JOSEPHUS AND NICOLAUS ON THE PHARISEES*

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In this study, I propose to examine Josephus' statements regarding the Pharisees, in order to determine to what extent they are his own original compositions or rather taken over from the writings of Nicolaus of Damascus. The idea is not new or original: Josephus' general, though not exclusive, dependence upon Nicolaus for much of the Hasmonenean and Herodian periods has long been recognized1), and commentators have specifically attributed to Nicolaus some of the passages on the Jewish sects2). However, there appears to be no study of the topic as a whole, most comments on the subject not going beyond generalizations. Moreover, the question takes on special importance insofar as it has been ignored by several recent studies which have sought to explain some of Josephus' statements on the Pharisees, namely those which ascribe them great influence and popularity, solely on the basis of his own needs and politics3). Finally, since the latter studies have sought not only to explain Josephus' statements but also to explain them away, in order to pave the way for a more variegated picture of

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2) R. Marcus, in the Loeb Classical Library (henceforth = LCL) edition of Josephus (vol. VII, London & Cambridge, Mass., 1966, p. 373, note d), goes so far as to observe that "the style of most of the passages on the Jewish sects suggests the hand of Nicolas". Unfortunately, Marcus did not live to write his planned appendix on the subject, or another appendix on Josephus' sources (see ibid., p. 311, note f, and p. 449, note b).

3) See below, n. 23.
Palestinian Judaism, our investigation will perhaps illuminate not only the historiographic question of Josephus' sources and his use of them but also the more strictly historical question of the popularity and influence of first-century Pharisaism.

Before going on to the passages on the Pharisees, I might note that Josephus' two major passages on the Essenes (BJ 2.119-161 and AJ 18.18-22) are generally assumed, this time on the basis of several detailed studies, to be based on written descriptions of the sect4). This state of affairs lends us a certain measure of confidence in our investigation of the possibility that Josephus followed a written source (Nicolaus) with regard to the Pharisees as well.

I Josephus' passages on the Pharisees

1. AJ 13.288: Several signs indicate that this statement is to be attributed to someone other than Josephus:
   a. It is hostile to the Pharisees (they are moved by envy; they are hostile; they are immediately believed by the masses, whenever they speak against someone [see below]). But Josephus (Vita 12) claims to be a Pharisee5).
   b. The someone against whom they speak is "a king or high priest", a distinction which fits neither the Hasmonean period, of which he is writing, nor Josephus' own time, but only that of Herod, as many have noted6).
   c. It contradicts the body of the story which follows, for while it claims the Pharisees were hostile to Hyrcanus, the story shows them loving him, participating in his celebration, enjoying his respect, and indignant when someone insulted him (§§ 289-292).

   On the other hand, AJ 13.288 and 299, on both sides of the pro-Pharisaic story, are very similar to BJ 1.67-68, even to the extent of linguistic parallels: both mention the Jews' envy of Hyrcanus and his sons (although the sons do not figure in either account), due to

4) For literature on the former passage, see Antike Berichte über die Essener, ausgewählt von A. Adam (revised ed. by C. Burchard; Berlin & New York, 1972), pp. 22-23, 41. On the latter passage, see ibid., p. 34, and G. Klinzing, Die Umdeutung des Kultus in der Qumrangemente und im NT (Göttingen, 1971), pp. 48-49.
5) The truth of this claim is not relevant here; what is important is that in his Vita Josephus claims to be a Pharisee and in AJ he frequently expresses his adherence to Jewish tradition, which points to the same claim. See S. J. D. Cohen, Josephus in Galilee and Rome: His Vita and Development as a Historian (Leiden, 1979), pp. 144-151.
6) See, for example, the comment ad loc. in Œuvres complètes de Flavius Josèphe, III (ed. T. Reinach, trans. J. Chamonard; Paris, 1904), p. 177, n. 3.