chapter 3

Josephus and Vespasian

To speak of Josephus as a Flavian historian or to describe him as writing under the patronage of the Flavians, ubiquitous in modern scholarship, obscures the existence of three distinct relationships, those between Josephus and Vespasian, Josephus and Titus, and Josephus and Domitian. While there is some value in treating the emperors as a unit, particularly the first two, in order to understand as clearly as possible the place of Josephus in the city of Rome following the suppression of the revolt, it is essential to consider his relationship with each subsequent emperor individually. This will allow me on the one hand to present possible differences in Josephus’ standing and status over time, and on the other hand to establish the continuities in this regard throughout the later period of his life.1

The obvious starting point for this examination is the relationship between Josephus and the founder of the Flavian dynasty, Vespasian. Although the focus of this monograph is on the nature of Josephus’ social circumstances in Rome following the revolt, I will begin my examination with the earliest encounters between Josephus and each of the Flavians in order to establish as comprehensively as possible the parameters of each relationship, an approach that has not yet been taken in Josephan scholarship. In the chapters dealing with Vespasian and Titus I begin, therefore, at the fall of the Judaean fortress of Jotapata when Josephus was taken prisoner by the Romans. In the present chapter I will explore the opportunities for the development of a relationship between Josephus and Vespasian during his incarceration, using more general evidence for the nature of captivity in the Roman world to evaluate Josephus’ narrative claims and to present possible answers to my historical questions. A similar approach will be taken to Josephus’ famous prediction that Vespasian would become emperor of the Roman world by placing that event in the context of the other omina imperii forecasting Vespasian’s accession.

1 The question of continuity or change both in attitude and social circumstances over the period of Josephus’ life in Rome is one that has been hotly debated in Josephan scholarship and lies also at the heart of the present study, particularly with regard to social issues. The main proponents for continuity have been Bilde 1988: 173–206 esp. 179–80; Mason 1988: 445–69; 1991: 26–40, 181–95; 2000: xiv–xx; 2001: xxv–xxxiv; Rajak 1998: 222–46; 2002[1983]: 223–229, although she does suggest increasing distance from the imperial family; for change, Laqueur 1920: 23–36, 258–78; Thackeray 1929: 52; Cohen 2002[1979]: 232–42.
After exploring these foundational stages I will turn my attention to Josephus’ circumstances in Flavian Rome. I will first explore the nature of Vespasian’s involvement in the production of the *Judaean War* by evaluating the historian’s writing activities within the broader cultural programme of Vespasian and against the backdrop of the processes surrounding the circulation of literary texts in the ancient world. The other interactions between the two individuals, most significantly the benefits Josephus received, will be viewed within the context of traditional patron-client relations between the emperor and the public in order to establish the level of intimacy between the Judaean historian and the Flavian emperor. By thoroughly contextualizing Josephus in this way I will be able to support and build on the growing recognition in scholarship of the limitations of this relationship, which challenges the traditional understanding of Josephus as a Flavian court historian or propagandist, a development that I have already outlined in my opening chapter, while also acknowledging the unique position of Josephus that was precipitated by his special service to the Flavians as harbinger of the new regime.

**Josephus as Prisoner-of-War**

I begin then with an examination of the capture and captivity of Josephus by the Romans. Prior to his arrival in Rome in AD 71, this period of two years was the only opportunity for Josephus to develop any kind of relationship with Vespasian, apart from the brief trip to Alexandria after the declaration of Vespasian as emperor in AD 69. Following these events Vespasian was busy consolidating his hold on the empire while Josephus remained with Titus in the Roman camp during the final stages of the Roman suppression of the Judaean revolt. It is important, therefore, that we learn as much as we can about this period.

The most extensive account is found in the *War*. Josephus reports that on the new moon of Panemus, in the thirteenth year of Nero’s principate, the fortified town of Jotapata fell to the besieging Roman army and the inhabitants were routinely slaughtered or taken captive. Although Josephus initially avoided capture by hiding in a cave with forty other individuals, after a complicated sequence of events ending in the mutual suicide of his companions he and the last remaining individual gave themselves up to the Romans. Josephus

---

2 The precise date is unclear. The options appear to be July 1 or 20, AD 67. Thackeray accepts Niese’s calculations for the latter date in the Loeb footnote at *War* 3.339, while Levick 1999: 40, prefers the former.