

William den Hollander, *Josephus, the Emperors, and the City of Rome: From Hostage to Historian (Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity, vol. 86)*, Brill, Leiden – Boston 2014, pp. 410; ISBN 978-90-04-26433-5

The oeuvre and persona of Josephus has in recent decades been the subject of increased interest. This is demonstrated by numerous conferences, whose participants analyse and interpret the historian's literary sources, the historical reliability of his works, his connection with various historical figures and evidence relating to his biography. The last two of these fields trigger a number of questions among scholars, as Josephus' biography is known to us mostly on the basis of the information which he provided himself. Its subjective nature rightly leads to suspicion over its credibility. Questions arise particularly in the debate on Josephus' role and fortunes at the time of the uprising and in the years he spent in Rome. A large number of scholars take Josephus' work as the basis for their belief that after freedom had been secured from Vespasian, he acquired a significant position in Titus' base during the Siege of Jerusalem, which he was also able to preserve in the royal court of Flavius in Rome. Many assign to him the function of court chronicler, who sycophantically extolled the war deeds of Vespasian and Titus in Judea in gratitude for the benefits he had received. But there is also no shortage of scholars who are more guarded in their assessment. The paucity of sources makes it difficult to determine which of these positions is closer to the truth. However, every attempt to do so is worthy of note. The results of one such endeavour, William den Hollander's book on Josephus' fortunes and position in Rome during the rule of the Flavians, were recently published.

The objective of Hollander's research is to depict Josephus against the wide background of the realities of social and political life in Rome at the time. To analyse the sources on Josephus' life in the capital of the Roman Empire from the point of view of his individual fortunes alone, he argues, would isolate him from the social context in which he operated, making it difficult to perceive the links between the historian and his environment. We can therefore better understand the life of Josephus himself, as well as his works, by paying attention to the realities of the era (pp. 18-19). The author's method essentially boils down to comparing Josephus' work with the social and political reality of the Flavians (p. 22).

Contrary to the indications of the book's subtitle, Hollander begins by looking at Josephus' mission to Rome under Nero's rule, devoting the first chapter to this stay (*Yosef Ben Mattaityah in Neronian Rome*, pp. 27-66). The author is particularly interested in the dates when Josephus was in Rome and the contacts he formed there (or is likely to have). The second chapter concerns Josephus' relations with Vespasian (*Josephus and Vespasian*, pp. 68-138). In it, the author discusses at length the status of Josephus in captivity, the question of his role as a prophet foretelling the rule of Vespasian, the role of historian of Roman activities in Judea attributed to him and the problem of the imperial patronage. Most of the next chapter, on Josephus' mutual relations with Titus (*Josephus and Titus*, pp. 139-199), concerns Josephus' role at Titus' side during the siege of Jeru-

salem and their relationship in Rome when Titus was emperor. In the fifth chapter, the author discusses the years of Josephus' life in Rome during the rule of Domitian, last of the Flavians (*Josephus and Domitian*, pp. 200-251). The book's final chapter examines Josephus' relations with the residents of the capital of the empire (*Josephus and the Inhabitants of Rome*, pp. 252-304). Although the Jewish historian's relations with his Roman environment have been analysed by numerous scholars, the conclusions they have drawn have differed greatly. Hollander's contribution to the discussion paints a picture that allowed Josephus to form contacts with the representatives of various groups of Roman society: the senatorial aristocracy, Herod's descendants living in Rome, and the representatives of literary circles. He also identifies a separate problem: Josephus' links with the Jewish community in Rome. Although there is no reference to this in the sources, according to Hollander their existence should not be ruled out entirely: "The possibility that Josephus could regularly be found among his fellow Judaeans, even those of lower social standing, should not, therefore, be dismissed too easily" (p. 303).

In his *Concluding Remarks* (pp. 304-310), the author admits that his analyses do not offer any particular new information on the life of Josephus himself, but expresses his hope that they provide a focus for the subjects that have not been adequately addressed in previous research on his biography (p. 305). Hollander is satisfied at the effects of his studies, as in various specific issues his conclusions essentially agree with the opinions of other scholars (p. 307).

This summary of an account taking up almost 300 pages might discourage a potential reader from Hollander's book. Yet such a reaction would be far wide of the mark. Indeed, the truth is that the analyses of various issues take up too much space in the book, and the investigation of sometimes excessive detailed analysis can be tedious, especially as the resulting conclusions are only hypotheses or speculations of various degrees of probability. However, the book also contains interesting and notable observations and conclusions concerning the position of Josephus at the side of Titus in Judea, in the imperial court, as well as in Rome. These include Hollander's discussion of the role of the Josephus at the walls of Jerusalem, clearly suggesting that he exaggerated the part he played. It was a similar case with his role alongside Titus, as there is no doubt that he did not figure among those advisers with an influence on the decisions taken by the Roman leader (pp. 139-164). The author offers convincing conclusions negating the function of Josephus as official historiographer of the war with the Jewish rebels (pp. 105-120; cf. 180-187, 222-231),¹ as well as questioning the opinion about his especially privileged position in the imperial court (pp. 120-138, 180-187, 203-222).

Although Hollander's book does not bring many new conclusions to what we know about the Roman chapter of Josephus' life, it should certainly be of interest to all scholars dealing with the Flavian era. Its particular strength is that the picture of the epoch it paints is based on a solid familiarity with the sources and the most recent subject literature.

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¹ See also p. 307: "The long entrenched view of Josephus as the official historian of the Flavian regime, despite the general absence of such figures in the imperial courts, a view that has now been firmly set aside in at least Josephan scholarship, appears an even less likely scenario in the light of the limited evidence for Josephus' contact with the imperial court."