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Ruler or God? The Demolition of Herod's Eagle

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1. Introduction

One of Revelation's many *cruces interpretum* concerns the book's brief and unspecific statements about the violent deaths of Jesus followers.¹ The circumstances of the persecution that may have led to these deaths remain largely unknown. Scholars have even argued that most of these passages do not refer to oppression by political or economic institutions in Roman Asia in John the prophet's past or present. The passages merely show that John perceived his group as being in conflict with these institutions and that, consequently, he anticipated persecutions in the future.² From a tradition-historical perspective, most of the passages, at least, suggest a context of persecution. The vision about the two beasts in chapter 13 evidently builds on the famous deliverance story of Daniel's three companions in Daniel 3, suggesting an analogous situation for Daniel's companions and Jesus followers.³ The vocabulary

¹ Rev. 1:9; 2:13; 6:9-11; 7:9; 11:7-8; 12:11; 13:7, 10, 15; 14:13; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2 and 20:4. D.E. Aune, *Revelation* (World Biblical Commentary 52A-C; Dallas, Texas/Nashville: Word Books/Thomas Nelson, 1997-1998), vol. 1, lxiv-lxix. I warmly thank Luuk Huitink for his help with references and Emma E. England for correcting my English.

² See especially L.L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 172-4.

³ Daniel 3 has been re-interpreted as a martyrdom story in early Christianity, J.W. van Henten, "Daniel 3 and 6 in Early Christian Literature," in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, eds J.J. Collins & P.W. Flint, 2 vols (Leiden: Brill, 2001), vol. 1, 149-69.

in some of Revelation's persecution passages matches that of Jewish and Christian passages about martyrdom.⁴ The last point that suggests a setting of persecution is that the relevant passages in Revelation are part of a presentation of two world-views that exclude each other: the ideological clash between the world of the ruler and the realm of God in accounts of martyrdom. Thus, on the one hand common vocabulary and motifs suggest an overlap between Revelation and early Jewish and Christian passages about persecution and/or martyrdom; on the other hand, the passages in Revelation keep us largely in the dark about the circumstances of the persecution. There is, for example, no information about the interrogation or execution of Jesus' followers by the Roman or local authorities.

The obvious way out of this *aporia*, which has been chosen by many commentators, is to fill these gaps in Revelation's data by reading the passages with other relevant sources. These include Roman passages about the persecution of Christians, foremost, of course, Pliny's correspondence with Trajan about how to deal with obstinate Christians.⁵ Another helpful corpus in this respect concerns writings of

⁴ *pi/stij/pisto/w* meaning "faithfulness", "remaining faithful" (Rev. 13:10; cf. 1:5; 2:10, 19), *u(pomonh//u(pome/nw* ("endurance," "endure"; Rev. 13:10, cf. 1:9; 2:2, 19; 14:12); *nika/w* etc., triumph over the opponent by death (Rev. 12:11; cf. 3:21; 5:5; 6:2; 17:14). Cf., for example, 4 Macc. 1:11; 6:10; 7:4, 21; 8:2; 9:6, 30; 15:24, 30-1; 16:1, 17, 19, 21-2; 17:2, 7, 15. See about the *pi/stij* of martyrs, van Henten, "The Tradition Historical Background of Rom. 3.25. A Search for Pagan and Jewish Parallels, in *From Jesus to John: Essays on Jesus and New Testament Christology in Honour of Marinus de Jonge*, ed. M.C. de Boer (JSNTSup; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

⁵ There is a consensus now that Domitian did not organize a persecution of Christians. See for relevant passages P. Guyot and R. Klein, *Das frühe Christentum bis zum Ende der Verfolgungen: eine Dokumentation* (Texte zur Forschung 60; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft), vol. 1, 24-37. Thompson analyses the Roman sources about Domitian, including the character assassination by

martyrdom from areas that are important in Revelation, such as the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* and the *Martyrdom of Pionius* both located in Smyrna.⁶ I would like to contribute by calling attention to an episode that to my knowledge so far has not been discussed in connection with Revelation's passages about the violent deaths of Jesus' followers.

Josephus' writings include two versions of the removal and destruction of Herod the Great's golden eagle on the Jerusalem temple. A discussion of the perpetrators' motivations and the ruler's response to the act may put the persecution passages in Revelation in a different light. The fact that Revelation has become part of the Christian canon and Josephus has remained within Judaism, although there was a trend among Christian readers to consider him the "fifth evangelist," should not bother us too much. Recent studies about the "parting of the ways" demonstrate, if anything, that there was continuity and interaction between Judaism and Christianity

historians who shared negative opinions of the senatorial elite or created propaganda for Domitian's successors. He concludes that there is no basis for claiming that Domitian persecuted Christians. *Book of Revelation*, 95-115. See also Aune, *Revelation*, vol. 1, lxvi-ix.

⁶ Scholars have drawn very different conclusions on the basis of these writings concerning the participation of Jews in the persecution and execution of Christians. C.J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting* (JSNTSup 11 Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989 2nd ed.), 8-11, argues that Rev. 2:9, 3:9; *Mart. Pol.* 13; 21; *Act. Pion.* 4.14-5 concern persecutions of Christians by Jews. E.L. Gibson, "The Jews and Christians in the Martyrdom of Polycarp: Entangled or Parted Ways?," in *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages*, ed. A.H. Becker and A.Y. Reed (Tübingen: Mohr, 2003), 145-58, cannot accept Hemer's view and argues that the passages about the Jewish participation in the persecution of Christians in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* result from an editorial intervention intended to criticize Judaizing Christians. See also her "Jewish Antagonism or Christian Polemic: The Case of the Martyrdom of Pionius," *Journal of early Christian Studies* 9 (2001) 339-58.

in the first centuries. At first glance, Josephus' eagle passages and the hints to persecution in Revelation appear very different, but a closer look may reveal intriguing similarities. The destruction of Herod's eagle concerns a famous case of civil disobedience, but Josephus' reports correspond in narrative form and content to accounts of martyrdom. The eagle episode also shows how a clash between the authorities of God and the ruler creates a perceived crisis for the believers. Consequently, this could lead to rebellious acts and the execution of the perpetrators, which may put the lack of references to persecution situations in a new light. In addition, Josephus' reports are chronologically close to Revelation, being probably not more than a few decades older than John the prophet's work.⁷ Successively my contribution will offer an introduction to the eagle episodes in *The Jewish War* and *The Jewish Antiquities*, a translation of the version in the *Antiquities*, discussions of the symbolic meaning of the eagle as well as the perpetrators' motivations for its demolition, and a conclusion that briefly determines the relevance of the episode for the interpretation of Revelation's persecution passages.

2. Josephus' Golden Eagle episode (*B.J.* 1.648-55; 2.5-7; *A.J.* 17.148-64)

There are two versions of the destruction of the golden eagle episode in Josephus: *B.J.* 1.648-55 with 2.5-7 and *A.J.* 17.148-64. The narrative context of the larger eagle section, *The Jewish War* 1.431-673, focuses upon the disastrous history of Herod's family including the execution of Mariamme's sons Alexander and Aristoboulos as

⁷ For surveys of the dates of Revelation and Josephus' works see Aune, *Revelation*, vol. 1, lvi-lxx, and P. Bilde, *Flavius Josephus between Jerusalem and Rome: His Life, his Works and their Importance* (JSPSup 2; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988). 79; 103-6; 113.

well as Antipater.⁸ The parallel narrative in *Antiquities* 16 and 17 intermingles the events of Herod's rule with the history of his family. Yet, the immediate context of the golden eagle episode is rather similar in both works. Josephus situates the destruction of the golden eagle on top of the entrance to the temple's sanctuary at the end of Herod's life, when he had become seriously ill (*B.J.* 1.645, 647, 656-8; *A.J.* 17.146-7, 168-173).⁹ In fact, Herod didn't recover from this illness and died soon afterwards. Both narratives refer to Herod's seventieth year (*B.J.* 1.647: "for he was about seventy;" *A.J.* 17.148: "for he was around his seventieth year").¹⁰ Josephus' casual remark in *War* 1.656 that "the inspired persons" (του_j ε0πιqεια/zontaj) considered this illness to be his punishment for the execution of the sages who instigated the destruction of the eagle, is missing in the *Antiquities*. Here, however, the sages themselves suggest, in their encouragement of the youths, that Herod suffered more than other humans because of his construction works that violated the ancestral laws (17.150). The chain of events between the eagle incident and Herod's death is basically the same in both works (*B.J.* 1.656-673; *A.J.* 17.164-199),¹¹ and the

⁸ The composition of *The Jewish War* highlights Herod's misfortune in the context of the disastrous fate of his sons (*B.J.* 1.622, 646-647, 665; *A.J.* 17.94-95).

⁹ Cf. no/soj in *B.J.* 1.649, 654, 656; *A.J.* 17.146, 150 (twice), 168.

¹⁰ The translations of Josephus' *Antiquities* are my own unless otherwise stated.

¹¹ This chain of events is:

- Substitution of Matthias as high priest by Joazar (missing in *B.J.*; *A.J.* 17.164-167)
- Treatment of illness (*B.J.* 1.656-658; *A.J.* 17.168-173)
- Hippodrome episode (*B.J.* 1.659-660, 666; *A.J.* 17.173b-181, 193)
- Letter from Caesar about the execution of Acme and the verdict for Antipater (*B.J.* 1.661; *A.J.* 17.182-183)
- Herod's suicide attempt and Antipater's execution (*B.J.* 1.662-664; *A.J.* 17.183-187)

golden eagle episode concerns Herod's last public performance in both narratives.

Josephus offers a precise date for the demolition of the eagle, because *A.J.* 17.167

informs us that there was an eclipse of the moon in the night after the youngsters were burned. This eclipse has been calculated for March 12-13 4 B.C.E.¹²

2.1. Translation of Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 17.156-164

(148) Because he had given up hope of recovering--for he was around his seventieth year--, he became enraged and handled everything¹³ with pure anger and bitterness.

The reason was his conviction that he was despised and that the (Jewish) people took pleasure in his misfortune, especially because some of the more highly respected persons among the people rebelled against him for the following reason. (149) Judas, the son of Sariphaeus, and Mattathias, the son of Margalothus, were the most erudite interpreters of the ancestral laws among the Jews, unequalled to any others, and much beloved by the people as well because of their educating the young. All who were pursuing the acquisition of virtue spent day after day with them. (150) When these (interpreters) found out that there was no remedy to cure the king's illness, they stirred up the young--because of all the constructions carried out by the king contrary to ancestral law--to knock these down and carry away prizes for their piety in accordance with the laws. For, all these disasters, which he experienced to a larger

- Herod's final testament (*B.J.* 1.664; *A.J.* 17.188-190)

- Herod's death and funeral (*B.J.* 1.665-673; *A.J.* 17.191-199).

¹² Michel and Bauernfeind, *Flavius Josephus*, vol. 1, 426; Schalit, *König Herodes*, 638

¹³ Perhaps "everyone" with Hudson's conjecture, see B. Niese, *Flavii Iosephi Opera edidit et apparatv critico instrvxit*, 7 vols, (Berlin: Weidmann: 1885-1895), vol. 4, 96.

degree than humans customary do, certainly happened to him because of his boldness¹⁴ in constructing these things against the law's prohibition. This was especially true of his illness. (151) For, Herod had been engaged in certain projects that were contrary to the law, because of which, in fact, Judas and Matthias with their followers brought accusations against him. For, the king had constructed on top of the sanctuary's great entrance an ornament and a costly one indeed, namely a great golden eagle. But the law forbids those who intend to live in accordance with it to engage in the construction of statues as well as to become involved in setting up images of any living creatures in public. (152) Therefore, the sages ordered (them) to tear down the eagle. For, (they said), even if they ran the risk of getting the death penalty that would be reserved for them, the virtue gained by death would appear much more beneficial than the pleasure of life for those about to die for the safety and the preservation of their ancestral customs. For, they would arrange an eternal glory of receiving praise: they would leave behind their lives as an ever-lasting memory for being praised by both those who are now alive and by people in the future. (153) Moreover, even for those who live without taking risks the misfortune is unavoidable, with the result that it is noble for those who strive for virtue to depart from life with praise and honor by accepting their¹⁵ death sentence. (154) For, death with an eye on a noble cause, of which the suitor is danger, brings great comfort. And, at the same time, it secures for their sons and all other relatives who survive, men and women, for them too it secures a benefit of glory that comes from them. (155) With such words, they stirred up the youngsters. And when a rumor reached them saying that the king had died, the sages also supported this. At midday, they climbed up, pulled the eagle

¹⁴ With Greek MSS M and A as well as Latin MSS, Niese, *Flavii Iosephi*, vol. 4, 97.

¹⁵ With the *editio princeps* MSS read "his death sentence," Niese, *Flavii Iosephi*, vol. 4, 97.

down and cut it to pieces with axes while many were lingering in the temple. (156) Because the attempt was reported to him, the king's commander suspected that their true intention was of greater significance than what they (actually) succeeded in doing. He arrived with a large force, sufficient to withstand the crowd that was attempting to destroy the ornament. He attacked them when they did not expect it. As a crowd loves to do, they had undertaken this bold act more out of a whimsical idea than by cautious foresight, disorganized and without anticipation of anything that would help them. (157) He captured no less than forty of the youngsters, who persevered courageously during his attack, while the rest of the crowd started to flee. He also caught the instigators of the bold act, Judas and Mathias, who considered it shameful to flee his onslaught. Next, he brought them before the king. (158) When they came before the king and he asked whether they had been so bold to pull down his ornament, they said: "Yes, our thoughts have been thought through and what we did was done with excellence which is most suitable for men. For, we have assisted in a cause, which was entrusted to us because the divinity deemed us worthy, and which was (159) taken care of in obedience to the law. It is not at all surprising if we consider the preservation of the laws, which Moses left behind in writing, following the council and the instruction of the divinity, to be more important than your decrees. We will gladly endure death and every punishment you lay upon us, for it is not because of unrighteous deeds but out of love of piety that we are bound to have thorough knowledge of what living with it means. (160) And they all said these things, and the boldness of their speech was in no way inferior to the confidence they had when they did not refrain from carrying out their action. And the king had them bound and sent them off to Jericho. He summoned the Jewish leading authorities, and (161) when they arrived, convened an assembly in the amphitheatre. Then, while he

was lying down on a couch because of his incapacity to stand, he enumerated all of his benefactions¹⁶ that had taken place concerning them, (162) namely the great cost that he provided for the construction of the temple, while the descendants of Hasmonaeus had not been able to arrange such a magnificent thing in God's honor in the hundred and twenty-five years they ruled; (163) he also had adorned it with remarkable ornaments by which he had come to hope that he had left a memorial to himself and that after his death a favorable reputation would be left. Finally, he began to shout that not only had they not abstained from acting outrageously against him while he was still alive, but also that because of their outrageous action during daylight and for the whole crowd to see they had taken hold of what had been erected by him and had destroyed it by their outrageous behavior. They pretended this was directed against him, but in fact, should someone examine what had happened, they were committing sacrilege. (164) But because of his cruelty and their fear that in his outrage he would even exact vengeance on them, those present said that these things had been done without their approval, but also that it seemed to them that they should not go unpunished. So he acted to these others rather indulgently. But he relieved Mathias from his office as high priest on the ground that he had been partly responsible for these things, and appointed his wife's brother Joazar as high priest.

2.2. Composition and content

The composition of *Jewish Antiquities* 17.148-164 can be summarized as follows:

- I §§ 148-9: Introduction, characterization of Herod and both sages
- II § 150: The sages' incitement and their motivation

¹⁶ With the Epitome MS E. Most readings of the MSS do not make sense. Hudson's conjecture $\tau\omega\sim\eta$ a)gwni $\omega\sim\eta$ does and may be translated by "his struggles."

- III § 151: Josephus' explanation, the case of the golden eagle
- IV §§ 152-154: Continuation of the sages' incitement, noble death rhetoric
- V § 155: Description of the destruction of the eagle
- VI §§ 156-157: Counter actions by the king's commander
- VII §§ 158-160: Trial scene: opposition of the king's laws and God's laws
- VIII §§ 160-164: Assembly in Jericho: Herod's apology and the accusation of the 'rebels'
- IX § 164: Conclusion, with substitution of the high priest.

The introduction of the golden eagle episode in the *Antiquities* informs the reader at the start that Herod had turned into a cruel tyrant because of his incurable illness.

Josephus immediately characterizes Herod in this section with the help of stereotypes of wicked tyrants (below). On the other hand, the instigators of the rebellion against him (εὐπανε/σθησαν αὐ)τῷ, 17.148), Judas son of Sariphaeus and Mattathias son of Margalothus,¹⁷ are introduced in highly positive terms: they were part of the most respected members of the Jewish people (τῶν εὐδοκίμωνων τῶν Ἰουδαίων, 148), they were the most erudite interpreters of the ancestral laws of their time, and they were beloved by the people because of their role as the youths' educators (149; cf. *B.J.* 1.649). Josephus' introduction of this section of the narrative suggests, therefore, that a clash occurred between highly respected representatives of the Jewish people and their brutal tyrant.

¹⁷ The names vary in the textual traditions, Niese, *Flavii Iosephi Opera*, vol. 4, 96. A. Schalit, *König Herodes: Der Mann und Sein Werk* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001; 2nd ed.), 638, supposes that the two sages were Pharisees (p. 737), although this is mentioned neither in *The Jewish War* nor in the *Antiquities*.

Josephus suggests, in line with his setting of the episode, that Herod's incurable illness triggered the rebellion (17.150, 155; cf. *B.J.* 1.649, 651). That would imply strategic planning by the perpetrators, who waited for a good opportunity after the eagle was put on the entrance of the sanctuary, in their opinion (see below), a violation of the second commandment.¹⁸ Apparently, serious illness of the ruler offered such an opportunity. Suetonius' description of Augustus' final day implies that Augustus took his death lightly and played with it by using theatrical *topoi*, but Suetonius also suggests that the emperor frequently inquired whether the rumors of his illness were causing popular disturbances.¹⁹ The sages' incitement of the youths in Josephus' *Antiquities* is motivated by Herod's transgressions of the laws in his building activities (17.150) and Josephus presents the case of the golden eagle as one of these transgressions (151). In fact, the eagle is the only offensive building activity by Herod explicitly mentioned in the narrative. The continuation of the youths' exhortation in 152-154 is full of noble death rhetoric and focuses on the rewards for those who would execute the eagle's destruction.

The description of the eagle's demolition in 155 is rather brief, but Josephus presents this provocation of Herod as such a risky undertaking that it almost turns into a suicide attempt. The deed was executed at midday, when many people were present in the temple. The king's commander counters the act efficiently (156-157) with the arrest of forty perpetrators as well as the two instigators, Judas and Matthias. The remark in the margin that associates these law-abiding 'rebels' with the stupid behavior of a crowd in 156 deconstructs their rather positive image elsewhere in the story (below). The arrest leads up to a brief trial scene (158-160) including a dialogue

¹⁸ Unfortunately, Josephus does not inform us when the eagle was constructed.

¹⁹ Suetonius, *Aug.* 99.

between Herod and the anonymous perpetrators that focuses almost entirely on the response of the perpetrators.²⁰ The boys confess their deed,²¹ elaborately explaining it in a way that recalls the Maccabean martyrs' refusal to give in to Antiochus IV.²² They explain to Herod that their deed was ordered by God and that God's laws overruled the king's decrees.

The assembly that follows the interrogation was held in the theatre in Jericho, or perhaps the amphitheatre (160-164).²³ During this, Herod in his anger points out the uniqueness of his temple restoration project and accuses those arrested of having committed sacrilege. The concluding paragraph (164) is brief; it forms an *inclusio* with the beginning of the eagle narrative by referring once again to Herod's tyrannical

²⁰ It is strange that neither in *The Jewish War* nor in *The Antiquities* do the two sages appear as Herod's opponents in this dialogue.

²¹ The version in *The Jewish War* states this, while the *Antiquities* version elaborates quoting the youth's statement (*B.J.* 1.653; *A.J.* 17.158-159). Confessions in martyr texts: G. Buschmann, *Martyrium Polycarpi - Eine formkritische Studie: Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach der Entstehung der Gattung Märtyrerakte* (BZNW 70; Berlin-New York: 1994), 113-9, 193-5, 205, 229-32, 251-3; J.W. van Henten, *The Maccabean Martyrs as Saviours of the Jewish People: A Study of 2 and 4 Maccabees* (JSJSup 57; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 89-90; 237-8.

²² See also *B.J.* 1.652-653. Cf. 2 Macc. 6:19; 7:2, 30; 4 Macc. 5; 8:1-9:9; 12:1-19

²³ The Greek MSS literally mention "the same theatre" as the assembly's location. Naber's conjecture implies that it took place in the amphitheatre, which is mentioned in *A.J.* 17.194. Neither building has been excavated in Jericho, but E. Netzer, *Die Paläste der Hasmonäer und Herodes' des Grossen* (Mainz am Rhein: von Zabern, 1999), 56-59, argues that the hippodrome south of Tell es-Samarat was, in fact, a multifunctional building, which also functioned as a theatre. The *War* does not specify the location of the meeting.

character. The participants in the assembly²⁴ clearly disconnect themselves from the perpetrators out of fear of being executed as well. They get away with this, but the high priest Matthias was replaced because he was suspected of being a member of the rebellious group.

2.3. Opposition of ruler and ‘rebels’

The *Antiquities* narrative of the episode consistently presents a tyrannical Herod and the two sages with their youthful followers as each other’s opposites. It could be that Josephus’ sources already indicated that Herod behaved as a tyrant during the last phase of his life, alternatively, Josephus himself is responsible for a shift in Herod’s image, perhaps adapting his presentation of Herod to the conventional themes of a noble death story. Either way, at the end of his life, after he became seriously ill, Herod is depicted as a tyrant. Moments of severe anger occur earlier in both Herod narratives,²⁵ but during most of his life according to *The Jewish War* as well as the *Antiquities* the king is capable of controlling, concealing or ending his anger (e.g. *B.J.* 1.320, 484; *A.J.* 17.50, 83). The beginning of the golden eagle episode, however, strongly suggests that Herod had become a tyrant. A cluster of references constructs Herod as a wicked tyrant, whose behavior is determined by rage, cruelty, bitterness as well as the belief the people held him in contempt.²⁶ The emphasis on Herod as a

²⁴ Josephus is not at all explicit about Herod’s counterpart in this section, but context and content imply that οἱ ἄρχιερεῖς of 17.164 most probably refers to the Jewish officials mentioned in 17.160.

²⁵ *B.J.* 1.212, 214, 252, 320, 484, 507, 526, 565, 571, 654-655; *A.J.* 14.180, 436; 15.83, 211, 214, 229; 16.90, 199-200, 262, 366; 17. 50, 69, 83, 191.

²⁶ H. Berve, *Die Tyrannis bei den Griechen* (2 vols; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967), 352-509 (see also Index sv *Tyrannenpersönlichkeit*, vol. 2 771-2); C. Mossé, *La tyrannie dans*

tyrant at the beginning of the section returns at the end with references to Herod's rage and cruelty (17.164). The relevant vocabulary can be listed as follows:

- Rage: 148 (e0chgri/wsen); 164 (e0cagriw&saj)²⁷
- Anger: 148 (o0rgh=| |)
- Bitterness: 148 (pikri/a|)²⁸
- The belief he was held in contempt by the people: 148 (do/ca tou= katafronei=sqai kai\ h9donh|= ta_j tu/xaj au0tou= to\ elqnoj fe/rein)
- Cruelty: 164 (w)mo/thta).²⁹

Elsewhere in Josephus there are incidental passages that might associate Herod with stereotypes of evil tyrants, but they are far less explicit and do not present as consistent a picture, as the golden eagle episode and Herod's final days.³⁰ The image of Herod as a tyrant is continued in the narrative about his final period including his unbelievably cruel plan for a mass execution in the Jericho hippodrome after his

la Grèce antique (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1969), 141-5. About Antiochus IV in 4 Maccabees: van Henten, *Maccabean Martyrs*, 258-67.

²⁷ Similar vocabulary concerns Alexandra (*A.J.* 15.44), rebels (17.216), Athronges and his group (17.282), Tiberius (18.226-227), Gaius (19.27), and Sentius Saturninus' tirade against tyrants (19.175).

²⁸ Herod's bitterness is referred to a few times elsewhere, for example concerning Herod's taxes (*B.J.* 1.494; 2.87; *A.J.* 16.235; cf. 17.205).

²⁹ A few other rulers are described in Josephus' works with a similar vocabulary: *B.J.* 1.97 about Alexander Jannaeus' bitterness and cruelty in connection with his crucifixion of 800 Jews; *A.J.* 18.282 about Gaius' anger and bitterness (ei0 d 0 e0kpikranqei\j Ga/ioj ei0j e0me\ tre/yei to\ a)nh/keston th~j o0rgh~j); also *A.J.* 19.130.

³⁰ *B.J.* 1.473, 526 (concerning Alexander and Aristoboulos, scheming of Antipater); *A.J.* 16.363 (during the accusation of Alexander and Aristoboulos, me/gista qumou= kai\ a)gri0&thtoij e0nedi/dou shmei=a).

death.³¹ Furthermore, Josephus' own comments in his report of the king's death (17.190-192) include the following sentence: "He was a cruel man for everybody alike (w)mo\j ei0j pa/ntaj o9moi/wj), being smaller than his anger and bigger than his justice, though he was gifted with a good fortune, which was better than anybody else's (17.191)."

Another motif that links the eagle story to martyrdom is Herod's suspicion that the people held him in contempt (*A.J.* 17.148). Josephus mentions other cases of rulers held in contempt, but they are usually held in contempt by individuals or small groups.³² The anonymous father who kills his seven sons as well as his wife reproaches Herod because of the king's humble descent or lowness of spirit (tapeino/thj, *B.J.* 1.311-313; and more explicitly *A.J.* 14.429-430). In the eagle episode, however, Herod apparently fears that the entire Jewish people held him in contempt, which reminds one of martyrdom stories. In the martyrdom of the Maccabean mother and her seven sons Antiochus IV suspects that he is being held in contempt by the mother and her only remaining son when he tries to persuade his son to give in to the Greek way of life by agreeing to eat pig meat (2 Macc. 7:24-31; cf. 4 Macc. 12:1-19).³³ The distinction between the languages used in 2 Macc. 7 emphasizes the ethnic-cultural dimension of the antithesis of the wicked king and the martyrs with their conflicting views about the proper way of life—Greek or Jewish.

³¹ Cf. Josephus' introduction of the plan in *A.J.* 17.173 (me/laina/ te xolh_ au)to_n h3|rei e)pi\ pa~sin e0cagriai/nousa).

³² See Syllaesus' contempt for Herod (*B.J.* 1.633) or Saul being held in contempt by wicked persons (*A.J.* 6.67). Cf. Daniel's contempt for Darius' commandments (*A.J.* 10.255), Ahasverus' response to Vashti's refusal (11.193-194), Sabinus' contempt for Gaius mentioned in *A.J.* 19.261 and the contempt for human and divine matters because of the corruption of power in *A.J.* 6.262-268.

³³ Van Henten, *Maccabean Martyrs*, 105-8.

The martyrs speak among themselves in their ancestral language, perhaps Hebrew, but they talk to the king in Greek, his language. Antiochus' seduction of the youngest son fails, and the boy announces the king's punishment in harsh terms (2 Macc. 7:31; cf. 4 Macc. 12:11-14). Although the contempt for the ruler in Josephus is not elaborated as in 2 and 4 Maccabees, the motif in *A.J.* 17.148 again compares Herod with wicked tyrants.

The Jewish War indicates a significant shift in Herod's pattern of behavior at the time of the eagle incident in a different way. In the introduction to the story in *War* Josephus uses the phrase *di 0 u(perbo1h/n*, highlighting Herod's excessive anger because of the youths' statements during the interrogation: "Because of his excessive anger about these responses he got the better of his illness and started an assembly. He denounced the men at great length as sacrilegious because, by using the law as a pretext, they were attempting something more ambitious, and he insisted that they be punished for sacrilege." (1.654, trans. Forte/Sievers).³⁴ The image of Herod as a tyrant becomes very explicit in a flashback in *The Jewish War* about the Jewish petitioners to Augustus who pleaded for Archelaus' deposition. They characterize the former king as "the most cruel tyrant ever" (*tw~n pw&pote turannhsa&ntwn w)mo/taton e0nhnoxe/nai tu/rannon*, *B.J.* 2.84) and Archelaus as "the son of such a tyrant" (*to\n thlikou/tou tura/nnou pai=da*, 2.88).

In the *Antiquities*, Josephus calls the two sages who instigate the destruction of the eagle interpreters of the ancestral laws (*e0chghtai\ tw~n patri/wn no/mwn*,

³⁴ *B.J.* 2.87 also associates Herod with tyranny. I warmly thank Antony Forte and Joseph Sievers, co-contributors to the Brill Josephus project, for allowing me to use their still unpublished translation of *Jewish War* book 1.

A.J. 17.149).³⁵ The noun *e0chghtai/* is missing in the *Jewish War*,³⁶ which consistently uses *sofisth/j* in its references to Judas and Matthias (1.648, 650, 655, 656; also A.J. 17.152, 155).³⁷ *Sofisth/j* is mostly used to indicate important sages or heads of a religious and/or political school.³⁸ Sometimes the word is pejorative, meaning “sophist, charlatan, demagogue” (e.g. *C. Ap.* 2.236).³⁹ In contrast, Josephus’ introduction characterizes Herod as a tyrant and the two sages as highly respected and learned members of the people. This is underpinned by semantic fields that induce readers to interpret Herod and the sages with their followers as each other’s opposite. The sages and/or their followers strive for virtue (*a)reth/*, A.J. 17.149, 152, 158) and piety (*(eu)se/beia*, 17.150; cf. 159), Herod obviously not. The sages educate the young to live a virtuous life (17.149; cf. 2 Macc. 6:24-28), and not only to remain faithful to the laws, but also to consider their cause as being entrusted to them by God

³⁵ K.H. Rengstorff, *A Complete Concordance to Flavius Josephus* (4 vols; Leiden: Brill, 1973-1983), vol. II s.v. 122: “expounder, interpreter,” the noun occurs three times in Josephus, only in the *Antiquities* and always referring to the two sages (17.147, 214, 216). The noun *e0ch/ghsi j* occurs more frequently and can indicate dream interpretation (A.J. 2.69, 75, 77, 93) or explanation of laws (A.J. 11.192).

³⁶ Once the *Jewish War* uses the verb *e)chge/omai* in the eagle episode in connection with the sages (1.649). See also *B.J.* 2.113 and A.J. 17.347 about dream interpretation and A.J. 18.81 (laws of Moses).

³⁷ Cf. *B.J.* 2.10, 118, 433, 445.

³⁸ O. Michel & O. Bauernfeind, *Flavius Josephus De bello judaico: der jüdische Krieg Griechisch und Deutsch* (vols 1-3.2; München: Kösel-Verlag, 1962-1969), vol. I, 425. Rengstorff, *Concordance*, s.v. *sofisth/j*, vol. 4, 28-29.

³⁹ *C. Ap.* 2.236: “For all that, the Lysimachuses and Molons and other writers of that class, reprobate sophists and deceivers of youth (*a)doki/moi sofistai/*, *meiraki/wn a)patew~nej ...*” (trans. Thackeray).

(*tou= te ga_r qei/ou th=| a0ciw&sei pepisteume/na*, 158). Herod's tyrannical behavior results in bold transgressions of the Jewish laws: "... For, it certainly was because of his boldness (*to/lma*) to construct these things against the law's prohibition ..." (17.150). In fact, Herod, the sages, and their group are also contrasted with each other in their attitude towards the ancestral laws. In their statement to Herod in the interrogation the youths say: "It is not at all surprising if we consider the preservation of the laws, which Moses has left behind in writing after the council, and the instruction of the divinity to be more important than your decrees." (A.J. 17.159).⁴⁰ Faithfulness to the ancestral laws (*oi9 pa/trioi no/moi*) is highlighted in the story (A.J. 17.149, 150, 151, 152 and 159; just once in the parallel narrative, B.J. 1.653). The opposition of Jewish ancestral laws, identical with the laws of Moses, and Herod's decrees (*do/gmata*) in 17.159 even suggests that Herod treated his subjects as a foreign ruler.⁴¹ This contrast echoes the stories in Daniel 3 and 6 as well as the martyr stories in 2 and 4 Maccabees (cf. 2 Macc. 7:30), which oppose the foreign ruler's laws and God's laws or authority.⁴²

The opposition of Herod and the sages with their followers, therefore, appears to be an important narrative thread. Yet, in the margin Josephus seems to deconstruct this presentation of the antagonists with small remarks. The sages and the perpetrators are both held responsible for a bold act, at least from the perspective of the king's

⁴⁰ In the parallel narrative in *The Jewish War* the youths explicitly refer to *o9 patri/oj nomo/j*: "First [the king] asked whether they had dared to cut down the golden eagle. They admitted to it. When (he asked) who it was who ordered this, they responded that their ancestral law (did)." (B.J. 1.653; trans. Forte/Sievers).

⁴¹ Cf. B.J. 2.86.

⁴² Van Henten, *Maccabean Martyrs*, 10-4.

representative⁴³ who arrested them: “He attacked them when they did not expect it. As a crowd loves to do *they had undertaken this bold act* (tetolmhko/sin) more out of a whimsical idea than by cautious foresight ... He also caught *the instigators of the bold act* (tou\j ei)shgha\j tou= tolmh/matoj), Judas and Matthias, who considered it shameful to flee his onslaught.” (17.156-157, my emphasis). The Greek words indicating these bold acts, toлма/w and to/лhma (cf. toлма/w in 17.158 and to/лма in 17.160) are ambiguous. In the golden eagle section to/лма has a negative meaning at least once; in 17.150 it refers to Herod’s bold transgression of the laws by his building activities (above). The parallel narrative in *The Jewish War* uses to/лма or related phrases only once in 1.653 in the youths’ dialogue with Herod (cf. *A.J.* 17.158). Another note in the margin that runs counter to the youths’ positive image is that during their arrest they were disorganized and behaved stupidly, in the manner typical of a crowd (17.156). Finally, the continuation of the narrative, dealing with Archelaus’ reign, associates the two sages openly with rebellion (stasia/zw, 17.214-216), which obviously matches Herod’s view of the case as presented by the narrative.⁴⁴

⁴³ O. Michel and O. Bauernfeind, *Flavius Josephus De bello judaico*, vol. I, 425, assume that the title o(strathgo/j tou~ basile/wj in 17.156 (cf. 17.209-210, probably referring to the same officer) refers to the manager of the temple, responsible for the order in the temple area, and one rank below the high priest (Acts 4:1; 5:24). W. Otto, “Herodes,” *PRE* 8 Suppl. 2, 1-158, esp. c. 59-60, and Schalit, *König Herodes*, 218, argue that this officer was the representative of the king in the city, who controlled the administration of a toparchy and was also responsible for maintaining the order. The king’s strathgo/j, in Jerusalem, may also have been the governor of Judaea and perhaps Idumaea.

⁴⁴ The introduction of the version in *The Jewish War* includes the noun e0pana/stasij “insurrection” (1.648), *LSJ* 608 sv I,3, the parallel version the related verb e0pani/stamai “rise up against” (*A.J.* 17.148).

3. The Eagle as *pièce de résistance*

The big golden eagle was apparently the *pièce de résistance* for the sages and their followers (*A.J.* 17.151, 206; *B.J.* 1.650- 653; 2.6). Why did sages and followers object to the eagle so much that they decided to risk their lives by taking it away? One motive is explicit in Josephus' report: the eagle was considered a violation of the second commandment, and, therefore, a severe transgression of Jewish law. Two other motives, not explicit in the text, may have been a factor as well, namely the eagle's location and its symbolic meaning.

Josephus calls the eagle an *ἀνάθημα* (*A.J.* 17.151), which can mean something set up in a temple as a votive-offering or an ornament.⁴⁵ The eagle as a votive-offering is highly improbable in a Jewish context. It is also improbable that the eagle was just for decoration, because it was located at a prominent place and was a well-known symbol of power in various contexts, not only in the Greco-Roman world,⁴⁶ but also in the Ancient Near East. Interpreting the eagle as a symbol of loyalty to Rome is, therefore, far from obvious. Pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions from the biblical times onward attest the veneration of the eagle deity *nsr/nswr* throughout

⁴⁵ *LSJ* sv 105; Rengstorf, *Concordance*, s.v. ἀνάθημα, vol. 1, 91, does not offer the meaning "ornament."

⁴⁶ Eagles also appear in Greek religious representations: Heracles' statue in his temple in Olympia, for example, had a scepter in the left hand of the god, ornamented with every kind of metal, and an eagle sitting on the scepter (Pausanias 5.11.1). Two pillars before the sanctuary of Zeus on Mount Lycaeus in Arcadia had gilded eagles on them (Pausanias 8.38.7). See for Roman references below.

the Arabic peninsula.⁴⁷ The eagle was an important astral and solar symbol in the Ancient Near East,⁴⁸ and visual traditions of this eagle symbolism have been incorporated in Jewish art. In Late Antiquity, Jews in the Galilee and the Golan must have been familiar, for example, with eagles as decoration on the lintel above synagogue entrances or on Torah shrines or arches.⁴⁹ *Sarcophagi* from Beth Shearim as well as the arch of the Beth Shearim mausoleum show carved eagles.⁵⁰ Yet, there are two complications for using these archaeological remains to establish the symbolic meaning of the eagle in Herod's temple. Not only are all of these sources late, with the exception of a Herodian type of coin (below): they date from the third century C.E. onwards, but the content of the eagle's symbolic meaning is not very obvious. Goodenough's extensive discussion of the eagle motif in Jewish art builds on non-Jewish parallels like the eagle as *psychopompus*, i.e. transporter of souls of the deceased to heaven. He suggests three different symbolic meanings for the eagle in Jewish contexts: a symbol of the king on his throne, a symbol of God or God's

⁴⁷ B. Becking "Eagle," *DDD* 271-2. About the eagle in the Hebrew Bible see Becking, l.c., and D. Vogel, "Ambiguities of the Eagle," *JBQ* 26 (1998) 85-92.

⁴⁸ E.R. Goodenough, *Jewish symbols in the Greco-Roman period* (13 vols; New York: Pantheon Books, 1953-1968), vol. 8, 125-31.

⁴⁹ Lintels of Gush Halav, Safed, Dabbura, Japhia, Horvat Weradim, Kasbieh, and Capernaum synagogues, R. Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Land of Israel* (Handbuch der Orientalistik 7th series 1.2; Leiden: Brill, 1988) 206-8; 332 with references. Torah shrine ornamentation on a double column from Umm el-Kanatir and a stone relief from 'En Samsam, Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Land of Israel*, 333 with Plates 23 and 26.

⁵⁰ N. Avigad, *Beth She'arim. Report on the excavations during 1953-1958: catacombs 12-23* (vol. 3; Jerusalem: Massada Press, 1976), 141-2 with Plates xli:1 and xlii:2; Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Land of Israel*, 328-30; 333.

intervention, and a symbolic indication of immortality.⁵¹ Avi-Yonah and Hachlili, however, assume that the eagle motif was just ornamental and devoid of a symbolic meaning.⁵² Some of the archeological remains from the Diaspora, however, are chronologically closer to the eagle in Herod's temple and suggest a symbolic meaning that would fit this eagle's function better.

In the ancient Sardis synagogue stood a large stone table with big eagles in relief on its supporting stones. This table probably dates from the late Hellenistic or early Roman Imperial period. It was located in the center of the synagogue, toward the western end of the hall, probably the location where the Torah reading took place. Next to the table stood two stone pairs of lions.⁵³ We can only speculate about the original non-Jewish function of this table, but the combination with lions in its synagogue context may be a clue to the eagle as symbol of the ruler's power in a Jewish context. Representations of the eagle in the third-century C.E. Dura Europos synagogue also suggest that the eagle was a symbol of royal power. One of the center

⁵¹ Goodenough, *Jewish symbols*, vol. 8, 121-42, esp. p. 136. A recent interpretation takes the eagle as a symbol of divine presence and protection: P. Szkolut, "The Eagle as the Symbol of Divine Presence and Protection in Ancient Jewish Art," *Studia Judaica* 5 (2002) 1-11.

⁵² M. Avi-Yonah, *Art in Ancient Palestine: Selected Studies* (Collected and prepared for republication by H. Katzenstein and Y. Tsafirir; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1981), 65; Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Land of Israel*, 334. Hachlili (p. 346) explains the prominence of the eagle in (late) Ancient Jewish sources with a reference to *Midrash Exodus Rabba* 23:13, which associates the eagle as the most exalted bird with greatness and royalty, as well as nearness to God, being located under God's chariot.

⁵³ Description, plate and reference in R. Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Diaspora* (Handbuch der Orientalistik 1st series 35; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 82-3; 230; also L.I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (Yale University Press, 2000), 245-7; 278; 589.

panels of the wall paintings in this synagogue represents a musician playing a lyre. A large yellow eagle perches on the rail of the throne behind his back.⁵⁴ Most scholars assume that this figure can be identified as David-Orpheus.⁵⁵ The interpretation of the eagle as a symbol of royal power is even more obvious in a heavily damaged painting of the panel on the western wall (register A), which depicts a king, perhaps Solomon,⁵⁶ sitting on a throne with a six-step dais. This dais is still clearly visible, and it shows crouching lions and eagles confronting each other at the ends of its steps in an alternating pattern.⁵⁷ On the western wall (register C 2), king Ahasverus has been painted, seated on a similar throne with a five-step dais with crouching lions and eagles, but this dais has pairs of eagles at the end of the first and last steps and pairs of lions on the others, the throne itself is flanked by two lions.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Diaspora*, 110-1; 179 with figure III-9.

⁵⁵ Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Diaspora*, 247-9 with references.

⁵⁶ Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Diaspora*, 166, argues that this was an intentional adaptation of Solomon's throne as described in 1 Kings 10:18-20.

⁵⁷ Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Diaspora*, 114 with figure III-45b and plate III-8.

⁵⁸ Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Diaspora*, 146-7 and 166-7 with figure III-45a.

A synagogue chancel screen from Horvat Susiya has a menorah and a tree of life surrounded by heraldic lions as well as a palm tree surrounded by eagles, S. Gutman, Z. Yeivin and E. Netzer, "Excavations in the Synagogue at Horvat Susiya," in *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, ed. L.I. Levine (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981), 123-128, esp. p. 125; Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Land of Israel*, 189 and 221 with Plate 26.

The depiction of these royal thrones with a dais in the Dura Europos synagogue has probably been taken over from non-Jewish artwork.⁵⁹ In fact, the eagle has been used as a symbol of the ruler's power in various ancient contexts from the Persian period onward. Several sources report that Cyrus and later Persian kings used a golden eagle as their ensign, the eagle was either sitting with outstretched wings on a lance, or depicted on the shield.⁶⁰ Ptolemaic kings likewise used the eagle as a symbol of their power. Athenaeus' description of the pavilion in the citadel of Ptolemy Philadelphus in Alexandria mentions golden eagles facing each other along the topmost space of the ceiling, being fifteen cubits in length (Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 5.126a). From the entire period of Ptolemaic rule from Ptolemy I up to Cleopatra VII, various types of Ptolemaic coins had the ruler's portrait on one side and the eagle, sometimes holding a thunderbolt, on the other.⁶¹ Herod's enemy Cleopatra, for example, had a silver drachm in 47/46 B.C.E. issued in this fashion by the mint of Alexandria as well as bronze eighty and forty drachma coins between 51 and 30 B.C.E.⁶² Two silver tetradrachms issued by Ascalon in 50/49 and 39/38 B.C.E.

⁵⁹ A relief from Dura Europos in the Temple of Gad with an inscription dated 159 C.E. depicts Gad of Dura as Zeus/Baalshamin, a bearded male figure, seated on a throne flanked by eagles. S.B. Downey, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos: The Stone and Plaster Sculpture* (Final Report, vol. 3 part 1.2; Los Angeles: The Institute of Archaeology, 1977), 14-17 with figure 4 and 208-9; Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Diaspora*, 167.

⁶⁰ Xenophon, *Cyr.* 7.1.4; Flavius Arrianus, *Parthorum fragmenta* 98; *FGrH* 2b, 156 Frag. 156; Xenophon, *Anab.* 1.10.12; Philostratus, *Imag.* 2.31.

⁶¹ S. Walker and P. Higgs (eds), *Cleopatra of Egypt from History to Myth* (London: The British Museum Press, 2001), nos. 67, 74, 76, 82, 90-91, and 177-185.

⁶² References: A. Meadows in Walker and Higgs, *Cleopatra of Egypt from History to Myth*, 177-8 with nos. 177-185.

respectively follow this Ptolemaic tradition and present Cleopatra VII's portrait on the obverse and the eagle on the reverse.⁶³

In Roman contexts, the eagle could symbolize the highest god, Jupiter-Zeus, and express in this capacity Jupiter's role as protector of the army. This function forms the background for the eagle on the Roman standards.⁶⁴ The eagle's function as symbol of the supreme god or the ruler in which the deity's power could become manifest may explain the presence of the eagle on the ceremonial dress of consuls at their inauguration or the gala dress of emperors.⁶⁵ A gold coin from 27 B.C.E. indicates Augustus' new status after his victory at Actium. The reverse of this coin shows the eagle of Jupiter with Augustus' oak-wreath crown in its talons, and two laurel-branches behind it.⁶⁶

The Herodians clearly had no difficulty in minting coins with their own portrait and/or animal images and, in fact, one type of Herod the Great's undated coins depicts a standing eagle on its reverse. The obverse has a single *cornucopia* and an inscription referring to King Herod (BASIL/HRW[D]).⁶⁷ Meshorer argues that the eagle on these coins refers to Herod's embellishment of the temple exemplified by the

⁶³ A. Meadows in Walker and Higgs, *Cleopatra of Egypt from History to Myth*, 234 with references (nos. 219-220).

⁶⁴ Y. le Bohec, "Feldzeichen," *Der Neue Pauly* 4, 458-62; T. Schneider and E. Stemplinger, "Adler," *RAC* I, 87-93, esp. c. 88 with references.

⁶⁵ Schneider and Stemplinger, "Adler," 89.

⁶⁶ J. Williams, in Walker and Higgs, *Cleopatra of Egypt from History to Myth*, 259 no. 301.

⁶⁷ Y. Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage* (2 vols; Dix Hills, New York: Amphora Books, 1982), vol. 2, 29-30 no. 23 (and 23a-c as coins belonging to this type); Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Land of Israel*, 81.

eagle on the sanctuary's entrance, as well as to Rome as the source of his power.⁶⁸ However, it seems more plausible to interpret the eagle in the context of the coins of contemporary rulers.⁶⁹ With this coin, Herod, therefore, probably followed a well-established tradition, illustrated, among other things, by coins from his arch-enemy Cleopatra VII as well as from his later benefactor Augustus (above).

Thus, in the light of Jewish visual sources in the Diaspora and in non-Jewish traditions, Herod's eagle may be interpreted as a symbol of the king's power and perhaps his benefactions. The temple itself was an obvious demonstration of such benefactions, as Herod himself indicates during the meeting in Jericho following upon the eagle incident (*A.J.* 17.162-3). Such a function, glorifying Herod's rule, may have been associated with Jewish traditions about the eagle, such as the well-known image of the eagle spreading its wings over its nest as a symbol of God's protection of the people of Israel (*Deut.* 32:11). Schalit suggests that this biblical imagery may have been applied to rulers.⁷⁰ Yet, Schalit also argues, with Meshorer, that the eagle was a demonstration of Herod's loyalty to Rome. In his opinion, emperors and soldiers alike

⁶⁸ Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage*, vol. 2, 29. See also footnote 69.

⁶⁹ Y. Meshorer, *A Treasury of Jewish Coins From the Persian Period to Bar Kokhba* (Jerusalem/Nyack, NY: Yad Ben-Zvi Press/Amphora Books, 2001), 69-69, notes the similarity of Herod's eagle coins with Ptolemaic and Seleucid coins as well as the Tyrian sheqels with an image of an eagle and suggests that the Jewish masses may have interpreted the eagle on the temple as a symbol of God's power.

⁷⁰ Cf. Schalit, *König Herodes*, 734, who refers in this connection to a statement by R. Aqiva in *Yalkut Shimoni Jethro* 19, fol. 84b 276. Schalit also associates the role of the eagle in connection to returning the chosen their homeland.

must have interpreted the eagle, at such a conspicuous place in the temple, as a tribute to the *imperium romanum*.⁷¹

It is certainly possible that the eagle functioned as a symbol of Herod's loyalty to Rome although one wonders how many Romans may have seen the eagle. However, this reading is not supported by details in Josephus' text. There is no hint that the two sages were furious about Herod's loyalty to Rome. The narrative does mention two other things, first, that Herod had disqualified himself as king because of his transgressions of the law (above), which implies that the eagle as a symbol of the ruler's power would be particularly offensive, and secondly, that the eagle was a violation of the second commandment. Associations of Herod's eagle in the temple with Deut. 32:11 would only have fuelled such criticism, because the symbolism would presuppose in this connection that Herod took over God's role according to the biblical passage.

The remark that introduces Josephus' explanation of the golden eagle as a transgression of Jewish law "But the law forbids those who intend to live in accordance with it ..." presents Judaism as a way of life (*A.J.* 17.151). Similar introductory phrases including the verb *kw̄lu/w plus o(no/moj* usually imply a ban in Jewish law based on the written Torah.⁷² The ban referred to in *A.J.* 17.151

⁷¹ Schalit, *König Herodes*, 734.

⁷² Similar formulae in *A.J.* 3.236 (referring to the prohibition of Lev. 22:27-30); 9.74-75 (paraphrasing 2 Kings 7:3-4 and hinting at Lev. 13:45-46 while calling this prohibition a Samaritan law); 12.187 (implying a prohibition of mixed marriages, probably building on Neh. 13:23-31; Ezra 9:1-2; 10:6-44; cf. also *A.J.* 18.345), 12.206 (referring to a Jewish prohibition made up by the Tobiad Hyrcanus); 14.167 (implying that Herod violated the sixth commandment), and *Vita* 161 (implying the prohibition to work on the Shabbat). Related formulae in *C. Ap.* 1.67 and 2.267 concern Tyrian and Athenian laws. The formula is not based on vocabulary in the Hebrew Bible, and the Septuagint has only one passage

concerns the construction of statues (ei)ko/nwn te a)nasta/seij) as well as the setting up of images of any living creatures (tinwn zw|&wn a)nage/seij) in public. The passage lacks an explicit quotation, but it is obvious that it concerns a paraphrase of the second commandment (Exod. 20:4; Deut. 4:16; Josephus, *A.J.* 3.91).⁷³ The second commandment is taken in a strict way, possibly because there was disagreement about its interpretation. Not all ancient Jews took offence at images of living creatures in public. Archaeological sources like the wall paintings from the Dura Europos synagogue show that figural decorations were fully acceptable for at least part of the Diaspora Jews. Additionally, remains from, and references to, Judea dating from the early Second Temple period or earlier show that figural representations were not unusual. They include Yehud coins minted in Jerusalem with representations of animals, including the eagle.⁷⁴ During the Hasmonean era it became more common to consider images of living creatures a violation of the second commandment. The second half of the second C.E. shows a come back of figural art in the funerary context of the Beth-Shearim cemetery, followed, among other things, by figurative motifs on synagogue mosaic floors.⁷⁵ Yet, even in the ‘iconoclastic’

combining kwlu/w with bibli/a, referring to Antiochus IV’s prohibition of Jewish sacrifices, Shabbat observance, Jewish festivals and circumcision as well as his order to move over to Greek customs (1 Macc. 1:44-50).

⁷³ Cf. Josephus’ paraphrase of this commandment in *C. Ap.* 2.190-191. For Jewish receptions of the ten commandments see B.-Z. Segal and G. Levi, *The Ten Commandments in History and Tradition* (Jerusalem: Magness Press, 1985).

⁷⁴ References in Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 208-9.

⁷⁵ Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 103, 208-210. Cf. Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Diaspora*, 238 and 382, who argues that some of the figurative symbols, e.g. lions and eagles, had a vague symbolic meaning, but that most of them had only an ornamental function.

period of about 150 B.C.E. until about 150 C.E. there were exceptions, the Herodians especially used figural motifs in decorations and on coins. Herod the Great, Philip and Agrippa I used them on coins and Herod Antipas had decorations including living creatures in his palace in Tiberias (below). There are even a few specimens of images of animals, fish and birds, from the Jewish quarter of Jerusalem in the Herodian period.⁷⁶ This implies that Judean Jews in the first century C.E. were divided about the tolerance of images of living beings.⁷⁷ Apparently, the image of the eagle was only offensive to some of the Judean Jews, including Josephus himself. His strict interpretation of the second commandment excluded all images of living creatures, at least in the context of the Holy City.

Two other episodes in Josephus also imply a strict interpretation of the second commandment, taking the fabrication of images (ei)ko/nej) of living creatures as a severe violation of Jewish law, which had to be countered. Pilate's decision to move Roman standards with busts of the emperor over to Jerusalem was taken as a matter of life and death by the Jerusalemites (below). Josephus himself agreed to execute the demolition of Herod the tetrarch's palace in Tiberias because it had figures of living creatures (zw&|wn morfa_j e1xonta), but Jesus son of Sapphias got there first (*Life* 65-67).⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Josephus, *Vita* 65-66. N. Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 150, 169. Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 210 n. 47. For the coins of Philip (4 B.C.E.-34 C.E.) with portraits of Augustus or Tiberius, or with his own portrait, as well as coins of Agrippa I see Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage*, vol. 2, 29, 44-46, 60-61.

⁷⁷ Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, vol. 8, 124, assumes that the majority of the Jews accepted the symbol of the eagle on Herod's coins as well as on the temple.

⁷⁸ S. Mason, *Life of Josephus. Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary* (S. Mason ed., vol. 9, Leiden: Brill, 2001), 59.

Finally, the eagle's location may also have triggered the rebels' act. Josephus' description suggests that the eagle was located on top of the great gateway, i.e. the broad porch that gave access to the sanctuary itself. This means that the eagle must have been clearly visible for those within the court of the Israelites and the priestly court as long as they were not standing too close to the sanctuary's walls.⁷⁹ The location of the eagle by king Herod this close to the Holy of Holies could easily be interpreted as an enormous provocation. In fact, the protest against Pilate's transfer of Roman standards with busts of the emperor from Caesarea to Jerusalem was also considered a provocation and a violation of Jewish law. By their faithfulness to the Jewish laws and their willingness to die for them the Jerusalemites persuaded Pilate to return the standards to Caesarea (*B.J.* 2.169-174; *A.J.* 18.55-59). The parallel passage in the *Jewish War* suggests that Jewish law forbade the erection of any kind of sculpted creature (ou)de\n ... dei/khlon ti/qesqai) in *Jerusalem* (2.170), which suggests that the presence of images of living beings could not be tolerated in any case in the Holy City of Jerusalem.⁸⁰

4. Other Motivations for the Eagle's Demolition

The sages' encouragement and the youngsters' responses to the king, including noble death rhetoric, present the demolition of the eagle as a self-sacrifice on behalf of the

⁷⁹ Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Land of Israel*, 27; Schalit, *König Herodes*, 396-7.

⁸⁰ The passage about the prohibition to fabricate images of living creatures in *The Jewish War* contains also a geographical marker: "for it was unlawful *for the temple* (kata\ to\n nao/n) to contain either images or busts or a work representing some living creature" (1.650, trans. Forte-Sievers, my emphasis).

ancestral laws and piety. This has a double reward: eternal glory and a happy afterlife. As indicated above, Herod and the sages with their youthful followers are contrasted by their opposite attitudes to the ancestral laws. Herod is characterized as a transgressor of these laws (*A.J.* 17.150, 159) while the sages and the youths remain faithful to them at the cost of their lives (17.149, 150, 151, 152 and 159). The willingness to die for the Jewish ancestral (and God's) laws, reminds one of the noble death of the Maccabean martyrs who didn't give in to Antiochus IV's orders.⁸¹ The eagle's destruction is also characterized as a deed of piety. The two sages describe the act in athletic terms as "carry(-ing) away prizes for their piety in accordance with the laws" (*A.J.* 17.150). Josephus' combination of *eu)se/beia, a)gwni/smata* and *nomw~n* in this passage is rare and perhaps unique in Greek literature up to the third century C.E. However, the application of athletic metaphors in Jewish religious contexts does occur in other Hellenistic-Jewish writings that are heavily influenced by Greek culture, like Philo's writings and 4 Maccabees. Philo frequently uses athletic imagery in order to express how *eu)se/beia* "piety" was put into practice, for instance, by the Levites who executed God's punishment for the Golden Calf as described in Ex. 32 (*tou\j u(pe\r eu)sebei/aj a)gw~naj diaqlh/santej, Spec.* 1.79) or by the priests who fulfilled their duties (*ge/raj a)gw&nwn, ou\$ j u(pe\r eu)sebei/aj a)qlou=sin, Spec.* 2.183; also *Virt.* 45 (*to\n u(pe\r eu)sebei/aj a)gw&na*). The closest parallel to Josephus' phrase in *A.J.* 17.150 is a passage about

⁸¹ Van Henten, *Maccabean Martyrs*, 125-269. Faithfulness to the ancestral laws and/or practices is also an important motive in *B.J.* 2.170-171, 174; *A.J.* 18.59 (context: Pilate's provocations, *B.J.* 2.169-177; *A.J.* 18.55-62); *B.J.* 2.192, 196; *A.J.* 18.263, 266, 270 (context: Gaius' statue, *B.J.* 2.184-203; *A.J.* 18.261-288); *C. Ap* 1.42-43: every Jew dies gladly (*h(de/wj)*), if necessary, for the laws. See also *C. Ap* 2.146, 218-219, 225-235; cf. 2.293-294 and 1.191.

the tabernacle in Philo's *Life of Moses* (*Vit. Mos.* 2.136). It reports that the women brought carefully produced utensils for the tabernacle's washbasin. By doing this they competed in piety with the men and thought that they would carry away a beautiful prize because of their contribution (... a(millw&menai toi=j a)ndra/si pro\j eu)se/beian, a)gw&nisma kalo\n a!rasqai dianohqei=sai).⁸² The vocabulary in 4 Maccabees also combines eu)se/beia "piety" with athletic imagery. It is less similar to Josephus' *A.J.* 17.150, but its context, the martyrs' noble death for eu)se/beia, is rather similar to the self-sacrifice of the eagle's destructors in Josephus.⁸³

There is another passage in the eagle episode, a very difficult one, that is relevant for eu)se/beia as motive for the youths' deed. In *A.J.* 17.159 the young men state to the king: "We will gladly endure death and every punishment you lay upon us, for it is not because of unrighteous deeds but out of love of what is pious [or: the pious one]⁸⁴ that we are bound to have thorough knowledge of what living with it [him?] means." The phrase fili/a| tou~ eu)sebou~j is ambiguous, because tou~ eu)sebou~j could either indicate a pious person or something pious, as my literal translation shows. Unfortunately, another phrase further on in the same sentence, e)fo)mi)lh=san au)tu)~, is also ambiguous, because the au)tu)~ that modifies the rare verbal form e)fo)mi)lh=san⁸⁵ can be taken as a masculine or a neuter form, and

⁸² Similar imagery in early Christian passages: Clemens Alexandrinus, *Strom.* 2.18.84; Origenes, *Contra Celsum* 3.8; 8.70; *Exhortatio ad martyrium* 5; 23; *Enarrationes in Job*, PG 17, 61D.

⁸³ For athletic metaphors in 4 Maccabees, see van Henten, *Maccabean Martyrs*, 121-2; 235-8.

⁸⁴ Marcus/Wikren translate "piety".

⁸⁵ *LSJ* 746 s.v. e)fo)mi)le/w mentions a dubious reference in *Hermesianax* 7.51 (fourth/third century B.C.E.) and Nonnus, *Dion.* 5.410 (fourth/fifth century C.E.). See also Nonnus, *Dion.* 24.335.

therefore refer to a person or a matter. A possible interpretation of this second phrase is to take the $\alpha\upsilon\theta\tau\omicron\upsilon\sim$ as referring to $\epsilon\upsilon\theta\sigma\epsilon\beta\omicron\upsilon\sim\jmath$ mentioned before, although there is hardly evidence that word combinations of $\omicron\theta\mu\iota\iota/a/\omicron\theta\mu\iota\lambda\epsilon/w$ and $\epsilon\upsilon\theta\sigma\epsilon/be\iota a/\epsilon\upsilon\theta\sigma\epsilon\beta\eta/j$ were common.⁸⁶ If $\epsilon\upsilon\theta\sigma\epsilon\beta\omicron\upsilon\sim\jmath$ in the passage would indicate a person, the continuation of the sentence would suggest a close relationship with this person, which would only make sense in the context if this person would be God.⁸⁷ However, God is not referred to in the immediate context, and the passage focuses upon the proper attitude to God, implying piety as a virtue. The only remaining option is to take the $\alpha\upsilon\theta\tau\omicron\upsilon\sim$ as a reference to $\tau\omicron\nu\ \eta\alpha/\eta\alpha\tau\omicron\nu$, which implies a paradox, i.e. living with death, but this may be taken ironically or as a hint at the posthumous reward for the perpetrators.⁸⁸ This reading also fits in with the

⁸⁶ An isolated line in one of Aeschylus' fragments refers to a "pious communion" ($\epsilon\upsilon\theta\sigma\epsilon\beta\eta\backslash\jmath$ $\omicron(\mu\iota\iota/a)$) (*Fragmenta* 67 [229]).

⁸⁷ In his refutation of Celsus' view that the animals, being irrational, are closer to God than humans Origen uses the phrase $\eta(\ \eta\epsilon\iota=a\ \omicron(\mu\iota\iota/a)$ ("the society of God"): "And wholly false, too, is his assertion, that 'the irrational animals are nearer the society of God ($\theta\eta=j\ \eta\epsilon\iota/aj\ \omicron(\mu\iota\iota/aj\ \epsilon\iota\}\eta\alpha\iota\ \tau\alpha\ \alpha\lambda\lambda\omicron\eta\alpha\ \eta\omega\sim|a)$ (than men),' when even men who are still in a state of wickedness, however great their progress in knowledge, are far removed from that society ($\rho\omicron/r\eta\omega\ \epsilon\iota\theta\sigma\iota\backslash\ \theta\eta=j\ \eta\epsilon\iota/aj\ \omicron(\mu\iota\iota/aj)$). It is, then, those alone who are truly wise and sincerely religious who are nearer to God's society ($\eta\alpha\tau\omicron\nu\ \eta\alpha\lambda\eta/\eta\epsilon\iota\alpha\ \sigma\omicron\phi\omicron\iota\backslash\ \eta\alpha\iota\ \alpha\}\eta\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omega\sim\jmath\ \epsilon\upsilon\theta\sigma\epsilon\beta\epsilon\iota=j\ \epsilon\}\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta/r\eta\omega\ \theta\eta=j\ \eta\epsilon\iota/aj\ \omicron(\mu\iota\iota/aj\ \epsilon\iota\theta\sigma\iota/n)$); such persons as were our prophets, and Moses, to the latter of whom, on account of his exceeding purity, the Scripture said: 'Moses alone shall come near the LORD, but the rest shall not come nigh.'" (*Contra Celsum* 4.96.16-17, trans. Roberts-Donaldson; see also *Philocalia* 20.23).

⁸⁸ A passage in Eleazar ben Yair's Masada second speech presupposes the immortality of the soul and suggests that death is a liberating event for the soul, which can leave the misery of its existence in the mortal body (Josephus, *B.J.* 7.344). H.C.C. Cavallin, *Life after Death: Paul's Argument for the*

continuation of the narrative.

Conventional Graeco-Roman noble death rhetoric is found in the sages' incitement in *A.J.* 17.152 (cf. *B.J.* 1.650): "For, (they said), even if they ran the risk of getting the death penalty that would be reserved for them (εἰὼ τῆς γενεῆς κτήσεως τῆς ἐπιβίου καὶ τῆς ἀθανάτου ἀρετῆς), the virtue gained by death would appear much more beneficial than the pleasure of life (τῆς ἐπιβίου τῆς ἡδονῆς) for those about to die for the safety and the preservation of their ancestral customs." Dying nobly for the ancestral laws brings virtue and fame, which is, of course, a *topos* frequently articulated in Greek literature.⁸⁹ Josephus was well aware of this motif.⁹⁰ This passage concerns a particular voluntary statement, which builds on Greek traditions, expressing a decision to die when a violent death could be avoided in the form of "rather X noble death than Y shameful way of living on". Several noble death passages in Josephus include such a statement about a voluntary death.⁹¹ A most famous forerunner, echoed many times in later sources, is Plato's

Resurrection of the Dead in 1 Cor. 15, Part I: An Enquiry into the Jewish Background (Lund: Gleerup, 1974), 143-4

⁸⁹ To give just a few examples: Heraclitus, Fragm. 44, H. Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker Griechisch und Deutsch* (3 vols.; Berlin: Weidmann, 1951-1956), vol. 1.160; Plato, *Apol.* 32b-d; Lycurgus, *Contra Leocr.* 106-107. Herodotus 7.228, Lycurgus, *Contra Leocr.* 109 (with adaptations), and Cicero, *Tusc. disp.* 1.101, transmit the famous epigram by Simonides for Leonidas and his 300 Spartiates, who fell at Thermopylae in 480 B.C.E. (*Anthologia Graeca* 7.249):

Tell Sparta, passer-by, that you saw us lying here,
obeying the sacred laws of our country. (according to Cicero's version)

⁹⁰ Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.226-228. *A.J.* 18.210, 278 and 19.181 refer to self-sacrifice for other reasons. See also 2 Macc. 6:19. Van Henten, *Maccabean Martyrs*, 97-100.

⁹¹ See, for example, *A.J.* 18.59 in connection with the emperor's busts attached to military standards,

elaboration of Socrates's voluntary death in the *Apology*.⁹² Plato elaborates Socrates' determination to remain steadfast in preferring death by execution to living on disgracefully (*Apol.* 28b-d). He explains Socrates' behavior with the example of Achilles, who was warned by his mother that he himself would die if he killed Hector but he ignored this advice: "When he heard this, he thought lightly of death and danger, and fearing much more to live on as a coward and leaving his friends unavenged (o(de\ tau~t' a)kou/saj tou~ me\n qana/tou kai\ tou~ kindu/nou w)ligw&rhse, polu\ de\ ma~llon dei/saj to\ zh|=n kako\j w@n kai\ toi=j fi/loij mh\ timwrei=n) he said: 'May I die immediately',⁹³ 'making the one pay who did me wrong. I do not want to stay here, being laughed at beside the curved ships, a burden to the ground.'"⁹⁴ Plato adds a rhetorical question: "Do you think he gave much heed to death and danger (mh\ au)to\n oilei fronti/sai qana/tou kai\ kindu/nou;) ...?" (*Apol.* 28c-d). Taking the danger of death lightly is expressed twice in Plato's passage, and highlighted in the sages' statement in *A.J.* 17.152.

According to Plato's *Apology*, Achilles' preference of death and revenging Patroclus by means of his killing Hector is motivated by a strong urge to avoid shame. Josephus articulates the youngsters' motivation for accepting death as the consequence of their act differently. He connects it with another motif that contrasts which were brought to Jerusalem by Pilate and *B.J.* 7.337 about suicide as a noble choice in certain situations, with a hint even at pleasure in the response to Eleazar's first speech at Masada.

⁹² J.W. van Henten and F. Avemarie, *Martyrdom and Noble Death: Selected Texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian Antiquity* (The Context of Early Christianity, London: Routledge, 2002), 12-14; 28-30 with references.

⁹³ This is an allusion to Homer, *Iliad* 18.98.

⁹⁴ This is an allusion to Homer, *Iliad* 18.104.

pleasure and life: “death would appear much more beneficial than the pleasure of life ... (pōlū\ th=j e0n tw~| zh=n h9donh~j lusiteleste/ran fai/nesqai)” (*A.J.* 17.152). Here again Josephus builds on Greek traditions and vocabulary. Plato points out that a normal path of life would bring more pleasure than pain and would end with a natural death at old age. An unexpected death because of a disease or wounds, on the other hand, was a painful or even violent event (*Tim* 81e). The assumption that life and pleasure should go hand in hand is also apparent from Aristotle’s argument. He considers it a natural thing for humans to aim for pleasure in life.⁹⁵ Yet, several Greek authors indicate that there were limits to the combination of life and pleasure, not only in their criticism of the “hedonistic” attitude of life of the Epicureans,⁹⁶ but also in military contexts. Polybius points this out several times. He takes Hasdrubal, who died fighting when Fortune had deprived him of all hopes for the future, as a model that indicates that a glorious death on the battlefield is preferable to clinging to life (fi lozwe/w) and living on with disgrace and contempt (Polybius 11.2). A similar reasoning is found in a speech of Publius Scipio: “Since, then, Fortune puts before us the most glorious of rewards, in whichever way the battle is decided, should we not be at once the most mean-spirited and foolish of mankind if we abandon the most glorious alternative, and from a paltry clinging to life (fi lozwi5a) deliberately choose the worst of misfortunes? Charge the enemy then with the steady resolve to do

⁹⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1175a. Aristotle, taking life as an essentially good thing (*Eth. Nic.* 1170b1), also argues that neither enduring death for the sake of some sort of pleasure or in order to avoid greater pains nor committing suicide in order to escape from trouble is brave in itself (*Eth. Eud.* 1229b.33), a view that Josephus himself probably endorsed, J.W. van Henten, “Noble Death in Josephus: Just Rhetoric?” (forthcoming).

⁹⁶ Cf. the dialogue between Eleazar and Antiochus IV in 4 Macc. 5, which associates the Greek king with Epicurean views, van Henten, *Maccabean Martyrs*, 276.

one of two things, to conquer or to die! For it is men thus minded who invariably conquer their opponents, since they enter the field with no other hope of life” (Polybius 15.10, trans. E.S. Shuckburgh).⁹⁷

Josephus expresses a similar reasoning in Simon the Hasmonean’s speech of encouragement before the battle against Tryphon in *A.J.* 13.198. Simon refers to the exemplary self-sacrifice of his father and brothers and associates “clinging to life” (filozwi5a) with contempt of glory.⁹⁸ The motif also occurs in non-military contexts in Josephus. *Antiquities* 15.319 is critical about Herod’s attitude to life in the context of his marriage with the high priest’s daughter and Herod is blamed for living for his own pleasure.⁹⁹ *Antiquities* 17.152 about the destruction of Herod’s eagle seems to build on the motif in a military context; life has to be sacrificed in a situation without prospect, for the sake of honor. The self-sacrifice on the battlefield is transposed to the conflict between ruler and youngsters. The king forces the youngsters, from their perspective, to stand up against his transgression of Jewish law and risk their life for the demolition of the godless symbol of his power.

In the double reward for the perpetrators, commemoration and afterlife, there is again a correspondence between the rebels’ intervention and the fate of the Maccabean martyrs, who refuse to give in to the king’s order. In *A.J.* 17.152 Josephus writes: “For, they would arrange an eternal glory of receiving praise: they would leave

⁹⁷ Cf. Polybius 30.7.1-8.

⁹⁸ Cf. *A.J.* 12.300 and *B.J.* 3.357 concerning Josephus himself. The noun also occurs in *A.J.* 17.180 in an attempt to explain Herod’s treatment of his relatives, concluding that Herod’s mind brought about nothing human.

⁹⁹ Philo contrasts pleasure and self-control in life frequently, e.g. *Agr.* 98; 100. Cf. *Ebr.* 212 and *Somn.* 2.150, which concern the contemplative and pleasant life in the City of God as humankind’s goal.

behind their lives as an ever-lasting memory (a)eimnhmo/neuton katalipei=n to\n bi/on) for being praised by both those who are now alive and by people in the future.”¹⁰⁰ Commemoration and praise of the deceased go hand in hand in various noble death passages.¹⁰¹ Commemoration in later times is presupposed, for example, by the annual funeral orations for victims on the battlefield by the state of Athens.¹⁰² The motif of leaving one’s life behind as a memory or, perhaps, even a monument, is also expressed in the conclusion of the scribe Eleazar’s martyrdom in 2 Macc. 6:18-31: “And this person died in this way and left behind his own death, not only for the young ones but also for most others of his people, as an example of the greatest nobility and a distinct memory” (... to\n e9autou~ qa/naton ... mnhmo/sunon a0reth~j katalipw&n, 2 Macc. 6:31).¹⁰³

In the version in *The Jewish War* Herod also asks the youngsters why they were so cheerful even though they faced execution. They answer him that they would enjoy even greater happiness after death, a hint at their posthumous vindication: “When he further asked them why they were so glad now that they were going to be

¹⁰⁰ The adjective a)eimnhmo/neutoj “ever-lasting” is extremely rare in Greek literature from the eighth century B.C.E. until the third century C.E. *LSJ* 26 sv gives just one reference: Pseudo-Callisthenes 1.30.

¹⁰¹ E.g. Xenophon, *Apol.* 34 (praise of Socrates); Hyperides, *Epitaph.* 37-8; Polybius, 2.61.5-12; 6.14.7; Phylarchus, *Fragm.* 2a,81,F.55.16; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Dem.* 25.16[?]; Plutarchus, *Per.* 38.4.

¹⁰² N. Loraux, *L'invention d'Athènes. Histoire de l'oraison funèbre dans la 'cité classique'* (Civilisations et Sociétés 65; Paris/The Hague/New York: Mouton, 1981).

¹⁰³ Cf. a Pseudo-Clementine epitome of the acts of Peter: mnhmo/sunon kalo\n to\n e(autw~n bi/on katalipo/ntej “leaving behind their own life as a beautiful memory”, A.R.M. Dressel, *Clementinorum epitomae duae* (Leipzig: Hinrich, 1859), 143; Pseudo-Clemens, *Hom.* 4.23.3.

put to death, they answered that after their death, they would even enjoy much greater bliss.” (1.653; trans. Sievers-Forte). In *War* 1.650 the sages already refer to the immortality of the soul as a reward for those who die such a noble death. This articulation of the young men’s reward for their noble deed in Greek terms is different from the posthumous vindication of the Maccabean brothers in 2 Maccabees, but closely corresponds to the immortality of the martyrs’ soul as described in 4 Maccabees.¹⁰⁴ The notion of the immortality of the soul of the youngsters is not expressed in the eagle story in the *Antiquities*, but the difficult passage in *A.J.* 17.159 discussed above contains a hint at a posthumous reward that is similar to the youngsters’ response to Herod in *J.W.* 1.653.

5. Conclusion

The demolition of Herod’s golden eagle corresponds, especially in the version in *The Jewish Antiquities*, to passages about martyrdom. The narrative pattern includes the perpetrators’ arrest, a dialogue with the ruler culminating in the rebels’ unflinching confession, and finally their execution. Additionally, we find in Josephus’ eagle passages several motifs that are important in martyr texts. These include, voluntary death, that is accepting death gladly for a good cause and not clinging to life in such a situation, dying for the ancestral laws as well as for piety, and a double reward, commemoration and praise by those who stayed behind as well as future generations, and a happy afterlife. In comparison to the parallel passage in *The Jewish War*,

¹⁰⁴ 4 Macc. 18:23; cf. 13:13 and 14:6. This is only one aspect of the martyrs’ multifaceted afterlife in 4 Maccabees, van Henten, *Maccabean Martyrs*, 172-84.

Josephus elaborates upon these motifs in the *Antiquities* considerably, but the content matter is basically the same in both narratives.

The eagle episode is essentially a clash of authorities between a radical group of Jews and their secular ruler. The two sages and their entourage could not accept, according to Josephus' reports, Herod's authority from the moment that he decided to do things that countered God's laws. The attitude of this group to the king's authority seems to be similar to that of Daniel and his companions according to Daniel 3 and 6, who could only remain obedient to the king's laws as long as these laws did not run counter to the laws of their God. Josephus mentions the rebels' radical relativization of Herod's laws in distinction to God's laws explicitly in *A.J.* 17.159 (above). In the context of such a fundamental conflict of authority, the eagle on the sanctuary's entrance must have felt as a terrible provocation. Being a well-known symbol of the king's power it must also have been considered a horrendous violation of God's laws as articulated in the second commandment, especially that close to the most holy place on earth. Herod's construction as a tyrant at the beginning and end of the *Antiquities* passage matches this worldview, only a tyrant could have thought of such a provocation. At the same time, it explains the reason for the rebellious deed and the youngsters' willingness to die for it.

The relevance of all this for the reading of Revelation is that the eagle episode helps us to imagine that violent deaths of Jesus followers may have been the result of their own actions. Revelation too constructs a fundamental clash between the divine realm and everything that is opposed to it. Josephus' noble death rhetoric is absent in Revelation, but both sources share the notion of voluntary death, the clash between the authorities of God and the ruler, as well as the posthumous vindication. Several details in Revelation, such as the eating of food sacrificed to idols (2:14, 20) or the

buying or selling of goods without having the mark of the beast (13:17), suggest that this clash deeply affected the daily life of John the prophet's followers. Josephus' golden eagle episode presents a scenario in which believers stopped accepting the *status quo* and countered measures by the secular authority. With an eye on Herod's golden eagle, it is, therefore, at least imaginable that John's followers also interfered in practices of the secular authorities that opposed God's authority and that some of them were executed because of such civil disobedience.

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