

# Flavius Josephus: A Quintessential Example for Historical Authenticity

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**Abstract:** *In this article, I want to highlight the importance of avid reading and writing, which is very nucleus to the scholarly growth by focusing on the intense historical works of a Roman - Jewish Historian as well, a military leader, Flavius Josephus, i.e. The Jewish War( The Jewish revolt against Romans); Antiquities of the Jews (The history of Jews to Greek and Roman audience); The Vita (Autobiographical text of Josephus ) and Against Apian (A polemical writing as an apology for Judaism ), who Initially battled against the Roman Empire during the First Jewish- Roman War as a general of the Jewish forces in Galilee, and later on as the war was progressing, he was in the course of time in A. D. 67, totally surrendered to the Roman army, which was chivalrously led by the military commander Vespasian, who later became the Roman Emperor in A. D 69 and who willingly granted freedom to Flavius, as a result , Josephus had taken the family name of Flavius. In the latter years, Josephus became the advisor of Titus, Vespasian's son, who led the army towards the the siege of Jerusalem in A. D. 70.*

**Keywords:** History, avid reading and writing, Banus, Pontius Pilate, ancestry and contemporary historians.

## Meaning of 'History'

The term 'History', which is derived from Greek word, 'historia', means, knowledge from inquiry, investigation, probe, discovery of real events and assembly and systematic organisation of the past without addition or deletion, and systematic study of past events or occurrences. Herodotus and Thucydides were worth mentionable historians in the west in BC and Herodotus is said to be the father of history. History can not be denied with our prejudices and biases, history as history is to be wholly accepted whether we have liking or disliking as it is unalterable but it can be duly analysed; interpreted and commented upon.

## Flavius Josephus

Those who read Josephus, as per my opinion, would certainly get inspired to become a relentless reader and writer. As most of us know, Flavius Josephus, who belonged to the first century from AD 37 to AD 100, was a Roman—Jewish historian, a powerful military leader, voracious reader and avid writer. He was descended from the priestly family, having the prestigious sacerdotal dignity and reputation. It is said that while he was still 14 years of age, he was highly commended by all for his great love for learning. History says that he had a great memory and deep understanding of things. When he was sixteen years old, he had a trial with many groups like Pharisees, whose teachings are foundational and ritualistic ground for Rabbinic Judaism, in fact, 'Pharisee' means the separated one. And another group is the 'Sadducees', they are also known as Zadokites, Sadducees only consider the Written Torah but reject the Oral Torah and the Resurrection of the Dead. And the final group is 'Essenes', who are the mystic Jewish sect and they are apolitical in nature.

## Banus

'Banus', was a great historical figure and Flavius had a great acquaintance with a great man called 'Banus', who was his teacher. We have the bits of information about in the writings of Josephus that 'Banus' lived in the desert and grew upon the trees. William Whiston suggests in his

translation of the works of Josephus, that 'Banus' might have been a disciple of John the Baptist and might have influenced Josephus to have a very good opinion of Jesus. When Josephus was just 26 years old, he had taken a voyage to Rome, when Felix was procurator of Judea. During this journey, in fact, he bitterly confronted many hazards while going by ship. He says in his own words that our ship sank in Adriatic Sea, by God's providence only, we could escape by another ship, called 'the ship of Cyrene' miraculously to the amazement of our eyes. All six hundred in number swam for life but only eight in number could miraculously escape.

## Ancestry of Josephus

His grandfather father's was named 'Simon Psellus', who had nine sons and one of whom was 'Matthias', called 'Ephlias' and who had a son called 'Mathias Curtus' in the year of the government of Hyrcanus. John Hyrcanus 11 was who died in BCE. He was a member of the Hasmonean dynasty, by reading about this dynasty, we understand that the 'Hasmonean dynasty' was a ruling dynasty of Judea and surrounding regions during the Hellenistic times of the second Temple Period from 140 BCE to 37 BCE in the Seleucid Empire. It is very interesting that the Seleucid Empire was a Greek power in West Asia, which was founded in 312 BC by the Macedonian general Seleucus 1 Nicator. Following the division of the Macedonian empire founded by 'Alexander the Great', it was ruled by 'the Seleucid dynasty' until its annexation by the Roman Republic under Pompey in 63 BC. Archelaus, who was the king of Macedonia from 413 to 399, died in 399 BC, during whose time, Matthias was born in the tenth year of the reign of Archelaus. And then, Josephus Flavius was born in the first year of the reign of Caius Caesar. Flavius Josephus was married four times and had three sons by his third wife, two of whom preceded Josephus death, while the third, namely, Hyrcanus, outlived him and other two are, Justus and Simonides Agrippa by his last wife, a jewess of nobility from Crete

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**His significant works**

**William Whiston** rightly comments on Josephus that possessing a unique appreciation of both the Jewish and Roman perspectives, Josephus provides a remarkable account of the events leading up to the revolt, military manoeuvres, anecdotes, and personal commentary. (Winston 111).<sup>1</sup> The first and foremost work of Josephus is *Jewish War*, As Steve Mason, who is a Canadian historian of Judea in the Graeco- Roman period and who is best known for his studies of Josephus and early Christian writings, strongly opines that “Perhaps the most influential non- biblical text of Western history is *Jewish War*, which is divided into ‘seven books’, in which, the first two books deal with a summary of Jewish history from the capture of Jerusalem by the Seleucid ruler **Antiochus IV Epiphanes** in 168 BC to the first stages of the First Jewish- Roman War and the next five books vividly detail the unfolding of the war under the Roman generals **Vespasian** and **Titus**, to the death of the last **Sicarii**.

Another most prominent book in sequence, *Antiquities of the Jews*, which was written around AD 93–94, clearly comprise two references, namely, one is to ‘Jesus of Nazareth’ and another reference is to ‘John the Baptist’. The specific reference about ‘Jesus of Nazareth’ is found in Book 18, chapter 3, section 3, lines, 63–64, in which, he said that Jesus was the Messiah and a wise teacher, who was crucified by Pontius Pilate; and this statement is originally and famously known as ‘Testimonium Flavianum’. Flavius Josephus makes mention of Jesus that Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over him to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was (the) Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that love him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third time, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians are not extinct at this day (Winston 590).<sup>2</sup>

The biblical account of John the Baptist is found in the synoptic gospels, the following one is found in the gospel of Mark, 6th chapter from 25th verse to 28th verse as “**25** Immediately she came in with haste to the king and asked, saying, “I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.” **26** And the king was exceedingly sorry; yet, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse her. **27** Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded his head to be brought. And he went and beheaded him in prison, **28** brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother. **29** When his disciples heard of it, they came and took away his corpse and laid it in a tomb”.

**William Whiston** carefully writes in Book 18, chapter 5, section 2, lines 116 to 119 that John the Baptist justly reproved Herod the tetrarch, and for which reprove Salome (the daughter of Herodias by her first husband Herod Philip, who was still alive), occasioned him to be unjustly beheaded. (Whiston 597).<sup>3</sup> This is the most essential, the

oldest and the most authentic extra biblical source, which is undeniably acceptable by all.

The second reference to Jesus is found is Book 20, chapter 9, section 1, line 200, which clearly mentions that... So, he assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James... (Whiston 656) <sup>4</sup>. Another remarkable work of Josephus was *The Vita*, which is an autobiographical work, written approximately around 94–99, and in which book, he meticulously revisits the events of the war, in response to allegations made against him by ‘Justus of Tiberias’, the first century Jewish author and historiographer from 35AD to 100AD. And another most striking book was *Against the Apion*, which is a polemical work, written by ‘Flavius Josephus’ as a defence of Judaism as a classical religion and philosophy against criticism by Apion.

**Contemporary Historians**

**Gains Plinius Secundus**, also known as **the Pliny the Elder** was a Roman author, the natural philosopher and a friend of the emperor ‘Vespasian’. *The Natural History*, is a famous and detailed Latin work by him, which is encyclopaedic in scope, divided into 37 books and ten volumes, out of which he published the first ten books and the the rest was published by the nephew, the Pliny the younger. Another prominent book of Pliny the Elder was *The History of German Wars*.

Another most notable historian of this time was **Plutarch**, who belonged to AD 46- AD 119, was Platonist philosopher and historian and later on, became a Roman citizen. *Parallel Lives*, the magnum opus by him, is a series of 48 biographies of famous men, in which the lives are orderly arranged in pairs to illuminate their common moral virtues or failings. The surviving *Parallel Lives* only comprises 23 pairs of biographies, each pair consisting of one Greek and one Roman of similar destiny, such as Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar, or Demosthenes and Cicero. **Dryden** in his translation of *Plutarch’s Lives*, in preface, Arthur Hugh Clough opines that to the proper work, the *Parallel Lives*, narrated in a series of books, each containing the accounts of one Greek and one Roman, followed by a comparison, some single lives have been appended, for no reason but that they are also biographies. (Dryden 19)<sup>5</sup>

Another most important **Suetonius**, who belonged to AD 69 to AD 122, was a Roman historian, whose famous work was *Twelve Caesars* from Julius Caesar to Domitian, namely, **Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitellius Vespasian, Titus and Domitian**. The work tells the tale of each Caesar's life and the descriptions of appearance, omens, family history, quotes, and then a history in a consistent order. “The oldest surviving copy of *The Twelve Caesars* was made in Tours in the late 8th or early 9th century AD, and is currently held in ‘the Bibliotheque nationale de France’...there are nineteen surviving copies of *The Twelve Caesars* from the 13th century or earlier. The presence of certain errors in some copies but not others suggests that the nineteen books can be split into two branches of transmission of roughly equal size (Suetonius *Twelve Caesars*, Digisource) <sup>6</sup>

Another most prominent of the first century was **Publius Cornelius Tacitus**, Who was greatly inspired by **Sallust**, a Roman historian ( BC 86 to BC 35) ( AD 56 to 120), who is highly regarded as one of the Roman historian and His famous work is “ *Annals and Histories* “, which thoroughly examines the reigns of the emperors like **Tiberius**, **Claudius** and **Nero**, Tacitus's *Annals* are of interest for providing an early account of the persecution of Christians and one of the earliest extra-Biblical references to the crucifixion of Jesus.( Tacitus: *Annals and Histories*)<sup>7</sup>. And the other most important personality was **Marcus Fabius Quintilianus** (AD 35 to AD 100), who was a Roman educator and **Lucius Annaeus Seneca the Younger** (4 BC to AD 65), a stoic philosopher and **Aufidius Bassus**, who was one of the greatest historians, had written a historical work called, *Bellum Germanicum*. **Seneca the Elder** greatly speaks of a Bassus as a historian.

## Conclusion

Thus, this article mentions of Josephus works, the history of meaning, ancestry of Josephus, contemporary historians, and their important writings how meticulously they were written in the era, which was completely devoid of facilities and Josephus's writings are the quintessential examples of avid reading and writing. And his meticulous observations; careful writings; study of minutest details of the past and present; strenuous drive into the most complex genealogies; passion for writing history and untiring patience are highly commended.

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