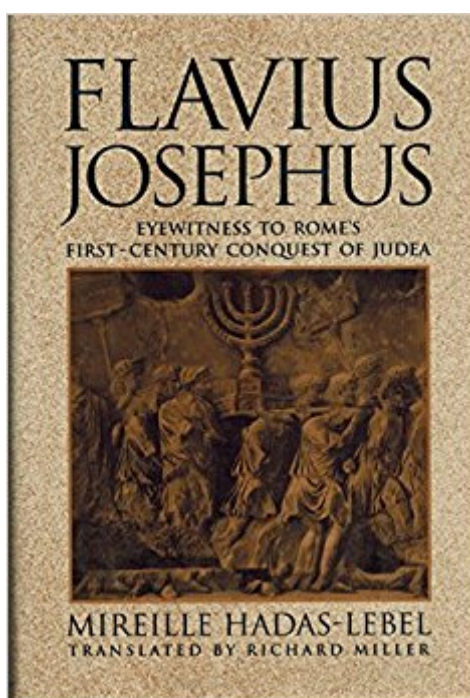


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Flavius Josephus: Eyewitness To Rome's First-Century Conquest Of Judaea



Synopsis

An account of Rome's campaign against Judea--through the eyes of the Jewish priest, general, Roman captive, and historian--narrates the key first-century events in Judeo-Christian culture.

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Customer Reviews

A century ago, the name Josephus would have evoked recognition from Westerners in all walks of life. His first-century eyewitness accounts of Rome's wars against Judaea provided classical scholars with valuable source material while his singular allusion to Jesus Christ made him popular with Christians. Within the Jewish community, however, there has always been controversy about his motives and actions. Was this Jew, who wrote so dramatically of the tragedy of Masada and the destruction of Jerusalem, a traitor to his people because he surrendered to the Romans and was honored by Vespasian and Titus? French scholar Hadas-Lebel explores Josephus's background and influences in order to answer this question. Her work is less a biography than an interpretation of her subject's behavior, thus defining his place in Jewish literature. Academic libraries may find this book a worthwhile addition. History Book Club alternate.- Rose Cichy, Osterhout Free Lib. , Wilkes-Barre, Pa. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc.

French writer Hadas-Lebel offers a scholarly but terse biography of the enigmatic Jewish-Roman general and historian Flavius Josephus (37 A.D. - c. 95? A.D.), who participated in, witnessed, and then recorded the Jewish uprising against Roman rule (67 A.D. - 73 A.D.). Hadas-Lebel presents Josephus as an unusually clever but otherwise typical upper-class Jewish male of the priestly class,

thoroughly grounded in Jewish Pharisaical traditions, and acquainted as well with the classical Greco-Latin learning of the regnant Romans. A patriotic Jew who feared and admired Roman strength, which he saw firsthand on a youthful visit to Rome, Josephus was a pragmatist who saw no hope in resisting Roman rule (his realism starkly contrasted with the mystical fatalism of many of the other Jewish leaders). Because of his priestly lineage and evident intellect, he became a natural, albeit reluctant, military leader of the rebellion (the causes of which are not explained in any depth); although he opposed the uprising against Rome, Hadas- Lebel speculates, he would have been executed if he has opposed the fanatical Jewish leaders. After an initial victory, the Jewish leaders were reduced to defending their fortified cities against the Roman armies of Vespasian and his son Titus. Josephus, designated by the rebels as the Governor-General of Galilee, defended Jotapata, often thwarting the more numerous and better armed Romans through a variety of clever stratagems. However, Jotapata finally fell, and after its destruction, Josephus befriended Vespasian and Titus through flattering prophecies about their ultimately becoming Emperors (which came true). The Roman generals spared him, and Josephus became the ally of the Romans and witness to their destruction of Judaea, including Jerusalem in 70 A.D. After the loss of Jerusalem, Josephus accompanied his captors to Rome, where he stayed for the rest of his life, and wrote the Jewish War (75?) and Jewish Antiquities (93?), among other works. Much is missing here: there is little analysis of the causes of the Jewish rebellion or of the civil war among Jewish factions (to which, in part, Hadas-Lebel attributes the fall of Jerusalem). Nonetheless, sticking faithfully to extant sources, Hadas-Lebel succeeds in making the astute, practical Josephus, and his moral compromises, come alive, and leaves the reader to decide whether Josephus was a despicable traitor or an admirable realist. -- Copyright ©1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Real nice analysis of the man named Joseph son of Mathias. As the author concludes, for Josephus it was a matter of survival in a time of sure destruction. Josephus was an intelligent individual, as well as, part of the elite class of Jewish society. He knew the war against the Romans was hopeless and therefore decided to go over to the Roman side. Yes, he was a traitor to his people, but has left us an eye witness account, that would have been lost, of the war between Rome and Judea. His ethics were unworthy of a man from such an honorable line of Jewish priests. However, he was also proud of the heritage of his people and being a Jew! Who knows how one would have behaved in his same situation? Great book!

This book is a classic. Who am I to critique Flavius Josephus, eyewitness to history 2 thousand

years ago? Anyone interested in this period HAS to get this book.

I concur with the previous reviewer's disappointment over the lack of summarizing appendices. I found Professor Hadas-Lebel's account quite adequate, even stimulating as an introductory text on the twin research controversies over Josephus and the revolt to which Josephus is virtually the sole eyewitness/contemporary account (unless one counts the tantalizing fragments of Tacitus). I wish that the author had included a bibliography or a discussion of the conflicting modern academic or religious studies. Nonetheless, this book is both a good summary of the debate and a solid introduction to Josephus, the events he describes and his predicament in the context of a hostile world. Particularly valuable is Hadas-Lebel's review of Josephus' legacy in art, music, literature and judicial polemics -- mock courts-martial and the like. I am pleased to see this book available again in paperback. I ordered expecting that some of the above defects would have been remedied. I hope that English-speakers might soon find translations of some of the author's other more recent work on the Jewish Revolt.

I had begun reading Josephus, but took a detour to read this book first. Very glad to that I did, because this book presents great context for reading the original work. The author pulls from (and summarizes) Josephus' works, and cites influences from the (still evolving/to-be-written) Mishnah and Talmud, New Testament, and contemporaries like Tacitus, Suetonius and others.

No one will ever know the full truth about Josephus. Was he a hero or a traitor during the war that left 1 million Jews dead, the Temple burnt to the ground, and resulted in Josephus becoming a friend and privileged member of Vespasian's circle? Josephus was born of royal (Hasmonean) and priestly lineage. He progressed quickly through school when "Each stage of Jewish schooling relied heavily on memory" (p 14). As a young man, he claims to have spent time with the Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes, and described them in his later writings. He even visited Rome which then had some forty thousand Jews, most of them former slaves. A few years before the war began, ominous signs appeared. A comet "shaped like a sword that had shone for a whole year" (p 64) over Jerusalem. On the streets roamed a madman who shouted "Woe to Jerusalem" (p 65). As the war began in 66 AD, Josephus was put in charge of Galilee, with an army - untrained, badly armed, but fervent and ready to die - of 60,000. It didn't take the Roman armies long to reconquer the areas. "The Galilean insurgents...had been looking for a soldier driven by an unwavering faith, and they had been sent an intellectual as tricky as he was eloquent" (p87). Tricky Josephus would prove

to be. After the bloody slaughter of some 40,000, Josephus pretended to go along with the suicides of the remnants of the army, then refused to kill himself at the end. Instead he demanded an audience with Vespasian, and astonishingly, was granted it. Josephus announced to Vespasian that he was destined to become emperor. The Jewish scriptures predicted a ruler coming from Judea, a Messiah who would conquer the world and bring peace to all. There are as many explanations for Josephus' behavior as you can imagine, with every scholar plumping for a slightly different variation.. As for Vespasian, since he came from an utterly non patrician background but had decades of success as military leader, his reaction is less difficult to understand. The ancient world was alive with 'signs' that needed to be read, and here was Josephus, living proof that Fate had destined Vespasian to rule the Roman empire. Josephus' life was spared, but he was kept in chains for the next two years until Vespasian, was indeed, proclaimed emperor. This is a splendid biography, impeccably researched, well written, and it has as its subject the fascinating Josephus.

perhaps three or four if you already have. This book is essentially a summary of Josephus's books (especially his Jewish War). If you have not read those works, this is an excellent guide to Josephus. If you have read Josephus, this book will add a little bit to your understanding, but obviously not as much. What Lebel does best is add emotion to Josephus's relatively dry account: that is, she tries to explain the passions that drove both Josephus and the Jewish rebels. On the one hand, Josephus believed that the Jewish rebellion was suicidal, and that the destruction of the Second Temple may have even been Divine punishment for the rebels' murderous tactics. Lebel speculates that the rebels were driven not just by nationalism but by the hope of divine intervention. Even seemingly insane behavior (e.g. the rebels' destruction of food that Jerusalemites needed to survive the Roman siege) makes sense if the rebels believed that their bravery would be rewarded with a miracle. Indeed, some language in Josephus' own work supports this view: for example, Josephus quotes one rebel as stating: "Even had they wings, the Romans would never surmount the walls of Jerusalem."

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