Kgs 9:7, 8, 9; 10:10, 11, 30; 21:13), but Chronicles emphasises it more in the reigns of (Judahite) Joram and Ahaziah (2 Chr 21:6, 13; 22:3, 4, 8) and contrasts it with the “ways of Jehoshaphat ... and Asa” (2 Chr 22:12) and the “house of Judah” (2 Chr 22:10).
- 16 Athaliah lived in Judah's royal house for twenty-three years prior to becoming queen (her son's age at time of accession plus his one-year reign). In reality, it is unlikely that this had no impact on her life and loyalties.
- 17 See comments on כַּל־זֶרַע הַמַּמְלָכָה in, e.g., MacWilliam, “Illicit Masculinity,” 72–72; Kuloba, “Athaliah,” 140–144; Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, 171–174; Park, 2 *Kings*, 145–146. Sergi, “Queenship,” 105–110, notes that it would have been illogical for a queen-regent to kill royal children (at least one of whom she would have needed to justify her rule). This report also sits oddly with the notice of Jehu killing forty-two brothers of Ahaziah at Beth-Eked (2 Kgs 10:13–14).
- 18 Begg and Spilsbury, *Antiquities*, 159. Josephus changes the mention of the “house of Judah” in 2 Chr 22:10 to the “house of David” in an attempt to be consistent with the later reference to the “house of David” (cf. *Ant.* 9.145; 2 Chr 23:3).
- 19 E.g., Baasha destroyed the *house of Jeroboam* and left “*not one that breathed*” (1 Kgs 15:27–29), Zimri in turn wiped out the *house of Baasha* and “did not leave him *a single male* of his kindred or his friends” (1 Kgs 16:10–11), and Jehu explicitly had “*the seventy sons*” of Ahab killed (2 Kgs 10:1–8) and left him *no survivor* (10:11). Athaliah's violence against “*all the royal seed*” is portrayed as worse than male monarchs, even when they executed family members to secure the throne; see Brenner-Idan, *Israelite Woman*, 30. The phrasing of the threat is also unparalleled in the HB, which underscores the propaganda of Jehu's slaughter of the Judahite royal family in 2 Kgs 10:13–14.
- 20 See Begg, *Later Monarchy*, 168 n. 6.

opening lines, therefore, Josephus' Athaliah is more explicitly foreign and more formally opposed to the Davidic line and Yhwh than she is in the biblical texts. Whereas the propagandistic politics and brevity of the biblical accounts make their version of Athaliah's coup potentially suspect, for Josephus, her usurpation and illegitimacy are unambiguous and definite.²¹

3 Jehoiada's Measures (*Ant.* 9.143–149; 2 Kgs 11:4–12//2 Chr 23:1–11)

Jehoiada's organisation of the coup is the longest section of the biblical Athaliah narratives, which Josephus embellishes to dramatise the events for his audience. Chronicles gives more detail than Kings, including the names of the commanders and their travel throughout Judah, repeated mentions of the priests and Levites, and a specific note that the Levites were to guard the king.²² Josephus' version contains a number of elements unique to Chronicles with a few changes. He portrays Jehoiada persuading the commanders to "be part of an undertaking against Othlia and to secure the kingship for the boy" (*Ant.* 9.143) and receiving *oaths* of loyalty so that, "he was confirmed in his fearlessness ... he was encouraged in his hopes regarding Othlia" (*Ant.* 9.143).²³ Similarly, once the priests, Levites, and chiefs of the tribes had been gathered, Jehoiada made them swear "that they would keep secret what they would learn from him" (*Ant.* 9.144–145).²⁴ The explicit mention of secrecy and potential betrayal in these embellishments heightens the narrative tension and indicates a subtle difference in the portrayal of Athaliah. While the biblical texts

21 On the difficulties of reconstructing anything of the truth surrounding Athaliah's ascension to the throne, see especially Sergi, "Queenship," 105–109. Ilan notes that the biblical accounts of Athaliah's reign are politically motivated to present it as illegitimate, despite small hints that female monarchical succession—in the absence of a male heir—might have been legitimate; see Ilan, *Silencing the Queen*, 45–46.

22 All the names of Chronicles' commanders appear in Priestly or Levitical lists (see Williamson, *Chronicles*, 315), though Josephus omits them for his audience; see Begg, *Later Monarchy*, 170 n. 21. The travel through Judah explains how "all the people" validate and support Joash's kingship (2 Chr 23:3) while Japhet explains the Levites guarding the king, not as a magnification of the Levites' roles *per se*, but as the Chronicler's attempt to resolve the difficulties in Kings. The Levites are given control of temple matters and "all Judah" oversee military activity; see Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 832–833.

23 Translation from Begg, *Later Monarchy*, 170; Begg and Spilsbury, *Antiquities*, 159–160. The usual term for covenant (διαθήκη) does not occur at all in this Josephus passage, despite being common to 2 Kgs 11:4//2 Chr 23:3 and 2 Kgs 11:17//2 Chr 23:16. Josephus instead uses ὄρκος (*Ant.* 9.143) to describe the oaths taken by the conspirators and uses ἐνὸρκος for oaths in 9.145.

24 Begg and Spilsbury, *Antiquities*, 159–160.

depict Athaliah as a lone agent with no support, Josephus' dramatisation relies on a recognition that she may have had support; Jehoiada's safety depends on the surety of these oaths.²⁵

Josephus' presentation of Joash following the oaths is modelled on Jehoiada's line in 2 Chr 23:3 and describes Joash as "from *the family of David* [Δαυίδου γένους], whom he had reared, and [Jehoiada] said: "This is our king from that house that, as you know, God prophesied to us would reign as king for all time" (*Ant.* 9.145b).²⁶ The mention of David and the divine promise underscores Joash's legitimacy but also distracts from his actual parentage, through which he was related to Athaliah and thus to the Omride line and Ahab.²⁷ Jehoiada then equips the guards from "the armoury in the sacred precinct that David had constructed" (*Ant.* 9.148) and instructs the rest of the people to remain unarmed in the temple.²⁸ When directing the guards to their roles, Josephus' ensures that one group is told to let "no soldier" (ὄπλίτην) enter (*Ant.* 9.146; cf. 2 Chr 23:6 ואל-יבוא בית-יהוה "do not let anyone enter"), which becomes important further on.²⁹ Joash is crowned (*Ant.* 9.149) but does not receive the ואת העדות of 2 Kgs 11:12//2 Chr 23:11, perhaps due to uncertainty about what it was.³⁰

Josephus' embellishments here continue to dramatise his story, emphasising the need for secrecy, the risks the conspirators take, and Joash's Davidic heritage. Athaliah is absent from the passage in person (as she is in 2 Kgs 11:4–12//2 Chr 23:1–11), but Josephus' additions suggest a powerful persona *in absentia*. Jehoiada's refusal to speak until he has sworn those present to secrecy (*Ant.* 9.143, 145) attributes potential support and power to the queen, not seen in the biblical sources.³¹ Whereas Josephus' tweaks to the "Preliminaries"

25 Similar concerns may underlie the account of covenant—oaths—revealing of Joash in 2 Kgs 11:4 but if so, it is left unspoken, perhaps deliberately so.

26 Begg and Spilsbury, *Antiquities*, 160. Italics ours.

27 2 Kings 11:2; 2 Chr 22:11 state that Joash was son of Ahaziah (and thus grandson of Athaliah and part-Omride). The texts down-play Ahaziah's fatherhood of Joash, however, through the lack of any formal regnal notices connecting their reigns. Instead, Jehoiada seems to fill the vacant father role, particularly in 2 Chr 24:3, where he provides Joash with wives.

28 Begg and Spilsbury, *Antiquities*, 160. Cf. David's weapons stored *in* the temple 2 Kgs 11:10//2 Chr 23:9—Begg notes that this change likely results from *Ant.* 8.259 following the LXX of 1 Kgs 14:26, wherein Shishak took weapons from Rehoboam that David had dedicated; see Begg, *Later Monarchy*, 175 n. 60.

29 Begg, *Later Monarchy*, 174 n. 51 observes that this pre-empts 9.150 wherein the guards allowed Athaliah to enter, but not her soldiers.

30 Begg, *Later Monarchy*, 176 n. 67 notes that Josephus shows no awareness of the Rabbinic tradition seen in *b. 'Abod. Zar* 44a that identified this crown as being the crown that David took from the Ammonites in 2 Sam 12:30//1 Chr 20:2 = *Ant.* 7.61.

31 Interestingly, there is only a hint of such concern for secrecy in 2 Chr 23:3, where the people make a covenant with the king (rather than an oath to Jehoiada). 2 Kings 11:4 implies

section created a much more foreign and illegitimate Athaliah, his changes here ensure that her presence continues to be felt in the backdrop of the coup. These additions create a sense of danger for the conspirators and implicitly acknowledge the power Athaliah held.

4 Athaliah's End (*Ant.* 9.150–152; 2 Kgs 11:13–16//2 Chr 23:12–15)

Athaliah re-enters events hearing a cacophony of sound in the biblical narrative, whereupon she follows it to the temple. Josephus, however, dramatically embellishes this entrance:

Τοῦ δὲ θορύβου καὶ τῶν ἐπαίνων Ὀθλία παρ' ἐλπίδας ἀκούσασα, τεταραγμένη σφόδρα τῇ διανοίᾳ μετὰ τῆς ἰδίας ἐξέπῆδησε στρατιάς ἐκ τοῦ βασιλείου. καὶ παραγενομένην εἰς τὸ ἱερόν αὐτὴν οἱ μὲν ἱερεῖς εἰσδέχονται, τοὺς δ' ἐπομένους ὀπλίτας εἴρξαν εἰσελθεῖν οἱ περιεστῶτες ἐν κύκλῳ τῶν ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀρχιερέως τοῦτο προστεταγμένων

Hearing the noise and the unexpected acclamations, Othlia was greatly disconcerted in mind. She rushed out of the palace with her own body of soldiers. Once she came to the sacred precinct, the priest let her enter, but those standing around in a circle kept the troops following her from entering, as had been ordered by the high priest.

Ant. 9.150³²

Whereas Kings and Chronicles describe the people's actions and noise—ותשמע עתליהו את־קול העם והמה־ (2 Kgs 11:13); ותשמע עתליהו את־קול העם הרצים והמה־ (2 Chr 23:12)—Josephus focuses attention purely on Athaliah's *reaction to the “noise” and “tumult.”*³³ Her “confusion of mind” and the speed with which she ran to the temple are not paralleled in the biblical sources, which both use בוא to straightforwardly describe her entrance. Josephus' addition of Athaliah having soldiers is also a fairly considerable—though often

more secrecy, but this is evidently amplified in Josephus and 2 Kgs 11:4 is careful not to explicitly connect its covenants with any notion of betrayal and thus, loyalty to Athaliah.

32 Begg and Spilsbury, *Antiquities*, 161; cf. the brief entrances in 2 Kgs 11:13//2 Chr 23:12.

33 Sound/hearing is an important narrative device in the Athaliah story: events begin when she hears (שמע) that her son is dead. Her downfall begins when the people clap their hands (ויכרכך, Kings only) and proclaim, “long live the king” (ויאמרו יחי המלך). It reaches a climax when she hears again (שמע) the voice(s) (קול), trumpets (חצצרות), and praising (והמהללים, Chronicles only) of the people. Finally, her end is sealed when the people rejoice (שמח) and the city descends into silence (והעיר שקטה).

glossed over—change from the biblical texts. Begg suggests that these soldiers solve the difficulty in the biblical accounts wherein readers must believe that Athaliah went alone to the temple.³⁴ Yet, Athaliah's lack of soldiers in the biblical texts make her assassination more believable, for if she had soldiers, the author would have had to account for their actions (or lack thereof) in defence of their queen, as Josephus had to do in *Ant.* 9.146. In addition, although Athaliah as queen presumably did have some control over Judah's armed forces, the association of royal women with private military forces is better attested in periods closer to Josephus' own time. Neo-Assyrian queens start appearing connected with military matters and private forces from Sennacherib's reign onwards—about a century after Athaliah.³⁵ A closer example can be found with regards to Salome Alexandra—the only other female monarch to rule Judah/Judea—who recruited an army to support her rule.³⁶ Indeed, Josephus comments specifically on Alexandra's army at multiple points, noting its foreign/mercenary character (*Ant.* 13.409; *J.W.* 1.112), her efforts to recruit more numbers (*J.W.* 1.112), and her sending of an army to Damascus (*Ant.* 13.418; *J.W.* 1.115). She also stated to the elders of the Jews and her son Hyrcanus that they had resources available to defend against Aristobulus' advancements, including “a nation in good condition [and] an army” (*Ant.* 13.428–429). It seems likely, therefore, that Josephus' embellishment of Athaliah's soldiers was not an attempt to resolve biblical tensions, but an addition drawn from his knowledge of other women's command of military forces.³⁷

While Athaliah's entrance into the temple is “greatly embellished”³⁸ by Josephus, the description of the scene that she encountered is compressed. The people and their noisy actions in Kings//Chronicles are replaced by a quieter spotlight, recording only that “Othlia saw the boy standing on the platform and wearing the royal crown” (*Ant.* 9.151).³⁹ Begg argues that the elimination of other persons in Josephus' account keeps attention focussed on Athaliah and

34 Begg, *Later Monarchy*, 178 n. 77.

35 From Sennacherib onwards the Neo-Assyrian queens seem to have had command of their own military units and Sammu-rammat is uniquely recorded as having gone on a campaign with her son Sennacherib; Svärd, *Women and Power*, 49–50, 53, 83–84.

36 See comments in Ilan, “Josephus on Women,” 214–215; Mayer-Schärtel, *Frauenbild des Josephus*, 62–63, 139–140, 184–185.

37 Scales and Quine, “Athaliah and Alexandra.” Halpern-Amaru, “Portraits,” notes that Josephus regularly models his women on five types of female characters, three “heroines,” two “villainesses”: Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Potiphar's Wife, and the Midianite women. Although Athaliah does not fit these models, some intra-female influence amongst Josephus' characters seems likely.

38 Begg, *Later Monarchy*, 178.

39 Begg and Spilsbury, *Antiquities*, 161.

Joash, though it seems rather that Athaliah alone has the spotlight.⁴⁰ Whereas the biblical narratives call Joash “king,” depict him standing in a location of significance, and ascribe him legitimacy through the acclamation of his people, in *Ant.* 9.151a, the scene is viewed through Athaliah’s eyes; Joash is merely a boy wearing a crown.⁴¹ While the biblical accounts afford Athaliah only two words at this point—קָשֶׁר קָשֶׁר—proclaiming the conspiracy against her, Josephus states that she cried out to her men “that he who had conspired against her and was intent on depriving her of her rule, be put to death” (*Ant.* 9.151b).⁴² A few things are noteworthy here; first, the lack of response from Athaliah’s forces creates narrative uncertainty as she does not appear to have noticed that her soldiers are not with her.⁴³ Second, while the biblical texts give Athaliah direct speech here, Josephus does not.⁴⁴ Third, the focus of Josephus’ attention has shifted—in 9.140 he emphasised Athaliah’s murderous intentions *vis-à-vis* the house of David. Here, however, her revenge is centred on Jehoiada, not the Davidic Joash, despite her supposed penchant for slaughter of the Davidic house. Another Josephan addition is found in Jehoiada’s command to his men to put Athaliah to death in the “valley of Kidron,” though she is ultimately killed at the “gate of the king’s mules” (*Ant.* 9.151–152). The mention of Kidron could be a corruption of σαδ(η)ρωθ in 2 Kgs 11:15 LXX, or an ideological insertion evoking the Kidron associated with ritual destruction elsewhere in Kings (1 Kgs 15:13; 2 Kgs 23:4–6 cf. 1 Kgs 2:37).⁴⁵ Alternatively, it may indicate knowledge of Jer 31:40, which connects the Kidron with the horse-gate (שַׁעַר הַסּוּסִים). Notably, the only things destroyed in the Kidron in Kings are previously accepted items used in the worship of other gods; their ritual destruction signifies a change in status both for the items (destroyed, non-usable) and for the

40 See Begg, *Later Monarchy*, 178 n. 80.

41 2 Kgs 11:13–14//2 Chr 23:13. That “standing by the pillar” (וְהָנָה הַמֶּלֶךְ עִמָּד עַל־הָעַמּוּד) was a location of significance is seen in the parallel with Josiah (וְיַעֲמַד הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל־הָעַמּוּד) 2 Kgs 23:3). 2 Chronicles 23:13 locates the pillar specifically “at the entrance” (וְהָנָה הַמֶּלֶךְ עוֹמֵד עַל־הָעַמּוּד בַּמְּבֹאָה). Public acclamation as a sign of royal legitimacy is seen elsewhere in, for example, 1 Sam 10:24; 11:15; 1 Kgs 1:34–39; 2 Kgs 9:13.

42 Begg and Spilsbury, *Antiquities*, 161; cf. Begg, *Later Monarchy*, 179. Josephus may be building from 2 Chr 23:13 LXX, which changes the Hebrew cry of “conspiracy, conspiracy” to a command to “attack, attack” (Ἐπιτιθέμενοι ἐπιτιθέσθε).

43 Which suggests that the addition of her forces creates more tension for Josephus than it solves.

44 Halpern-Amaru, “Portraits,” 155, cites direct speech as a mark of a “villainess.” Whereas the biblical Athaliah is very much a villainess, Josephus’ removal of her direct speech adds to the sense that his Athaliah does not fit any of Halpern-Amaru’s categories.

45 See Marcus, LCL (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*), 83, for textual corruption; Begg, *Later Monarchy*, 179 n. 88, for an ideological reference.

people (new start).⁴⁶ If the mention of the Kidron is an ideological insertion, then it implies a change in Athaliah's status; once accepted now destroyed.⁴⁷

5 Sequels (*Ant.* 9.153–156; 2 *Kgs* 11:17–20//2 *Chr* 23:16–21)

Following Athaliah's death, the narratives focuses on cultic destruction and restoration, thus framing Athaliah's death in cultic terms. 2 *Kings* 11:17 states that Jehoiada mediated two covenants, between Yhwh—king—people and between the king—people. 2 *Chronicles* 23:16, meanwhile, records only one, between Jehoiada—people—king. Josephus offers an expanded version, stating that Jehoiada made the people take an oath to “be loyal to the king and take care for his safety and ongoing rule.”⁴⁸ Ἀρχῆς here echoes and contrasts with Athaliah's rule (ἀρχήν) in 9.151; having taken the royal power from Athaliah, Jehoiada confers it on Joash.⁴⁹ Once the oaths are sworn, the people run to the temple of Baal which “Othlia and her husband Joram had constructed as an outrage against the ancestral God and in honor of Achab's god” (*Ant.* 9.154).⁵⁰ The verb for this construction (κατεσκεύασεν) is also used of Ahab building the temple of Baal in Samaria (*Ant.* 9.138), further emphasising Athaliah's similarity to Ahab.⁵¹ In contrast, the biblical texts introduce the note about the destruction of the Baal temple abruptly and Athaliah is never associated with it explicitly, whether with a view to construction or Baal-worship. Rather, its destruction seems intended to draw a parallel with Jehu's destruction of the temple of Baal and his worshippers in 2 *Kgs* 10:18–27, the final act of his coup against the Omrides. As Jehu wiped out the Omrides and Baal from Israel, so too does Jehoiada in Judah.⁵² Josephus, however, goes beyond the biblical texts in attributing its construction to Athaliah and describing it as an explicit act of opposition to Judah's deity. Athaliah is never said to be anti-Yahwistic in the

46 1 *Kgs* 15:13; 2 *Kgs* 23:4, 6, 12. For comments on ritual destruction in Kings, see especially Monroe, *Dynamics of Defilement*.

47 Although the biblical authors claim that the items destroyed in the Kidron were idolatrous, their presence in the temple and Jerusalem implies that they were viewed as legitimate at one point by the kings and people.

48 Begg and Spilsbury, *Antiquities*, 162.

49 See Begg, *Later Monarchy*, 181 n. 101.

50 Begg and Spilsbury, *Antiquities*, 162.

51 See Begg, *Later Monarchy*, 182.

52 Less convincingly, Long, 2 *Kings*, 153, states that it forms part of Jehoiada's reorganisation of the “geography of holiness.”

biblical texts, so these are significant theological developments.⁵³ Josephus' mention of "her husband" (ὁ ἀνὴρ αὐτῆς, *Ant.* 9.154) parallels Jezebel's influence on Ahab leading to the construction of the Baal temple in Samaria (1 Kgs 16:32). Finally, after Jehoiada organises temple matters, Joash is enthroned and the people "after expressing [their] good wishes, turned to feasting, banqueting for many days" (*Ant.* 9.156).⁵⁴ The term for "feasting" (ἐώρτασσαν) appears with non-cultic connotations rarely in *Antiquities* (8.374; 11.189, 203, 220; 12.196; 17.205, 344). Rather, the verb ἐορτάζω is much more commonly associated with cultic festivals, which suggests that the people's feasting here may entail cultic connotations.⁵⁵ While this feasting is going on, Josephus adds that "the city, *however*, was quiet" (*Ant.* 9.156).

6 Athaliah in Josephus

Athaliah is rarely studied in Josephus because most commentators conclude that Josephus mostly follows the biblical narrative with only minor, logical additions.⁵⁶ Yet, it seems to us that this conclusion only comes if the reader already presumes that which Josephus adds. For example, if one assumes that Athaliah was (after twenty-three years) still so foreign that the driving force of her ascension was her loyalty to the Omrides then Josephus' additions of "her brother Joram" (9.140) and the connections to Ahab (9.140, 156) seem small and logical. Indeed, if we assume that she was a Baal worshipper, then the note that she built the Baal temple is to be expected. The lack of attention to Athaliah in Josephus may, therefore, convey as much about our own views of Athaliah as it does of Josephus' views. While Begg is certainly correct that Josephus dramatises the story, in our view, he dramatises Athaliah in particular.⁵⁷ While

53 The closest biblical texts come to an anti-Yahwistic Athaliah is 2 Chr 24:7, an authorial interpolation stating that Athaliah's children had "broken into" the temple (פרצו את־בית האלהים) and used the implements for the בעלים. Framing her children (princes/princesses of Judah) as "breaking into" the temple is evidently polemical and, notably, the accusation is levelled at her children, not Athaliah herself. Though 2 Kgs 8:18, 27//2 Chr 21:6; 22:3–4 decry her influence on her husband and son, they do not explicitly connect it to cultic practices.

54 Begg and Spilsbury, *Antiquities*, 163. In the biblical accounts the people simply "rejoice" (2 Kgs 11:20//2 Chr 23:21).

55 The term is most commonly connected with Succoth but does appear with reference to other festivals. See *Ant.* 8.100, 125, 225, 230; 9.16, 270–271; 11.66, 77, 109, 154–157, 292, 295; 12.98, 324–325; 13.52, 241, 252, 304–305, 372; 14.21.

56 See Ilan, "Josephus on Women," 211.

57 See Begg, "Athaliah's Coup," 209–210.

Josephus changes the male characters' actions only slightly, Athaliah appears much more developed than she is in the biblical texts. Her opposition to the Davidic line and Yhwh is emphasised, fear of her drives Jehoiada's oath-making, she is accompanied by soldiers, her emotional state is mentioned, she is given more speech than in the biblical texts (albeit not direct), and she is said to have built a Baal-temple. Josephus thus actively creates important elements of Athaliah's character where it was absent in his sources. Some of these suggest influence from other literary women that Josephus wrote on. Athaliah's confusion of mind (*Ant.* 9.150) recalls the wife of Jeroboam's reaction to Ahijah's words and her force of soldiers is better attested with later women, especially Alexandra.⁵⁸ Liebowitz notes that Hellenistic society and literature permitted royal women more freedom and recognition than was previously attested.⁵⁹ Indeed, 2 Kgs 11 is uncomfortable with Athaliah's reign, denying her a regnal formula, changing the usual formulaic verb form מלך to the participle מלכת, and ascribing the six year period to the length of time Joash hid in the temple, rather than to her reign. Josephus, however, uses the verb ἐβασίλευσεν and expresses no condemnation of her right to rule, which may suggest that Hellenistic sources more freely acknowledging royal female power influenced Josephus' reception of Athaliah.⁶⁰ This creates a slight tension in his portrayal: on the one hand, Athaliah was foreign, illegitimate, and sinful, but on the other hand, she ruled as a monarch and the terminology of her office is unquestioned. Due to the lack of other extant Athaliah traditions from this period, however, we cannot tell whether Josephus' embellishments to her narrative came primarily from other sources or stemmed from his own creativity. What is evident, is that *Ant.* 9.140–156 plays an important role in the transmission and reception of Athaliah. Josephus' dramatisation may make the Athaliah narrative more palatable and interesting for his audience but in so doing, it further augmented (and in places, created) her reputation as a foreigner, a usurper, a Baal worshipper, and the southern equivalent to Ahab. The fact that modern scholarship views this as a fairly faithful version of the biblical accounts reveals a lot about our acceptance of the polemical portrayal there and how we—as readers—subconsciously fill the gaps left in the biblical texts.

58 Begg, *Later Monarchy*, 177 n. 76 notes the comparison with Jeroboam's wife (*Ant.* 8.273). Parallels with Alexandra are especially interesting, as both were widows, mature women, and monarchs in their own right, though Josephus seems to distance the two; see Scales and Quine, "Athaliah and Alexandra."

59 See Liebowitz, "Ambivalent Attitude," 185–186.

60 See Liebowitz, "Ambivalent Attitude," 192–193; see further comments on Josephus, women, and power in Mayer-Schärtel, *Frauenbild des Josephus*, 59–79.

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