

JOSEPHUS ON SALOME ALEXANDRA

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Queen Salome Alexandra came to the throne of Judea when she was sixty-four years old despite having two sons of eligible age. Rabbinic literature describes her reign as one blessed by natural wonders,¹ yet these mentions are few and most surviving information about her comes from Josephus' works. Unfortunately, these sources are confusing as much as they are informative, presenting almost opposite portraits of her character and her reign: *Judean War* paints her as a pious, beloved, and capable ruler,² while *Judean Antiquities* is generally critical, judging her to be ruthless and power-hungry.³

Historians who study her must try to resolve these differences to estimate what Salome Alexandra's influence truly was on the last days of Judea. I will be examining three of them, sometimes referencing some of the other historians they choose to use as sources or foils, and observing how their choices in analytical techniques have led to their different evaluations of Josephus' materials about Alexandra. Etka Liebowitz uses gender theory, analysis of word choice, and comparisons with Josephus' portrayal of other ruling women to conclude that Josephus was a misogynist whose bias unfairly distorted his writing. Tal Ilan uses comparisons to Josephus' writings about other women as well as textual analysis to work backwards, uncover his sources, and determine that Josephus' Greek source, Nicolaus, was a misogynist who is to blame for perpetuating a misrepresentation of Alexandra. Daniel R. Schwartz looks to the cultural and political influences on Josephus as well as chronologically mapping Josephus' works to identify the agenda of his sources, and arrives at a similar conclusion to Ilan – that Josephus' writing of the period is deeply influenced by Nicolaus – but he disagrees about *when* he used Nicolaus and he sees a political, not a gender bias, to the distortion. These evaluations

¹ Doris Lambers-Petry, "Shelomzion ha-malka: The Hasmonean Queen and her Enigmatic Portrayal by Josephus," in *Internationales Josephus-Colloquium Dortmund 2002*, ed. by Jürgen U. Kalms and Folker Siegert (Münster; Hamburg; London: LIT, 2003), 65.

² Etka Liebowitz. "Josephus' Ambivalent Attitude towards Women and Power: The Case of Queen Alexandra," *Journal of Ancient Judaism*, 6.2E (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015): 191.

³ *Ibid.*, 194.

have implications not only for the facts of Salome Alexandra's reign but also beyond, to all other facts presented in Josephus' historical works.

Personal Influences

Authors are a product of their times, their environment, and their experiences. Evaluating the context from which an author comes has even more value for those of ancient times – when impartiality was not as highly valued or demanded – the better to understand their bias and how it influenced the material they recorded.

Roman Culture

Liebowitz looks to the cultural shift Josephus went through in his life to explain why *War* and *Antiquities* show such a different picture of Queen Salome Alexandra. In Hellenistic society, the position of women was slightly improved, enough so that there were a few female rulers – most famously, the Ptolemaic queens⁴. When Josephus finished writing *War*, he had only just left Jerusalem and moved to Rome. By the time *Antiquities* was written, however, Josephus had been in Rome for nearly 25 years, enough time to become culturally acclimatized. The Romans, unlike Greeks, mostly excluded women from politics (with a few “unsympathetically” accepted exceptions)⁵. Josephus could have come to look down on women in power and reflected this change in *Antiquities*.

Nationalism

Schwartz grounds much of his thesis in the work of Richard Laqueur, who writes that Josephus' nationalistic tendencies, which developed only after writing *War*, led Josephus to develop a very poor opinion of all of the last rulers of Judea: not just Salome Alexandra, but Hyrcanus II, Antipater, and Herod as well. Josephus blamed them for the fall of the independent Jewish state and, as a result, he dramatically changed their characters in *Antiquities*, lamenting their perceived political errors and

⁴ Liebowitz, 185.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 186-187.

character flaws. Schwartz admits to that Laqueur's theory leaves a few unanswerable inconsistencies and was not widely accepted in the field when he published, but no one has denied that Josephus' *Antiquities* express a much more fervent sense of nationalism than in *War*,⁶.

Pharisees

One of the facts known for certain about Queen Salome Alexandra is that she, unlike the other Hasmonean rulers, favored the Pharisees. Yet even the depiction of this alliance differs in Josephus' accounts: in *War*, her admirable piousness leads her to be sympathetic of their agenda and she proves herself a "wonderful administrator"; in *Antiquities*, she grants them power only because her husband tells her to⁷. This first description does much more credit to her capabilities as a ruler, while the later paints her as "an imbecile in domestic affairs"⁸. This negative portrayal is tied to a similarly sinister portrayal of the Pharisees, a group that Josephus was generally identified with.⁹ Joseph Sievers says that Josephus had some negative interactions with Pharisees around the time of *War* and afterwards may have made unflattering notes that got accidentally worked into *Antiquities*, but even he calls that a weak argument.¹⁰ More likely, this inconsistency about how she sided with the Pharisees has more to do with Josephus' opinion of Salome Alexandra than it does with sect politics.

Comparisons to Others

A discussion about whether a portrayal of a historical figure is "fair" or even accurate is exceedingly subjective. Historians use comparisons between Salome Alexandra and other people

⁶ Daniel R Schwartz. "Josephus on Hyrcanus II," in *Josephus and the History of the Greco-Roman Period*, ed. Faust Parente and Joseph Sievers (Leiden; New York; Kiln : Brill, 1994), 212-213.

⁷ Tal Ilan. "Josephus and Nicolaus on Women," in *Integrating Women into Second Temple Histor* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999): 102.

⁸ Lambers-Petry, "Shelomzion ha-malka," 73.

⁹ Ilan, 86.

¹⁰ Sievers, Joseph. "Role of Women in the Hasmonean Dynasty," in *Josephus, the Bible, and History*, ed. Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989): 139.

Josephus wrote about so as to draw more substantiated conclusions about differences, were there any, in Josephus' attitude towards them.

Male Rulers

Salome Alexandra is unique because of her gender, so it is sensible to compare her to males that shared her role. Schwartz asserts that both she and her sons Hyrcanus II are treated more harshly in *Antiquities*, as by the time of its writing Josephus was more nationalistic and in general expressed disdain for the last Hasmoneans. To him, Josephus had not simply become a misogynist with age, nor had he – as Leibowitz writes – been convinced by Romans that women have no place in politics. Otherwise, there would be no reason to disparage Hyrcanus II as well as his mother. They both, in Josephus' eyes, failed to keep Jewish sovereignty, and Schwartz writes that Josephus' opinion is "...what matters in affairs of state is who is successful and who is not."¹¹ It is not women that he has grown bitter against, rather, any rulers he saw to be unfit.

Leibowitz disagrees with Schwartz on the matter. She believes in an "essential difference" between the way that Josephus criticizes Hyrcanus II and Alexandra.¹² Both are described as unfit rulers, but for Hyrcanus it is because of his feeble character and for Alexandra (*italics added*): "She caused misfortune to her dynasty, which had achieved sovereignty despite many dangers and difficulties, *due to a lust for these things that were not befitting a woman.*"¹³ Disgruntled anti-Hasmonean or not, Josephus puts down Hyrcanus for his character and Alexandra just for being a woman. In addition, Liebowitz compares Josephus' passages about Herod to those about Alexandra, and finds again a gendered bias in their renderings. Herod is an evil ruler, but a successful one. Alexandra of *Antiquities* is a poor ruler as well as, inexplicably, responsible for the failures of her sons,

¹¹ Schwartz, "Josephus on Hyrcanus II," 219.

¹² Liebowitz, 195.

¹³ *Antiquities* 13.431. Translated by Liebowitz., 194.

even after her death!¹⁴ Leibowitz uses both accounts as proof that Josephus was a misogynist whose portrait of Alexandra in *Antiquities* is unflattering and inaccurate.

Female Rulers

Leibowitz admits that misogyny alone does not explain Josephus' contradictory turn on Alexandra in *Antiquities*. His writing about Ptolemaic queens, for example, is not startlingly different than any other historian of the time and does not seem to be marked by a sudden misogynist turn in his life – that is, except for Cleopatra VII. He describes her as guilty of “lustfulness, greed, and haughtiness,” and, same as Alexandra, blames her for the actions of her children, an attitude that he does not express about male rulers.¹⁵

Hasmonean Women

Ilan looks not only to other rulers but specifically at Hasmonean women, which allows her to assess how the politics around them influenced Josephus and Alexandra.

Mariamme, Herod's wife, was executed by him for adultery. Josephus, in a rare twist, goes against his source, Nicolaus, and defends her, claiming she was falsely accused.¹⁶ Leibowitz notes that she is described similarly to Alexandra: praised for her feminine characteristics and scolded for her unfeminine ones, namely, her “disproportionate outspokenness.”¹⁷ Salome, Herod's sister, is portrayed as unequivocally a villain. She is lustful, sexually implicated with an enemy (an Arab, no less), responsible for disposing of members of the royal family and framing Mariamme, and even raping her nephew.¹⁸ Mariamme's mother is similarly a “ruthless insurgent.” (We know she is a villain because she even allies herself with Josephus' wicked caricature of Cleopatra!)¹⁹

¹⁴ Leibowitz, 202.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 200-201.

¹⁶ Ilan, 105-106.

¹⁷ Leibowitz, 196.

¹⁸ Ilan., 117-199.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 111.

Genre & Doublets

Could these be honest depictions? To prove Josephus had a pattern of writing women unfairly negatively, Ilan uses a story from both *Antiquities* and *War*: before Herod died, he sent Salome and Alexas to gather the elders and execute them so that the people of Judea would mourn them and it would be mistaken as mourning for their (unpopular) king. Instead, they let the elders go free once Herod had died. Curiously, almost this exact story is found in rabbinic literature, except the characters are now King Yannai and Shelomzion, another name of Salome Alexandra. Ilan says that rabbinic literature substitutes Yannai as a villain in almost any story, so she believes the second doublet to be the false one and the first to be the truth: Salome had some good deeds to her name, too. Salome was a good character to at least some authors and it was only Josephus' pen that slandered her.²⁰

This is a weak argument, because proving which doublet is true is not as “easy to explain” as Ilan makes it seem. Sievers calls the same story an “easy mistake,” and brushes it off as clearly a story about Salome *Alexandra*.²¹ Ilan writes: “a historian should reject [an inexplicable literary doublet] whenever possible,”²² yet neither historian spends more than a sentence defending which version of the doublet is the real one, so perhaps they should both have more caution. It does not give credibility to their arguments.

Biblical Women

The way Josephus chose to portray Biblical women differently than their source material is a strong indicator of what he believed to be admirable – and what was impermissible – about women in the Jewish heroines he hoped to portray favorably for both Jewish and gentile readers.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 121-122.

²¹ Sievers, 136.

²² Ilan, 107.

Liebowitz focuses on his retelling of Esther, taken from the Septuagint but modified in several ways. Most notably for us is the downplay of Esther's piousness and the emphasis on her good looks and heroic courage.²³ Liebowitz cites other historians, some of who call the new Esther a "bimbo" without character, while others explain that beauty was merely a marker of class to Josephus, not a choice of objectification. Most interesting for Leibowitz is the emphasis on the positive *male* characteristics and power Esther is attributed. She acknowledges that this is counter to her own argument of a misogynist Josephus and in fact supports Tal Ilan (and likewise, Schwartz).²⁴

Other Women

Ilan, out of the other historians, seeks out mentions of women that could not possibly have been influenced by outside sources – women whom Josephus would have had to write about exclusively from his own research, and therefore opinion. When he writes on his own, she claims, there are virtually no women. He seems to have "an utter lack of interest in the role women *qua* women played in politics" – not a distaste for, but a true disinterest, even going as far as to mix up "brother" and "sister" between his notes.²⁵ His source for the tragedy at Masada were two women who managed to survive, but the account he writes says nothing about whether the women supported their husbands' decision, any feelings other than the men's, and does not even bother to explain how the women escaped the massacre. They were a "source of information," but not a relevant part of the story to him.²⁶ This description of Josephus as not bigoted but merely deeply inattentive to women is a cornerstone for the next segment.

Sources

²³ Liebowitz, 197.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 197-199.

²⁵ Ilan, 89-91.

²⁶ Ilan., 92.

Perhaps the most discussed topic when it comes to understanding Josephus' writing is how he came about his information and therefore, who his sources were. He sometimes copied word-for-word from his references and unprecedented changes in his attitudes tend to be attributed to copying from a source with very different beliefs,²⁷ but it is a lot of guesswork. He did not label these passages well and in some cases we do not have any remaining copies of the original material, so discerning Josephus' own opinions from those of his source is remarkably difficult.

Writers Other than Nicolaus

Strabo of Amaseia is the only the only source besides Nicolaus of Damascus that is mentioned by any of these historians in relation to Salome Alexandra/²⁸ Schwartz discusses him briefly in relation to Hyrcanus II, but otherwise Strabo is not brought up. It seems that Nicolaus is the only source historians believe affected the passages about Alexandra.

Nicolaus of Damascus

Nicolaus was the Greek author of *Histories*, a massive 144-book work of which only seven and some fragments remain today. Josephus consulted him extensively and it is sometimes shocking to see the differences written side-by-side, as Nicolaus' politics were very contrary to Josephus: he was a pagan, tutor in the court of Cleopatra and Anthony, and Herod's main advisor.²⁹

Peripatetic Portrayals

Nicolaus followed the peripatetic school, which means he believed it was part of his job as a historian to make his writings interesting, by adding emotions, drama, and motivation as required and without need to be supported with facts. He often wrote about women and attributed them major roles,

²⁷ Lambers-Petry, 66.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Wacholder, Ben Zion. "Josephus and Nicolaus of Damascus," in *Josephus, the Bible, and History*, ed. Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), pp.147-9.

a hallmark that historians use to help decide whether a passage has been written by Josephus.³⁰ The more often women are mentioned and named, the stronger support there is for Nicolaus having been the original source.

Ilan asserts that Nicolaus was a clear and vitriolic misogynist, and uses this as a cornerstone to defend passages with misogynistic interpretations: to her, whenever Josephus writes uncharacteristically critically about a woman (or even just about a woman at all!), it is strong evidence that he has copied from Nicolaus.³¹ She claims Nicolaus held the belief that “all evil originates from women,” or as she says “*cherchez la femme!*”,³² a belief she does not see reproduced in Josephus when he is not using Nicolaus.³³ Liebowitz may not agree that Nicolaus is the *only* source of misogynist thinking in Josephus’ texts, but as we’ve discussed prior, she also sees sex-biased remarks in Josephus’ *Antiquities*. Not everyone has interpreted Nicolaus this way. Ben Zion Wacholder writes a single line on the subject: Nicolaus’ “heroes are romanticized, and women, for good or evil, play an important role.”³⁴ Even “obvious” interpretations of an author’s personal viewpoints are not so obvious. (At the same time, it is worth noticing that Wacholder is a man and Ilan and Liebowitz, women.)

Extent of Influence

When is Josephus writing and when is he simply copying? Ilan writes that, generally, historians have agreed that *War* is very loyal to Nicolaus’ *Histories*, while *Antiquities* shows much more original thought and re-working of the material.³⁵ Even this is contested, however, such as by Wacholder, who claims that since *Wars* has a very narrow focus on Jewish history and *Antiquities* has a wider range, the information of *Antiquities* must have come from a non-Jewish source, that is, the Hellenistic

³⁰ Ilan, 97.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 98.

³² *Ibid.*, 101.

³³ *Ibid.*, 103.

³⁴ Wacholder, 152.

³⁵ Ilan, 103.

Nicolaus, and *Wars* is in fact the more “Josephus” of the two books.³⁶ Schwartz discusses two other historians, Karl Albert and Bacchisio Motzo, who likewise each defend opposing sides of the debate.³⁷ That there is such uncertainty on the very foundation of this method – of where the ideas in Josephus originate from – means that all arguments on this vein cannot be very substantiated.

Textual Analysis

Historians can look to the makeup of a text itself and not just the content to discern more than the surface layer. Liebowitz uses this as another way to read into Josephus’ personal motivations, while Ilan and Schwartz use it to bolster their otherwise weakly substantiated arguments about Nicolaus’ being the source of many of what they perceive to be unfavorable expressions on Josephus’ part.

Word Choice

Liebowitz scrutinizes Josephus’ choice to use the Greek *dioikéo*, “to administer,” instead of *basileúo*, “to reign,” to reference Salome Alexandra in *War*, as it seems to demote her from a ruler to a less impressive civil administrator. In *Antiquities*, he uses *basileúo* for her and as well as for biblical Queen Athaliah. He does not write any condemnation of Athaliah, either, in the way he does with Alexandra, even though Athaliah is said to have killed off the entire house of David! Liebowitz says this shows that he treats women more fairly in *Antiquities* than in *War*.³⁸

She also tries to understand why Josephus uses only Alexandra’s name and never a title in *War*, while he uses *basíssa*, “queen,” next to her name 75% of the time in *Antiquities*. While it could be a sign of disrespect in *War*, she looks broadly at Josephus’ other works and notices that he also does not often use *basileús*, “king,” for Hasmoneans in either book.³⁹ It could be meaningless; it could also mean that in *Antiquities*, Alexandra and the Hasmoneans are made more formidable, even as they are made

³⁶ Wacholder, 154.

³⁷ Schwartz, 212.

³⁸ Liebowitz, 192.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 193.

out to be more villainous, too. *Antiquities* is undoubtedly more critical of Alexandra, but that doesn't mean she must also be made to seem more powerless. Josephus' main complaint of her, in fact, is that she *had* too much power – something “not befitting a woman.”

Writing Style & Motivation

Ilan compares the style of various passages in Josephus to the surviving fragments we have of Nicolaus' work as part of solidifying her argument that Nicolaus is the origin of the misogynist statements against Salome Alexandra and other women in *Antiquities*. The infamous paragraph that ends *Ant.* 13, including her having “no consideration for either decency or justice” and that “even after her death she caused the palace to be filled with misfortunes,” is directly followed by the opening of *Ant.* 14, in which he blames Hyrcanus and Aristobulus for the fall to the Romans. Ilan says that it is not that Josephus simply blames *all* Hasmonians – as Schwartz argues – but that these paragraphs are from two different authors. Josephus uses the first-person plural (“we”, as in, the Jews) and shows a grudging respect for the high priestly Hasmonians and disregard for the lower class Herodians. Nicolaus, meanwhile, not being a Jew, did not use “we” in recording these events, and though he gladly blamed the Hasmonians for the fall, he did not disparage the rulers who came after since his king Herod was one of them.⁴⁰ With this information, it does seem likely that Nicolaus wrote the paragraph in 13 and Josephus the one in 14 – though it does not tell us why Josephus chose to copy something so contrary to the opinion he had previously expressed in *War*.

Schwartz compares the same passages but believes Josephus wrote both (to be discussed further in the next section). He uses the same technique as Ilan, taking passages on the same topic from both books and comparing them, to make evidence for his assertion that Josephus' blame of Hyrcanus was an original opinion that had previously been concealed by his use of Nicolaus as a source.⁴¹ It is a very

⁴⁰ Ilan, 104.

⁴¹ Schwartz, 231.

similar argument to Ilan's, proven with the same tool of text analysis, but each scholar arrives at a different opinion about who wrote the anti-Hasmonean passages.

Text Comparisons

Schwartz rests most of his argument on the foundation that Josephus used Nicolaus in *War* and not in *Antiquity*: a foundation, we've discussed, that is shaky. From there his main technique is to compare *War* to *Antiquities* and find not only the differences but the commonalities as well, to discern what did and did not come from Josephus' pen. Since *Antiquities* blames the Hasmoneans and particularly Salome Alexandra, Aristobulus, Hyrcanus II, and Herod, and because that viewpoint is not present in *War*, he asserts that this is all Josephus' opinion. Josephus portrayed Alexandra mildly in *War* because he was following his source Nicolaus, but revealed his true attitude towards her in *Antiquities*.⁴²

He looks not only to the descriptions of her character and popularity, as Liebowitz and Ilan quote from, but also to the passages that describe how she appointed her sons. Hyrcanus was made high priest and Aristobulus was not given an office. In *War*, Alexandra seems prudent, for Hyrcanus is described as mild and "too lethargic to give trouble about the whole" while Aristobulus was troublesomely "hotheadedness" and perhaps not suited for public office. In *Antiquities*, the facts stay the same but the descriptions change so that Alexandra comes out looking like she was a power-hungry fool to put the weak Hyrcanus in government and not his brother, the "man of action and of high spirit." Alexandra looks like she made a terrible political maneuver, given what Aristobulus would come to do, and like her love of power got in the way of her judgement.⁴³ Alexandra becomes a more significant but also a much worse ruler in *Antiquities*, when *Histories* was not used as much. Schwartz argues that the amiable depiction of Alexandra was more accurate and that *Antiquities* is distorted by the grudge Josephus felt for her.

⁴² Schwartz, 221.

⁴³ Schwartz, 222-223.

Gender Theory

Liebowitz is the only one of the three historians being compared here to use gender theory in her discussion of Josephus and Salome Alexandra. She brings up that Alexandra may have been too prominent for male historians to exclude from their accounts, marginalizing her as they did with other women of antiquity, but that they could still permanently misrepresent in the historical record her due to her gender.⁴⁴

Josephus expresses scorn for her specifically for being a woman in power. It is not just that she ruled with bad judgement, in favor of the wrong religious sect, or was too influenced by her own personal desires: it is just as bad, if not worse, that she did these things *as a woman*. Liebowitz uses this line in particular for proof of Josephus' misogyny that makes the rest of the unflattering *Antiquities* passage unreliable. Ilan says that it is *Nicolaus* who wrote the entire passage, so he is the one to blame, but agrees that this misogyny makes the passage biased and untrustworthy. Schwartz does not even mention misogyny: merely he also disregards this description because of the political bias of both Josephus and Nicolaus. Either way, no matter who is to blame for the comments, historians seem to agree that Alexandra's treatment in *Antiquities* was unprecedented and probably false.

Conclusion

The dead can live on only in the words of others and unfortunately, no one is free from bias. Every source about historical figures should be weighed against the motivations of its author. In the case of Queen Salome Alexandra, we have more than just a case of a biased author, but a biased author who doesn't even seem to keep the same bias: the pious and venerable Alexandra of Josephus' *War* is juxtaposed with the power-hungry and unreasonable Alexandra of *Antiquities*. Historians then must not only seek to see through authorial bias, but to find which one of the accounts holds more truth.

⁴⁴Liebowitz, 191.

Ilan and Liebowitz are both women who have studied how Josephus' attitudes towards women in general have influenced his portrayal of Alexandra. Ilan uses textual analysis and comparisons between texts to argue that Josephus himself did not care at all about women, so much so that he would rarely even write down their names. His scathing report on Alexandra, then, is the fault of Nicolaus of Damascus, a Greek from whom he copied extensively and a man that Ilan finds indubitably misogynistic. The "Nevertheless..." line at the end of *Antiquities* 13, one contradictory and unexpectedly positive line at the end of several disparaging paragraphs, is further proof to Ilan that he copied out Nicolaus carelessly and then, surprised by how harsh the words were, at the last moment added some of his own to soften the blow, as he had no ill will towards the queen.⁴⁵ She analyzes her evidence with great detail and source material, but unfortunately, as seen throughout this paper, she makes a number of assumptions and mistakes that make her argument weak.

Schwartz is a man who writes about Josephus' unkind portrayal of Hyrcanus II, and in doing so covers much about Salome Alexandra as well. He does not even discuss the option of the portrayal having been colored by gender, but instead compares Josephus' and Nicolaus' works from a political perspective and comes to roughly the opposite conclusion as Ilan, that is, that Josephus' *War* was very much influenced by Greek Nicolaus whereas *Antiquities* is harsher to Alexandra and Hyrcanus because Josephus wrote from his personal anti-Hasmonean views.

Liebowitz uses several different techniques to evaluate Josephus: looking to his portrayals of other rulers, the exact word choices he made, the cultural climate he came from, and the critical framework of gender theory. She disagrees with Ilan and Schwartz that Josephus was only a middleman for furthering Nicolaus' agenda, as she sees sexist remarks and tones in even the passages that Josephus is credited as having written himself. She acknowledges the possibility that Josephus really did not care

⁴⁵ Ilan, 105. Also, another assertion that I find to be unsubstantiated, and a little bit ludicrous.

one way or the other about women and that his inflammatory remarks could have come from a place other than misogyny, but she defends that the writing itself has sexist remarks. Even if those came from his source alone, “if these sources were misogynist then, in my opinion, he is responsible for having given them a platform.”⁴⁶

Despite these dissenting opinions and manners of interpreting the very few passages we have on her, it is interesting that all historians have concluded that *War*, with its favorable depiction, is more accurate than the condemnation of *Antiquities*. We may never know who, exactly, wrote which part of the books that are the only surviving records of her life and her character – a misogynist Greek, an inattentive Jew, someone else entirely, or a combination thereof? – nor how true they are. Thanks to Josephus’ confounding writing, we have two very different portraits of her to puzzle over, theorize about, and try to find veracity in. No matter how close we look, from the very words he chose, to the sentences he copied, the tone he used, the motivations of his characters, the cultural impact of his words, and more, it is a secret that won’t likely be solved. Ilan, Liebowitz, and Schwartz have taken all these elements into account, made strong arguments, but ultimately seem to cancel each other out without hope of finding a solid answer.

⁴⁶ Liebowitz, 203.

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