



INTRODUCTION

Several years ago an editor at Hendrickson graciously invited me to consider putting together a volume of my scattered essays. I felt honored. Like many academics, I had published papers in places not easily accessible—in now out-of-print *Festschriften* or other essay collections—and I was fairly sure that some of these had not been widely read. But then, as I began gathering the more obscure pieces and reading them through again, it struck me with certain clarity that many of them should remain precisely where they were, buried. This, therefore, is not that originally envisaged book of studies, united only by common authorship.

The only reason to produce a new academic book is to contribute something coherent for scholarly reflection. In the past year I began to think that a number of my published and unpublished papers, on Josephus, Judean society, and Christian origins, had such a unifying theme and so could usefully be brought together in one volume. Driving my research for a number of years has been a set of questions related to historical and literary-interpretative methods, and the relationship between these two. What is history? What does it mean to read Josephus (or any other ancient narrative)? What is the relationship between reading the narrative and reconstructing the past—whether the past behind the story or the past represented by the text's own existence as an artifact itself?

On the historical side of the ledger, one of my primary concerns has been with the appropriateness of our standard categories. Oxford philosopher Gilbert Ryle taught us to think in terms of “category-mistakes”—when we place phenomena in categories that do not fit,¹ and especially when we set out to compare two very different kinds of phenomena as if they belonged in comparable categories: apples and oranges, a platoon and an army, Judaism and Christianity. The more that I have worked on the Eastern Mediterranean under Roman rule, the more I have become convinced that some of our most basic analytical categories, such as “religion,” “Judaism,” and even “gospel,” do not map onto ancient conceptions or language. And if they do not, what are the implications of that disparity for our analysis? What categories should we use instead?

And so, I seemed to have in hand the promise of a coherent contribution: “methods and categories” in the study of Josephus, Judea, and Christian origins. The remainder of this introduction will sketch the book's contents against the background of such a unifying framework.

¹Ryle applied this above all to the notion of the “ghost in the machine”: *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson's, 1949), 15–23.

The book comprises eleven chapters in three parts. Part 1 concerns the interpretation and historical use of Josephus. This is fundamental to everything else because, of course, Josephus is the chief narrative source for the history of Judea in the Herodian and early Roman periods. How can we use him, then, for that history?

Chapter 1, “Josephus as Authority,” broaches the issue directly by exploring what Josephus’s narratives are made of. Through an examination of illustrative episodes, I argue that using Josephus as a simple window into the past is, in effect, a category-mistake. He writes artistic narratives, not manuals of factual nuggets that may simply be appropriated as historical facts. That would be cheating. There is no way around the historian’s arduous work of seeking to understand each kind of evidence contextually, constructing and testing hypotheses, and admitting when the evidence is insufficient to permit proper demonstration of these hypotheses. Crucially, where Josephus is our only source for specific events, personalities, intentions, and motives, which is often the case, we must face the fact that we have no way of testing hypotheses—and so we cannot claim to know. On the other hand, Josephus’s narratives are themselves, as efforts at communication with real audiences, direct evidence for a new set of historical questions concerning the situation of a Judean living in Flavian Rome.

Chapters 2 through 4 develop this approach by examining the following issues more closely: the meaning of Josephus’s narratives for specific audiences in Rome, how he published his works, what he assumed his audience already knew and did not know, and how this communicative context helped to shape his narratives (chapter 2); his pervasive use of irony in communicating with Roman audiences, the importance of that irony for understanding his narratives in their Flavian-Roman context, and the consequences for using Josephus as a historical source (chapter 3); and finally, the general problem of trying to extract historical facts from Josephus’s narratives, with a critical survey of techniques that are often used, based on the method of “contradictory evidence” or reading against the grain (chapter 4).

If part 1 deals with Josephus’s narratives, asking where we might go from there, part 2 asks about a number of first-century historical phenomena. The first chapter here (chapter 5) anchors the section by tackling the basic problem of historical categories for studying Judea and Judeans. There I ask about the language we so easily use in relation to “religion,” and especially “Judaism.” I try to show that, far from debating whether this last noun should be singular or plural, we need to face the fact that the word itself was not used, and that the exceedingly rare *Ioudaismos* appears to mean something else. Chapter 5 is thus a plea to align our categories—for the “emic” sorts of study we normally conduct—with those actually used by the ancients. Once we do that, and see that Judeans understood themselves as an *ethnos* comparable to other nations, it will have profound effects on our understanding of Judean life, Judean-Roman relations, what we call “conversion,” and (though the topic is not developed here) the early Christian predicament in relation to Judean culture. Judean law, tradition, and custom (not “Judaism”) was a very different cultural complex from belief in Jesus.

Chapters 6 through 8 are devoted to two features of the Judean cultural landscape that continue to fascinate scholars: Pharisees and Essenes. Chapters 6 and 7 deal with Josephus's portraits of the Pharisees (as narrative actors and as a philosophical school). On the one hand, I try to show something of how complex and fascinating those narratives are, and how small a supporting role the Pharisees play; then I move to the implications for trying to extract historical information from such a stylized presentation. In the case of the Essenes (chapter 8), I do something similar. But there I felt an obligation to discuss historical implications in conversation with the still-dominant hypothesis that the primary evidence for Josephus's (second-hand) report comes from the Dead Sea Scrolls found near Qumran. That hypothesis provides, I hope, a useful foil for my main task of reading Josephus's Essenes contextually. My argument is that when we read his Essenes in context, paying attention to his structures, language, and themes (something that has not often been attempted), it becomes increasingly difficult to imagine that the group he is describing were the people of the sectarian Dead Sea Scrolls.

Part 3 applies the same concerns for method and categories to Christian origins. Chapter 9 anchors that section with a survey, and attempt at "stratification," of a crucial term for early Christian communities: *euangelion*, usually translated as "gospel" and assumed to be shared by more or less all followers of Jesus. I argue, by contrast, that the evidence is better explained if this was understood to be a proprietary term of Paul's gentile mission (it was truly *his* Announcement). This accounts for Mark's embrace of the term, in sharp contrast to the hesitation of Matthew, Luke, and John. Only with the third generation did the term begin to be used in a proto-catholic sense—with the rougher Pauline edges smoothed off in the process. Chapter 10 applies this broad stratification to an interpretation of Paul's letter to the Romans (with whom he has not yet shared his *euangelion*) as an urgent and earnest letter sent to defend his much-maligned Announcement (Rom 1:16) before the most prominent Judean-Christian community in the world.

Finally, chapter 11 applies the same sorts of methodological concerns as chapters 6–8 to the two-volume master work in the New Testament, Luke-Acts. Again, the question concerns the presentation of the Pharisees and other leadership groups (especially, the Sanhedrin, chief priests, and Sadducees) in that work, and their functions in the narratives. The ultimate problem, again, is how to use this narrative for historical reconstruction.

All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

It remains to thank several parties to this experimental effort. First, I thank two of my doctoral students. Michael Helfield undertook many editorial tasks, including the preparation of a unified bibliography and two of the indexes. Michael's preface clarifies a few formatting issues. William den Hollander prepared the index for ancient persons and places. I am grateful to them both for their valuable help. Second, my long association with Hendrickson Publishers has always been a happy one. But it has never been more pleasant than now, in connection with this volume. Shirley Decker-Lucke, Allan Emery, and Sara Scott

have been particularly encouraging, helpful, and professional. Third, as many of the essays indicate, I have been extremely fortunate to have a wide circle of outstanding scholars as friends, colleagues, and discussion partners. Even those who disagree with me most emphatically have been patient and generous in their criticism over the years. Although most of these essays are no more than five years old, re-reading them now brings home to me how far our exchanges over method have progressed. And they continue in an atmosphere of respectful engagement, as we challenge and learn from each other. I hope that these chapters may serve as useful reference points for those discussions and as stimuli for other students of this endlessly compelling and consequential period.