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CHAPTER 14

Josephus

*Jan Willem van Henten and Luuk Huitink**

General Observations

In general terms, the Jewish historian Josephus, working in Rome in the first century CE and supported by the Flavian dynasty, attempts to inculcate what he sees as the correct interpretation of the devastating conflict between Rome and the Jews (66–73/4 CE) as well as a fair view of the Jewish people and its way of life, beneficial to Jews and non-Jews alike: he is particularly concerned with showing how the God of Israel works in history and arguing that living in line with Jewish customs would result in a morally good life and the proper attitude (*eusebeia*) towards God, who in turn would reward these with happiness.[1] In order to prove these points, Josephus assesses the lives of his protagonists, examining to what extent they meet the moral standards to which they should, according to Josephus, be held.[2] It is difficult, therefore, to think of a narratological category more relevant to Josephus' project than characterization, both in his major historical narratives, *Jewish War* and *Jewish Antiquities*, and in the shorter tracts *Life* and (the largely non-narrative) *Against Apion*. Indeed, even a superficial reading of Josephus' works betrays the central importance of character. In *Antiquities* in particular, he constructs his narrative around the lives of great individuals, collapsing the distinction between history and biography to such an extent that it is tempting to call the work a 'psychohistory'.[3] But *War*, too, evinces a strongly personal perspective on history, and combines an interest in the behaviour of the military and political leaders on both sides with reflections on the 'national character' of Jews and Romans.[4] The autobiographical *Life*, finally, gives an overview of Josephus' own public

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1 See e.g. *AJ* 1.15–16, 20. Villalba i Varneda 1986: 63, 254–255.

2 Cf. Mason in Feldman 2000: XXXII–XXXIII, also placing Josephus in the context of an overtly didactic and moralizing strand of Roman historiography; cf. Feldman 1998: 4–5 and Landau 2006: 18–20 for historiographical antecedents of Josephus' interest in character.

3 Feldman 1998: 5, 74–75.

4 Cf. Mason 2007: 223–225.

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career, with the express purpose of enabling readers 'to judge my character (*ēthos*) as they see fit' (*Vit.* 430).

In an insightful paper Neyrey demonstrates the extent to which characterization in Josephus is indebted to formal rhetorical models by comparing Josephus' extensive self-characterization in *Life* with the precepts for the rhetorical exercise of the encomium given in the *progumnasmata*.[5] In line with what these rhetorical handbooks prescribe, Josephus emphasizes his descent from an ancient and aristocratic priestly family ('ancestry'), his early and thorough education in the various Jewish traditions ('nurture and training'), and above all his moral qualities ('virtues'), which include courage (*andreia*), wisdom (*phronēsis*, *sophia*), moderation (*sōphrosunē*, *metriotēs*, *enkrateia*), justice (*dikaiosunē*), and a proper religious attitude (*eusebeia*). These virtues are both mentioned explicitly and shown to have informed his actions (*praxeis*), and they are thrown into relief by various comparisons (*sunkriseis*) of Josephus and his opponents, who inevitably come off badly.[6] They are, among other things, characterized by the envy ('emotion') they feel towards Josephus, which is an index of the high regard in which Josephus himself is held. The main point of contrast between the *progumnasmata* and *Life* is that Josephus devotes little to no attention to his health, beauty or strength ('outward appearance').

Neyrey's analysis has a wider applicability. First, reflections on morality, especially as they are couched in terms of virtues and vices, everywhere form the most important 'ingredient' of Josephus' character portrayals;[7] he essentially avails himself of the canonical Greek virtues, but *eusebeia* often specifically means appropriate behaviour towards the God of Israel, and is the crowning virtue.[8] A character's ancestry and education are quite often flagged, while references to outward appearance are on the whole used more sparsely.[9] And whereas Josephus is elsewhere more interested in powerful emotions than in *Life*, he generally gives pride of place to the darker side of the spectrum, frequently referencing not only envy,[10] but also anger, hate and mistrust; he also

5 Neyrey 1994.

6 Cf. Mason 1998: 62–70.

7 Feldman 1998: 96–129 (on *Antiquities*).

8 According to Josephus, the Jews are special in that their lawgiver Moses 'did not make piety (*eusebeia*) a part of virtue (*aretēs*)', but all other virtues part of piety (*Ap.* 2.170).

9 For a list of passages see Feldman 1982: 62. Josephus would probably endorse the comment of the prophet Samuel (*AJ* 6.160): 'I do not make kingship the prize of bodily good looks (*sōmatōn euphormias*), but rather of virtue of soul (*psukhōn aretēs*)'.

10 On envy see Feldman 1998: 198–203.

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tends to stress the negative sides of love.[11] Secondly, characterization is everywhere primarily shaped by a mixture of direct comment, characterizing deeds and implicit and explicit comparisons between characters (arguably in that order of importance). Thirdly, the evaluative slant to Josephus' techniques of characterization, which is so prominent in *Life*, is clearly visible in his other works, too.

However, Neyrey's interpretation of *Life* as a formal encomium is less helpful in coming to grips with other, more nuanced, aspects of Josephus' practice, which breathe life into his 'rhetoric of character'. First, while *Life* does not depart from a conventional framework of what counts as 'good' and 'bad' behaviour, Josephus takes an evident pride in his ability to match character traits to events (and *vice versa*) in flexible and even surprising ways. An extreme example is his treatment of the Judean Queen Alexandra, whom, on the basis of much the same evidence, he paints as a superstitious dupe in *War*, but as a conniving powermonger in the parallel account in *Antiquities*.[12] Nor, secondly, are Josephus' evaluations always black-and-white; in fact, he often aims to achieve balance in his assessments, casting his protagonists as neither wholly good nor wholly bad.[13] Thirdly, characterization in Josephus serves narrative and argumentative purposes that go beyond expressing (dis)approbation; even in *Life* itself, he does not put so much emphasis on, say, his education because it is a conventional category of praise, but because it helps him position himself as one of only a few men capable of forming correct opinions on the Jewish people and their history—in short, to imbue the narrator of *Antiquities*, to which *Life* forms an appendix, with authority.[14] Fourthly, Neyrey claims that the *progumnasmata* contain all 'the basic information thought relevant for knowing a person' in Greco-Roman culture,[15] but in fact they focus on the public, displayed aspects of character. This may suit Josephus in *Life*, but in his longer narratives he often operates, as we will see, with a much wider and more elastic view of character, taking account of, for instance, idiosyncratic traits, people's 'true' nature or the possibility of character change.

The upshot, then, is that Josephus' practices of characterization can be both rigid and malleable, rely on typification and resist it, and serve purposes both

11 Cf. Mason in Feldman 2000: XXXII for Josephus' interest in erotic intrigues.

12 Mason 1991: 258–259; 1998: 71–72, with *BJ* 1.107–119 and *AJ* 13.400–432. See also Atkinson 2012.

13 Mason in Feldman 2000: XXXII.

14 Cf. Mason 1998: 45; 2001: XIV, XXXIV. By contrast, in *War*, where Josephus is also a (third-person) character, we hear nothing about his education in Jewish traditions.

15 Neyrey 1994: 180.

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evident and more veiled. Since the material is vast, we will elaborate on this claim by highlighting a few important points. We will first make the general point that the (moral) evaluation of characters is firmly tied to the narratorial voice. We will then show how Josephus employs his multi-layered conceptualization of character to explain and evaluate narrative events by analysing a sample of brief characterizing narratorial comments. We will then argue that Josephus' longer reflections on character (such as obituaries) may guide the narratees' interpretation in fairly straightforward ways, but may also raise complex questions about the relation between morality, actions and character. Finally, we will bring the strands of the discussion together by considering how Josephus shapes one of his most elaborate characters, namely Herod the Great.

The Narrator versus Focalizing Characters

It will be clear from the above that the most important characterizer in Josephus is the narrator himself. Being an overt narrator and in line with his self-appointed role as the arbiter of history, Josephus engages in abundant direct characterization. While speaking and focalizing characters often engage in characterization as well and could be a way of introducing multiple and equally legitimate perspectives, their point of view does not carry the weight of that of the narrator, and is often not allowed to stand without his interference.[16] One example concerns Saul's son Jonathan, who, after unwittingly violating an oath of his father, indicates in a speech that he is prepared to die nobly in order to propitiate God, after which the people, who first wanted to see him punished, are so impressed that they save him from his father's wrath (*AJ* 6.125–128). The characterization of Jonathan as a noble person and, implicitly, of Saul as a cruel father is shaped by his own speech and the perception of the people; but it is the narrator who has the last word: Jonathan 'was not dismayed at the threat of death, but showed himself noble and magnanimous' (*eugenōs kai megalophronōs*; 6.127).[17] Similarly, when Potiphar's wife supposes that she can easily seduce Joseph (*AJ* 2.41), at that point a servant in her household, and Joseph refuses, the narrator feels the need to add that 'she was looking at the outward bearing of his slavery (…) but not to his character, which remained

16 Cf. Landau 2006: 107–111.

17 A specific reason for the narratorial interference here may be that, according to Josephus, 'the people' are by definition fickle and easily persuaded; cf. also the programmatic statement at *AJ* 8.252, that 'the morals (*ēthē*) of subjects are corrupted together with the character (*tropois*) of their leaders'.

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firm despite his change of fortune' (*AJ* 2.42). The reader is not allowed to entertain the thought that Joseph could possibly be anything but virtuous: it is the perceiver who is at fault.[18]

In general, when Josephus includes his protagonists' opinions about others, it is often to indicate whether they do or do not understand them; in the paranoid atmosphere of the royal courts which he describes, a person's ability to assess other people's characters correctly can take them far, while a lack of such understanding can mean their downfall. Particularly intriguing in this respect is a group of on the whole wicked protagonists whose insight into character matches that of the narrator. An example is Eurycles the Lacedaemonian, who visits Herod the Great's court only to seek financial gain and stir up trouble. Quickly 'seeing through Herod's character' (*sunidōn ton Hērōdou tropon*), he ingratiates himself with the king 'through flattery, clever talk and false encomiums' (*BJ* 1.515). Another is Salome's son Antipater, who in an indirectly reported speech accuses Herod the Great's successor Archelaus of various crimes, including some which he did not commit but would easily be believed, 'because they were the kind of things that would typically (*phusin*) be done by young men who in their ambition to rule seize power prematurely' (*AJ* 17.233).[19] Eurycles' persuasive rhetoric of praise and Antipater's ability to refer actions to convincing stereotypes almost read like a blueprint of what are, at times, the narrator's own methods. The difference is, of course, that Josephus portrays himself, especially in *Life*, as a morally upstanding person, who at all times sticks to the truth.[20] As such, Josephus implicitly pits these characters against himself, in what we might call metaleptic *sunkriseis*.[21]

18 Significantly, both these narratorial interferences are extra-biblical additions; cf. 1Sam. 14:24–45 and Gen. 39:6–15, respectively.

19 Josephus reports Antipater's words in indirect speech precisely so as to be able to make such comments on them (cf. Landau 2006: 142); he therefore only tells us that Antipater was a 'very clever speaker' (*deinotatos … eipein*, 17.230), but does not show it by giving the man's own words. In general, Josephus is not much interested in characterization through speech; most of the direct speeches in his work are long, highly rhetorical disquisitions.

20 Cf. e.g. *Vit*. 8–9 for Josephus' concern with *akribeia* (also *SAGN* 2: 213, van Henten and Huitink). By contrast, Josephus' rival historian Justus of Tiberias is (dis)credited with 'craftiness and guile' in words (*Vit*. 40).

21 Cf. Daube 1980 on equally suggestive parallels between Josephus' stories about biblical figures associated with prophecy and his own life-story as shaped in *War* and *Life*.

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Motivating Actions

At almost every turn Josephus' narratorial voice explains the narrative action, and very often his explanations involve brief statements about the character of the actants. The sample given below may serve to highlight some key aspects of Josephus' practice. First, he takes into consideration various aspects of the concept of character, most notably someone's innate and behavioural qualities and/or emotions. The difference between the former two is to some extent lexically marked: the nouns *ēthos* and *tropos* (especially in the plural) often accompany characterizing statements which focus on the notions of performance and socially conditioned traits, while *phusis* is more frequently used to refer to someone's 'true' nature and more permanent characteristics.[22] Secondly, he configures the relation between such aspects and their influence on the course of events in several ways. Thirdly, apart from explaining the action, his comments usually also entail moral judgement.

- Josephus often motivates an individual's or group's actions in terms of some innate or learned moral qualities. For instance, Cambyses responds angrily to advice given to him by certain Samaritans, 'because he was wicked by nature' (*phusei ponēros ōn*, *AJ* 11.26), while Herod's son Antipater manages to conceal the hatred he feels towards his brothers, 'since he was of an extremely diverse disposition' (*poikilōtatos ōn to ēthos*, *BJ* 1.468); this damning phrase, which casts Antipater as an arch-dissembler and implies a lack of true moral steadfastness, recurs in Josephus' characterization of his own mortal enemy John of Gischala (*BJ* 4.85).
- More frequently, characters' actions are the result of an inherent trait, which is 'activated' by the immediate circumstances. For instance, the Germani recklessly revolt against Rome, because their character (*phusis*) 'is without

22 This resembles the practice of the Greek novelists; cf. De Temmerman 2014: 22 and van Henten 2014: 60. The distinction is not absolute (cf. e.g. how Cambyses is called 'wicked by nature' (*phusei ponēros*, *AJ* 11.26), Herod 'wicked in disposition' (*ponēros ēthos*, 19.329), without, it seems, a different import), but still illuminating, for example to explain the use of *ēthos* at the end of *Life* (430); when Josephus speaks about the formation of character (through education and training), he almost invariably uses *ēthos* (*ēthē*); cf. e.g. *BJ* 2.120; *Ap*. 2.171–173; on other occasions the word means little more than 'custom' or 'habit'; cf. e.g. *BJ* 2.279; 6.115, 190; *AJ* 20.256. Conversely, Josephus only talks about the *phusis* ('essence') of God, never about God's *ēthos*; cf. *AJ* 1.15, 19; 2.146; 4.269; 8.107, 338; 10.142; *Ap*. 1.224, 232; 2.168, 180, 250; similarly with 'human nature': *AJ* 3.23, 190; 5.215, 317; 6.59, 136, 341; 7.133, 8.117; 10.241; 13.315; 19.296 (see, however, n. 38 below).

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good sense and prone to take risks even when there is little hope' (*logismōn erēmos agathōn kai meta mikras elpidos hetoimōs ripsokindunos*), but also because they have come to hate their governors and because Rome is weakened by civil war (*BJ* 7.77–78). The references to the Germani's *phusis* and hatred (which has negative connotations) imply condemnation of their revolt.

– Circumstances may also repress aspects of someone's *phusis*. This line of thinking is made explicit in the speech which Claudius gives on becoming emperor: he concedes that he may not be 'moderate by nature' (*phusei metrios*), but assures his audience that the murder of his predecessor Caligula will be a 'sufficient warning to act with restraint' (*hikanon hupodeigma sōphrosunēs*) (*BJ* 2.208). While fear drives a wedge between Claudius' nature and his behaviour, a different emotion does the same for the Jews besieged in Macherus: they surrender the town to the Romans, giving in out of pity for a Jewish captive 'contrary to their nature' (*para tēn hautōn phusin*) (*BJ* 7.204).[23] An extreme case is Herod's hatred (*misos*) for his sons, which becomes so great that it 'completely overcame his nature' (*aponikēsai tēn phusin*) (*AJ* 16.395; cf. 16.10).[24]
– Occasionally, someone's *phusis* proves stronger than his circumstances. Thus, David mourns the death of his son Absalom, despite the fact that he had rebelled against him, because David was 'by nature an affectionate person' (*phusei … ōn philostorgos*) (*AJ* 7.252). The fact that David's affection overcomes the anger he might reasonably feel counts in his favour.
– It is also noteworthy, finally, if emotions do not influence a character's behaviour. For instance, despite his anger at certain Jews, Titus 'did not change his disposition' (*ouk ēllaxe to ēthos*), but received them (*BJ* 6.356).[25] In *Life* (80), Josephus goes out of his way to report that he never violated a woman, intimating that this was not a matter of course for a relatively young man in a position of authority. In these cases, which point out why people did *not* perform certain actions, explanation gives way to (positive) moral judgement altogether. The implicit praise concerns these characters' behaviour, but indirectly points to their possession of the cardinal virtue *enkrateia*.

23 The phrase recurs at *AJ* 19.88 (on Caligula).

24 Or rather (and more damningly) 'human nature', since what is intended is the natural affection a father feels for his sons.

25 The use of *ēthos* is suggestive of Titus' act of will; by contrast, David could not control the emotion which he felt for his son, as it was part of his inherent nature (*phusis*).

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A further point brought out by several of these examples is the extent to which the narrator's assessments rely on established types as a point of reference. Cambyses' behaviour resonates with the stereotype of the tyrannical ruler,[26] while that of the Germani is partly explained in terms of such a global category as ethnicity.[27] Herod and Josephus are assessed in terms of how their behaviour departs from what may be expected from human beings and young men,[28] respectively. This does not mean, however, that all these characters are very transparent. Thus, the violent metaphor used in the example about Herod's fatherly love being 'completely conquered' by hatred suggests that he is a genuinely conflicted figure and, perhaps, a dynamic one (see the section on Herod below; by contrast, it is not implied that Claudius or the Jews in Macherus undergo an actual change of character). Furthermore, there does not always exist a straightforward link between the narrator's moral (dis)approval and a character's success; Antipater's dissembling act, for example, takes him far. We will now consider how Josephus occasionally thematizes such complexities in longer reflections on character.

Longer Reflections on Character

The narrator also offers more elaborate reflections on character in separate blocks of the narrative, when protagonists are introduced, when they die (obituaries),[29] and/or after pivotal moments in their lives. While such reflections serve similar explanatory and appreciative purposes as the brief comments

26 See below. Perhaps this owes something to Herodotus' portrait of the king in book 3 of the *Histories*; it is in any case an extra-biblical addition.

27 Cf. e.g. *BJ* 2.76 on the characteristic unreliability of Arabs. Josephus also recognizes typically Jewish virtues, catalogued at *Ap*. 2.146, 170: justice (*dikaiosunē*), moderation (*sōphrosunē*), endurance (*karteria*), especially in times of hardship, 'harmony in all things among the members of the community' (*tōn politōn pros allēlous en hapasi sumphōnia*), 'universal benevolence' (*katholou philantrōpia*) and 'contempt for death' (*thanatou periphronēsis*). These virtues sometimes come to the fore in the narrative; cf. e.g. *BJ* 5.306, where Jewish soldiers are emboldened by their 'characteristic endurance in the face of calamities' (*to phusei karterikon en sumphorais*); see Swoboda 2014: 136–145, 338–341, 399.

28 For references to 'human nature', see n. 23 above. For 'age', cf. e.g. *AJ* 1.291: Rachel gets emotional, 'as usually happens to young people (*tois neois*)'; 8.209: Jeroboam is a 'characteristically hot-headed youth' (*phusei thermos … neanias*).

29 Cf. *SAGN* 2: 221–222 (van Henten and Huitink). They are particularly common throughout *Antiquities* and in the first book of *War*, which treats the Hasmonean dynasty; see Landau 2006: 92–98, 127–134 for discussion.

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discussed in the previous section, their clearly marked-out status within the broader texture of the narrative flags up the importance which Josephus attaches to character. Introductory remarks prime narratees to consider the entire following story in light of the character of the protagonists involved. Obituaries lay bare the traits, dispositions and behaviours which helped shape a person's fortunes throughout (much of) their life in order to impart a moral lesson.

A straightforward example concerns Josephus' treatment of King Asa of Judah. An introductory statement reports that God led him to a long and happy old age on account of his piety and sense of justice (*AJ* 8.290). Asa's exemplary behaviour in the story which follows is not in doubt, and thrown into relief by the contrasting deportment of a whole series of short-lived kings of Israel, with whom he has dealings. When Asa dies, Josephus comments:

> From these things one may learn that the Deity has very close oversight of human affairs and how he loves the good (*tous agathous*), but hates and annihilates root and branch the wicked (*tous ponērous*). For many kings of the Israelites, one after the other, were, within a short time, designated to be calamitously destroyed, along with their families, on account of their lawlessness (*paranomian*) and acts of injustice (*adikias*), while Asa, the king of Jerusalem and the two tribes, because of his piety (*eusebeian*) and righteousness (*dikaiosunēn*) was brought by God to a long and blessed old age and, after a reign of forty-one years, died in a happy state.
>
> *AJ* 8.314

This character assessment focuses only on the virtues *eusebeia* and *dikaiosunē*, the possession or lack of which here and elsewhere is the minimum requirement for distinguishing between good and bad rulers and for determining God's (dis)approval;[30] it takes the form of a polarized *sunkrisis* which deals in the absolute categories of 'good' and 'bad'; and it straightforwardly matches the *praxeis* of the various kings as described in the preceding narrative (indeed, in the interest of maintaining a sharp contrast Josephus has ignored biblical reports of Asa's less-than-happy end).[31] In short, Josephus here relies on stringent selectivity, schematization and black-and-white stereotypes in order to drive home a lesson about God's involvement in history.

30 Josephus here follows a basic trend of Jewish Scripture (cf. e.g. *AJ* 8.298–302, 361–362, 417–420; 9.1, 99–101), but the principle also determines his reports of non-biblical characters.

31 See Begg and Spilsbury 2005: 87, with 1 Kgs 15:23, 2 Chr 16:7–10.

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Josephus' narrative does not, however, always so obviously proceed at this emblematic level. As he tells the story, many protagonists lead more turbulent and uneven lives than Asa and do not occupy an extreme position on a scale of virtue. Josephus makes sense of these lives in a number of ways: he may still suggest (as he does for Asa) that a character's volatile career can be understood in terms of a few character traits, or he may draw up more rounded, composite portraits which take in various types of character traits. Moreover, while in the case of Asa the introductory and concluding comments correspond with each other and with the other characterization strategies employed throughout the story, at other times there are tensions between these elements in that, for instance, the introduction of a character does not match his or her obituary. In such cases, narratees are prompted to 'fill in the gaps' (to use a term from Iser's reader response theory), that is, actively to reconsider the relation between the several strands of someone's characterization; in the process they may arrive at a more profound understanding of a protagonist's character and motives; accordingly, the 'lesson' they take away from their reading may also be more complex. We will now illustrate these various possibilities.

Hyrcanus II is a good example of a character whose eventful life can, according to Josephus, be reduced to a single pattern of characteristic behaviour. He was High Priest, then King, but quickly deposed; then made ethnarch by Pompey, but deposed again; taken captive by the Parthians, he returned home, but he had lost his power to Herod, who finally executed him in 30 BCE. His obituary first summarizes the 'complex and changing fortunes in his lifetime' (*poikilais kai polutropois ... tais en tōi zēn tukhais*) (*AJ* 15.179) and then concludes:

> He seemed to be mild and moderate (*epieikēs kai metrios*) in all matters and to handle most parts of his rule through administrators. He was not interested in general affairs (*polupragmōn*), nor formidable (*deinos*) enough for being in charge of a kingdom. That Antipater and Herod advanced so far was due to his mildness (*dia tēn epieikeian*). So finally he met such an end at their hands, which was neither just nor pious.
>
> *AJ* 15.182

The passage reiterates the key elements of Hyrcanus' characterization so far.[32] Its added value is that it makes clear at a glance how Hyrcanus' fortunes were

32 He has been called decent and kind (*phusei khrēstos ... di' epieikeian ...*, *AJ* 14.13), but also naive, unambitious and indecisive (14.158, 179), which at least partly results from his kindness (*epieikeia*, 14.13; 15.165, 178), and incompetent to take action 'because of his unmanliness and want of good judgement' (*hup' anandrias kai anoias*, 14.179).

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essentially governed by a single character flaw, namely, a total lack of spine. Since Josephus formulates the man's shortcomings in part by commenting on his possession of the important virtues *epieikeia* and *metriotēs*, narratees are made to realize that friendliness and moderation are not in themselves enough to make a successful ruler.

A fairly typical example of a composite portrait is that of the malcontent Kores (biblical name: Korah), who rebels against Moses; his introduction gives the narratees an insight into his background, natural gifts and emotions:

> Kores, a certain one of the Hebrews who was among the most distinguished both in ancestry and in wealth (*kai genei kai ploutōi*), an able speaker (*hikanos d' eipein*) and most persuasive (*pithanōtatos*) in dealing with crowds, seeing that Moses was established in extraordinary honour, was hostile through envy (*phthonou*), for he happened to be his fellow tribesman and kinsman, and was embittered (*akhthomenos*) because he was more deserving to enjoy this glory by virtue of his being wealthier and not inferior in ancestry.
>
> *AJ* 4.14

The picture which emerges from this carefully balanced sketch is that of a man who possesses considerable endowments and talents but puts them to use in the service of the wrong cause, because he regrettably lets himself be guided by his emotions. The sketch helps explain why Kores will initially have considerable success and pose a serious threat to Moses (and to that extent creates suspense), but also why in the end he must fail. For despite the brief insight we are offered into Kores' motives, his is not a case of *tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner*: Kores should have known (as the narrator has made sure readers do) that Moses, because of the special favour in which God holds him, is rightly more honoured and that God disapproves of the rebellion; in the end, Kores and his followers are consumed by a God-sent fire (4.54–56).

A more complex composite portrait is that of Mariamme I, Herod the Great's wife. Her story abounds in brief characterizing comments, which are less consistent and one-sided than those which pepper the story of Hyrcanus II. She is, to begin with, one of the most beautiful women of her age (*AJ* 15.23, 25–27, 66–67, 73),[33] and partly for this reason Herod cannot stand the thought of her ever being with someone else, and gives the order to execute her if something

33 Josephus calls several other women 'the most beautiful'; this usually spells trouble for the women themselves and/or the men who behold them; cf. e.g. *AJ* 1.288; 7.130; 11.199; 20.142.

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happens to him (65). This order marks the beginning of the deterioration of her relationship with Herod. She is characterized as embittered (204, 208) and as taking many of Herod's actions in the worst possible way (70 'as was to be expected' for a woman, 202–203, 210, 222). She also, however, takes advantage of the love which Herod clearly, if problematically, bears her (65–66, 82–85, 204–205, 207, 216, 218–219), does not conceal her feelings (85, 208, 210–211, 214, 222), is arrogant (81, from the perspective of Salome; 212, 219), and has an inflated sense of her own nobility (36, 73, 210, 220); all of this is in part because she had 'something womanly and difficult about her by nature (*ti kai gunaikeion kai khalepon ek phuseōs*, 219).[34] However, in the section leading up to, and including, Mariamme's execution at the hands of Herod a noticeably more positive note creeps in, when she is called prudent (*sōphrōn*) in most things and also faithful (*pistē*) to Herod (219). And while she used to operate *in tandem* with her wicked mother Alexandra (e.g. 202), this now changes, too: in a calculated show of histrionics, Alexandra pretends ignorance of the things Mariamme is accused of in order to save herself, while Mariamme exercises great self-control up to the end (15.232–233). Using strongly evaluative terms, the narrator makes explicit how Mariamme's behaviour reflects on that of her mother:

> For [Mariamme] did not say one word, nor was she disturbed when she looked at Alexandra's annoying behaviour. Through her attitude she indicated, as it were, that her mother had behaved offensively and that she was more than angry about her evidently shameless behaviour. She, at last, truly went to her death calmly and without any change of complexion, clearly displaying her nobility to those who were looking at her, even in her last moments.
>
> *AJ* 15.235–236

At this point, it may be concluded that the change in Mariamme's characterization serves local rhetorical needs: she becomes the positive pole of a *sunkrisis* which pits her against Alexandra, and this is convincing to the extent that her story is temporarily aligned with the conventional pattern of a rogue character redeeming herself in death.[35] However, her obituary takes full account of her positive and negative sides, combining them into an integrated portrait:

34 For other instances of 'typically' female behaviour encapsulated by the word *gunaikeios*, cf. *AJ* 2.54; 15.44, 69, 168; 17.121; 18.255.

35 Cf. Ash 1999: 84, and van Henten 2007 and Swoboda 2014 on noble death in Josephus.

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> So Mariamme died this way, a woman who excelled in self-control (*enkrateian*) and greatness of mind (*megalopsukhian*) but fell short (*eleipen*) in reason (*to d' epieikes*); contentiousness had the upper hand in her character (*pleion ēn en tēi phusei to philoneikon*). Yet in physical beauty and dignity of manners she surpassed the women of her time more than one could say. But the greatest cause of her not living acceptably or pleasantly with the king arose from just this: while being paid court because of his love and not expecting anything unpleasant from him she kept up a disproportionate frankness (*parrhēsian*).
>
> *AJ* 15.237–238

Josephus appears to have realized that not all strands of Mariamme's characterization sit comfortably together (e.g. *enkrateia* and *megalopsukhia* on the one hand, and *parrhēsia* and *philoneikia* on the other). He meets the challenge by ranking Mariamme's various virtues and vices, suggesting that her 'contentiousness' was her most important trait and played the most important role in her eventual downfall. In the process, Mariamme's portrait has become quite rounded and individual. While her contentiousness resonates with earlier remarks on her 'typically' female behaviour, the total picture cannot easily be reduced to any simple type.[36]

While Josephus here appears to go out of his way to create a coherent portrait, there are occasions on which he lets apparent inconsistencies stand side by side. This can be illustrated with the help of what is perhaps Josephus' most ambitious reflection on character. It is inserted after a narrative episode which relates how Saul, the first ruler of the united kingdom of Judah and Israel, killed the High Priest Abimelech and his entire family:

> [By committing this deed, Saul] gave everyone to learn and understand the ways of man (*ton anthrōpinon tropon*): as long as they are private, humble citizens, they are gentle and moderate (*epieikeis eisi kai metrioi*), because they are incapable of exhibiting their nature (*khrēsthai tēi phusei*) and do not dare to do as they wish; they only pursue justice (*to dikaion*), and on that they focus all their positive impulses and energy (*spoudēn*). As for the Deity, they are convinced that he is present to everything that happens in life, and does not only witness their actions, but even knows the very thoughts that give rise to those actions. When, however, they attain

36 Cf. van Henten 2014: 162, noting, for instance, that *megalopsukhia* is elsewhere a typically male trait in Josephus (of ambiguous morality).

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> to authority and dynastic power, they set all these things aside, and taking off, like stage masks, their habits and manners (*hōsper epi skēnēs prosōpeia ta ēthē kai tous tropous apothemenoi*), they instead put on audacity (*tolman*), recklessness (*aponoian*) and contempt (*kataphronēsin*) for matters human and divine; and at the moment when they are most in need of piety (*eusebeias*) and justice (*dikaiosunēs*), since they are now most exposed to envy, with their thoughts and actions manifest to all, then, as if God no longer saw them or was afraid because of their authority, they act without restraint (*emparoinousi tois pragmasin*). Their fear of rumours, their wilful hates, their irrational loves—they regard all these things as valid, sure and true, and as pleasing to men and God alike, while to the future they give no thought at all.
>
> *AJ* 6.262–266

This comment moves on an abstract plain. The reference to 'human nature'[37] suggests that Saul's story shows that no human being can fully incarnate God's divine will as king, and this chimes with indications to this effect given earlier in the narrative.[38] But the logic of the argument is difficult to follow. On the one hand, Josephus unfolds a theory of gradual character revelation: the implication is that a ruler's firm grip on power gives him the opportunity finally to 'exhibit his [true] nature' (*khrēsthai tēi phusei*) and to do as he pleases; the morally upstanding behaviour he displayed before, encapsulated in the phrase *ta ēthē kai tous tropous*, turns out to be disposable. On this reading, the ruler never was actually gentle, moderate or just (and this may alert us to the fact that when Josephus states that someone '*is* gentle and moderate' or the like, he does not necessarily refer to inherent qualities, but may have projected, cultivated traits in view). On the other hand, Josephus suggests that the ruler's character is adversely affected by his hold on power, specifically because emotions (fear, hate, love and envy) and a susceptibility to slander begin to cloud his judgement; the connotation of madness which the noun *aponoia* and the verb

37 Only here is *tropos* used to refer to 'human nature', no doubt because of its associations with 'change' (of circumstances or character?); cf. *trepō* 'turn'. Begg 2005: 171 claims that the passage articulates a universal tragic pattern.

38 Cf. *AJ* 6.40–42, 60–61 (speeches of Samuel), drawing a sharp distinction between God and kings. The main exception is Moses, whose legislation is believed faithfully to reflect the divine will and so to be 'greater than [Moses'] own [human] nature' (*tēs autou phuseōs kreittona*) (*AJ* 3.320). For the motif of 'superiority to human nature', cf. also *AJ* 15.372; 19.345. Van Henten 2014: 277 notes how the motif plays on the tragic trope that 'human nature must think human thoughts' (S. *TrGF* 590.1).

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paroinein carry strongly suggests that the ruler is no longer himself, up to the point that his earlier virtues are so completely suppressed that it makes sense to speak about character change.[39]

The combination of these two explanatory models is uneasy and poses an interpretative challenge. One factor to emphasize is the programmatic nature of the passage. Both models will play a role, either in isolation or in combination, in the narrative about Saul's successors, and so the passage underlines that, in one way or another, monarchy is a form of rule which is bound to lead to problems. Still, careful readers will also find that both strands of the argument resonate with certain elements of Saul's story. For instance, when it is determined that he should become king, Saul's first response is to hide himself, 'I think', Josephus says (marking an extra-biblical addition; cf. 1Sam. 10.21–22), 'because he did not wish to appear eager to take the rulership' (*AJ* 6.63)—which implies that he *was* eager and deliberately hid that side of himself. When he spares the Amalekite king Agag even though God demands his execution, the narrator states that Saul disobeyed God, 'being overcome by his emotions and giving in to an untimely pity' (137); this exacerbates a process of deterioration which set in even earlier.[40] The narratees, then, are prompted to apply to Saul an even more differentiated view of character than that which the narrator applied to Mariamme, considering both the preceding and following account of Saul with questions in mind about what traits were dominant in what parts of Saul's life, who he really was, and who he really became.[41] There may be no definitive answers, and ultimately readers may well be left with a sense of Saul's inscrutability.[42]

That Josephus at times intends narratees to think about his protagonists in such ways may be illustrated through two final examples. One case in point is the obituary of the matricide and fratricide Aristobulus I, which casts him, among other things, as someone of 'a gentle nature' (*phusei … epiekei*) and given to 'modesty' (*aidous*) (*AJ* 13.319). This striking evaluation of a murderer

39 Feldman 1998: 531 emphasizes this aspect of the passage, claiming that Josephus' 'main point is that Saul's character suffered because of his accession to power'.

40 Cf. *AJ* 6.102, 104, 146–151.

41 For Josephus' multi-faceted portrait of Saul, see Feldman 1982; 1998: 509–536. He remains, for instance, exceptionally brave and is prepared to meet death on the battlefield (*AJ* 6.343–350).

42 A possible parallel is Tacitus' characterization of the enigmatic Tiberius in *Annales* 1–6; Koestermann 1963–1968: vol. 1, 38 suggests that Tacitus deliberately provides readers with alternative scenarios from which they can choose.

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has been called 'almost comical',[43] and there is something to this; the whole sequence is rather reminiscent of the fictional court speeches which pupils at the declamation schools were asked to write and which often set out to defend the indefensible in extravagant ways.[44] On the other hand, the obituary is consistent with one strand in Aristobulus' earlier characterization: he really did love his brother Antigonus and was led astray only 'reluctantly'[45] by the rumour-mongering of 'wicked persons' into believing that he was plotting against him (*AJ* 13.302–307). Antigonus' execution is presented as an object-lesson about how 'there is nothing more powerful than envy and calumny, nor anything that more easily disrupts friendship and the ties of nature (*phusikēn oikeiotēta*) than these influences' (310), and Aristobulus immediately regrets it (314). It is still surprising that the obituary should focus on who Aristobulus once was (and, dimly, remained) rather than on what he had become, but the result is poignant rather than comical: it reinforces the moral lesson that outside influences can make people behave contrary to their deepest nature, and imbues the story with a tinge of regret.

Something close to the opposite of this can be observed in Josephus' treatment of Herod the Great's father Antipater, the self-appointed right-hand man of Hyrcanus II. Upon his introduction he is characterized rather negatively as 'energetic by nature and rebellious' (*drastērios de tēn phusin kai stasiastēs*, *AJ* 14.8),[46] and the subsequent narrative reports how he schemes (e.g. 11), persuades (131, 141–143), bribes (81), threatens (156–157) and fights (bravely: 134) his way to prominence. But when this extraordinarily ambitious character is murdered, his obituary straight-facedly states that he 'stood out because of his piety, justice and devotion to the fatherland' (*eusebeiai te kai dikaioisunēi dienenkōn kai tēi peri tēn patrida spoudēi*) (14.283). One could again think that the discrepancy results from the local needs which the initial character sketch and the obituary serve: the former explains Antipater's rise and pits him against Hyrcanus, who, as we have seen, lacks all ambition; the latter follows the scene of Antipater's murder at the hands of Malichus, and describing the victim in positive terms is Josephus' way of condemning Malichus.[47] However, the fact that

43 Mason in Feldman 2000: XXXII.

44 Cf. Russell 1983.

45 *Akōn* (*AJ* 13.307, if the text is sound).

46 The adjective *drastērios* is used by Thucydides (4.81.1) of Brasidas; otherwise rare, it is a favourite word of Josephus and denotes an important trait (though of ambiguous morality) in successful leaders; cf. *BJ* 1.204, 226, 283; 4.392, 624; 7.196; *AJ* 2.139; 5.182; 7.9; 8.318; 9.27, 93; 10.219; 13.407; 14.8, 13.

47 Landau 2006: 128 also points out that the obituary looks ahead at the narrative about

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the final assessment comes in the form of a clearly marked obituary and the fact that it goes so far as to ascribe to Antipater the two key virtues which elsewhere mark out good rulers (see above) speak against such an interpretation. It is more likely that Josephus gives us to understand that, whatever we may think of Antipater's ambition, it preserved the integrity of the kingdom.[48] Imparting another lesson about the dubious relation between power and moral goodness, he seems to be suggesting that good leadership, including doing what is just and pleasing to God, is determined as much by the effects of someone's actions (a matter of *ēthos*) as by their true moral qualities (a matter of *phusis*).

Herod

King Herod the Great is Josephus' most elaborate character. The extensive reports about him in *War* 1 and *Antiquities* 14–17 function in the broader context as a guideline for the interpretation of the subsequent war against Rome.[49] We will briefly consider his characterization, bringing together some of the points made in the previous sections.

Herod is chiefly characterized by a mix of virtues and vices shared between both accounts. Important virtues are his energy (*phusei drastērios*, *BJ* 1.204 at Herod's introduction; also 1.283) and his bravery (*aretē*) in military affairs (*AJ* 14.159; 15.114; cf. *pros to deinon eupsukhos*, *AJ* 14.355). Another characteristic virtue is the king's magnanimity (*megalopsukhia*), which may refer to his generous treatment of others, including his Roman patrons (*AJ* 15.48, 196; 16.140–141) or activities like his care for subjects in need (15.316) or splendid buildings (*BJ* 1.401–428).[50] A related trait, which may be ambiguous, is Herod's *philotimia*, which can mean 'love of glory' (*AJ* 15.271; 16.153), but also 'ambition' (especially to erect new buildings, *BJ* 1.403, 408, 419; *AJ* 15.296, 303, 330) and 'munificence' (*AJ* 15.312, 315, 328; 16.149–150, 158). Negative traits include Herod's suspicion of relatives and other courtiers (*AJ* 15.42, 183, 210, 258, 264–265; 16.119, 223, 334), his

Herod, whose vices are in many ways the mirror-image of the virtues ascribed to Antipater here (making this another *sunkrisis*).

48 In the corresponding passage in *War* Josephus explicitly states that Antipater 'restored the government to Hyrcanus and preserved it' (*BJ* 1.226). Cf. also *AJ* 14.277: Malichus plots the murder, because he thinks (mistakenly and ironically) that this might secure Hyrcanus' rule.

49 Van Henten 2011b.

50 See *SAGN* 3: 206 (Huitink and van Henten) for the characterizing function of building and buildings in Josephus.

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jealousy (*BJ* 1.463, 633–634; *AJ* 15.50, 66–67, 82, 16.248), and his violent attitude (*AJ* 14.165; 15.321).

In *War*, Josephus deals with Herod's many contradictions by dividing the narrative into two sections, one about his struggle for the throne and his rule (1.203–428) and one about his private affairs (1.431–673). The passage that forms the transition to the second section (1.431) suggests that Herod was successful as king but privately unhappy: 'Fortune, however, made [Herod] pay for his public success with troubles at home. The origin of his ill-fated condition was a woman, with whom he was very much in love' (the woman referred to is his wife Mariamme I). In this way, Josephus paints a fairly positive image of Herod as a successful ruler. His public deeds articulate the picture that emerges from his virtues, highlighting three main points: Herod is a very loyal and successful friendly king of the Romans (e.g. *BJ* 1.282–283, 387–393, 400; see also *AJ* 15.183–198, 361), a superb military commander (also emphasized in the direct characterization in *BJ* 1.429–430), and an avid builder (*BJ* 1.401–428). His negative sides chiefly come out in the narrative about Herod's inability to control the factions within his household, who are constantly at each other's throats and attempt to take over the throne.

In *Antiquities*, the picture is more complex, and ultimately more damning. Josephus deconstructs the positive side of the image in *War*. He does so in part by making small changes. One addition, situated in a period when the Parthians and Antigonus controlled Jerusalem and Herod had to bring his close relatives to safety at Masada, describes how Herod panicked when the wagon with his mother overturned while the enemy was chasing them; Herod's companions had to prevent him from committing suicide (*AJ* 14.355–358). This brief story is absent from *War* and a crack in the image of Herod as a courageous and cool-headed military commander. Another episode absent from *War* concerns Manaemus the Essene (*AJ* 15.373–379), who predicted that Herod would become king; his prediction implies that Herod lacks *dikaiosunē* and *eusebeia* (15.375–376; differently: *BJ* 1.400), the two main virtues of good rulers (see above).

Josephus also articulates the basic stereotype of the bad ruler as the stereotype of the tyrant by making explicit references to tyranny and by hints at the negative traits usually associated with tyrants (e.g. autocratic rule, arbitrariness, lawlessness, cruelty, greed, lack of trust, envy, murder of relatives).[51] In the case of Herod in *Antiquities*, Josephus makes the point that he is a tyrant

51 These traits are prominent in Suetonius' depictions of Nero and Domitian; see van Henten 2011a. For the example of Cleopatra, see van Henten 2005.

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in a sophisticated way, by applying the idea of gradual character revelation. He feeds the readers with observations by others in the story that point to the king's tyrannical character (*AJ* 14.165; 15.70, 222, 321, 353; 16.1–5). After reporting Herod's first deed, the elimination of Ezekias' gang of robbers, Josephus notes already that prominent Jews became afraid of him: 'But the chief Jews were in great fear when they saw how violent (*biaion*) and bold (*tolmēron*) Herod was, and how much he longed for tyranny (*turannidos glikhomenon*)' (*AJ* 14.165). At the end of Herod's career Josephus presents us with the full picture of Herod as a tyrant in his revised story about the golden eagle episode (*AJ* 17.148–164): rage, pure anger, bitterness and cruelty characterize Herod's behaviour, as well as his conviction that the Jewish people despised him (17.148, 164). A flashback by Jewish delegates before Augustus after Herod's death connects Herod's tyrannical deeds with his character (*phusei*, *AJ* 17.304).[52] This implies that Herod was, in fact, a tyrant since his first public appearance, but that it became fully manifest only towards the end of his life.

Finally, in *Antiquities* episodes about Herod's public career alternate with episodes covering his private affairs, and this results in a more mixed picture of his character, too. *Antiquities* especially stresses to a much higher degree than *War* Herod's ambivalence towards his family. On the one hand he is, for example, determined to have his brother-in-law and High Priest Aristobulus III killed because he may be a competitor, but after the young man is murdered in one of the royal swimming pools, he is deeply moved by his death. Josephus makes this ambiguity explicit with the rare phrase 'sincere confusion of his feelings' (*sunkhusin tēs psukhēs alēthinēn*, *AJ* 15.60), which is repeated at 16.75, also referring to Herod. Herod's relationship with Mariamme I is another example, as he is torn apart by feelings of love and hatred towards her (*AJ* 15.211–212, 214).[53] At the same time, Josephus here seems to portray Herod as a dynamic character, who gradually succumbs to his bitterness and hatred, which eventually overcome the better aspects of his true nature.

Conclusion

Josephus interprets the history of the Jewish people and in particular its war with Rome largely in moral terms: leaders on both sides are categorized in terms of virtues and vices. Josephus' preoccupations in characterization inter-

52 Cf. *BJ* 2.84, 88. Discussion in van Henten 2011a.

53 See also *AJ* 16.400–403.

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estingly come to the fore in his concern to establish himself as a proper judge of history. Josephus' 'rhetoric of character' is at times quite sophisticated. This sophistication does not so much rise from subtle, implicit or novel techniques of characterization, but rather from the way in which Josephus elaborates and varies basic rhetorical models, such as that prescribed in the *progumnasmata*. He constantly analyses the character of his protagonists (especially breaking down the notion of virtue into many different component parts) against the background of a multi-layered conception of character, and uses several models, including gradual character revelation and character change, to explain and explore the relations between his protagonists' diverse and sometimes contradictory character traits and their actions and morality.

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