

Part One: Text and Translation of Josephus *Jewish War* 2.14.4

(4) Ἐν δὲ τούτῳ καὶ οἱ Καισαρέων Ἕλληνες, νικήσαντες παρὰ Νέρωνι τῆς πόλεως ἄρχειν, τὰ τῆς κρίσεως ἐκόμισαν γράμματα, καὶ προσελάμβανεν τὴν ἀρχὴν ὁ πόλεμος δωδεκάτῳ μὲν ἔτει τῆς Νέρωνος ἡγεμονίας, ἑπτακαιδεκάτῳ δὲ 5τῆς Ἀγρίππα βασιλείας, Ἀρτεμισίου μηνός. πρὸς δὲ τὸ μέγεθος τῶν ἐξ αὐτοῦ συμφορῶν οὐκ ἀξίαν ἔσχεν πρόφασιν. οἱ γὰρ ἐν Καισαρείᾳ Ἰουδαῖοι, συναγωγὴν ἔχοντες παρὰ χωρίον, οὗ δεσπότης ἦν τις Ἕλλην Καισαρεύς, πολλάκις μὲν κτήσασθαι τὸν τόπον ἐσπούδασαν τιμὴν πολλαπλασίονα τῆς ἀξίας διδόντες· ὥς δ' ὑπερορῶν τὰς δεήσεις πρὸς ἐπήρειαν ἔτι καὶ παρωκοδόμει τὸ χωρίον ἐκεῖνος ἐργαστήρια κατασκευαζόμενος, στενὴν τε καὶ παντάπασιν βιαίαν πάροδον ἀπέλειπεν αὐτοῖς, τὸ μὲν πρῶτον οἱ θερμότεροι τῶν νέων προπηδῶντες οἰκοδομεῖν ἐκώλυσον. ὥς δὲ τούτους εἶργεν τῆς βίας Φλῶρος, ἀμηχανοῦντες οἱ δυνατοὶ τῶν Ἰουδαίων, σὺν οἷς Ἰωάννης ὁ τελώνης, πείθουσι τὸν Φλῶρον ἀργυρίου ταλάντοις ὅκτῳ διακωλύσαι τὸ ἔργον. ὁ δὲ πρὸς μόνον τὸ λαβεῖν ὑποσχόμενος πάντα συμπράξειν, λαβὼν ἔξεισιν τῆς Καισαρείας εἰς Σεβαστὴν καὶ καταλείπει τὴν στάσιν αὐτεξούσιον, ὥσπερ ἄδειαν πεπρακῶς Ἰουδαίοις τοῦ μάχεσθαι.

At this moment the Greeks of Caesarea having won from Nero the right to govern the city, and having taken care of the judgement which was written, which brought on the start of the war in the twelfth year of Nero's reign in the seventeenth of Agrippa's dominion in the month of Artemisius. The motive of the war itself and the greatness of its burden were not of like value. The Judaeans of Caesarea had a synagogue beside a place owned by a certain Greek of Caesarea. Many times they made an effort to obtain for themselves the place offering many times its worth. But overlooking their entreaties, and insulting towards them, he yet built up the place, and he equipped it with workshops, and all in all left a narrow way by which to force themselves. Earlier, the hot-tempered of the youth had hindered those trying to build, though Florus closed off their violence. Being at a loss, the elite of the Judaeans, who with the help of John the tax collector, they persuaded Florus with a sum of eight talents to prevent the work. Florus thinking only of himself, after promising all he would join them [that he would do what they wished], left Caesarea to Sebaste and he left behind the place under its own power as if selling to the Judaeans the freedom to fight.

Part Two: Written Commentary of Josephus *Jewish War* 2.14.3-2.15.1

Introduction

This is a written Commentary on Josephus' *Jewish War* 2.14.3-2.15.1. The two main foci of this commentary will be, firstly, the Roman Emperor Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus (Nero, from here on in), specifically, his reign as Emperor, and the effects of his style of governance on the Empire, in particular, from a Greek and Eastern Mediterranean perspective and from Josephus' point of view.¹ Secondly, to offer a critique of Josephus' representation of events in these particular chapters and discuss certain aspects of Josephus' own life. Any conclusions presented will be evidenced using ancient (both Greek and Latin) as well as modern source material.

Nero, born Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus in A.D.37, succeeded to the role as Emperor of Rome in A.D.54 after his adopted father, the preceding Emperor, Claudius died.² Nero remained Emperor of the Rome until his own death in A.D.68.³

In the aftermath of Nero's death in A.D.68 some believed that he had not committed suicide at all and would return and regain power over the Empire.⁴ Edward Champlin, in his biography of Nero, writes of numerous incidents of people claiming to be Nero after his death, suggesting that pulling off such a ruse, of course, depended on physical appearance, and Nero-like personality traits, but that 'your chances of support improved as you moved east' and even beyond the border, to the east, of the Roman Empire.⁵

Yosef Ben Mattityahu was born in A.D.37 to a wealthy Judaeen family.⁶ Yosef was a Jewish priest, soldier, general, and later an historian, who led a force in a failed defence of Jotapata during the Jewish uprising against Rome (the First Jewish Revolt) which began in A.D.66 (concluding in A.D.73), about which he would later write about in his histories, *Jewish Wars* and *Jewish Antiquities*, which are extant today.⁷

Captured at Jotapata by the Roman general Titus Flavius Vespasianus, Yosef offers a prophecy to the general that he (as well as his son Titus) is destined to become Emperor of Rome.⁸ Considered of use to himself, Vespasian spares the defeated general Yosef a trial in front of the current Emperor, Nero.⁹ When Yosef's prophecy comes to pass, and Vespasian's succession to Emperor of Rome in A.D.69 is complete, Vespasian makes Yosef a freedman and Yosef takes the name Titus Flavius Josephus and remains protected under the Flavian family.¹⁰

¹ Barrett et al., 2016, p.xi

² Sue.Nero.8; Barrett et al., 2016, pp.xii-xiii

³ Sue.Nero.57; Barrett et al., 2016, p.xvii

⁴ Sue.Nero.57

⁵ Champlin, 2005, pp.6-12

⁶ Edmondson et al., 2007, Online;

⁷ Edmondson et al., 2007, Online; Mendels, 2011, Online

⁸ Jose.BJ.3.8.9; Sue.Vesp.5.6; Levick, 1999, p.4

⁹ Edmondson et al., 2007, Online;

¹⁰ Edmondson et al., 2007, Online;

2.14.3

This section of the *Jewish War* sees Cestius Gallus, Governor of Syria, visiting Jerusalem. The Judaeans seize the opportunity to gather, and denounce Florus for his crimes against them. Florus was procurator of Judaea but would, firstly, have had to answer to Cestius.¹¹

In *Jewish War* 2.13.1 Josephus offers a character assassination of the new Emperor, Nero, after reporting the death of Claudius in 2.12.8. Josephus then continues his history by listing the procurators of Judaea under Nero (Felix, Festus, Albinus, respectively) up to this point in time where the reader finds Florus in the position. Their mishandling of the governorship of Judaea and their crimes against its people grows ever more unpleasant until the reader reaches Florus, the worst of them all.

Cestius returns to Syria having calmed the crowd with the promise of getting Florus to consider his future treatment of the Judaeans. Josephus reports that this panics Florus, who sees no other option but to pressure the Judaeans even greater still, to cause them to rise to arms, to cover his crimes else he may find himself answering for his own crimes in front of Caesar (Nero). This suggests that Nero would not have been dismissive of the Judaeans' plight under their current procurator, had a case been brought before him.

In his autobiography Josephus tells of his first visit to Rome. His purpose, pleading a case for a number of priests (together they travelled to Rome) accused of some affront (unmentioned) by Felix (at the time procurator of Judaea).¹² Josephus secures their release through befriending an actor named Aliturus (popular with Nero) on this journey which accesses Nero's inner circle (Poppaea) and enables Nero to hear a plea for leniency which he duly adheres to.¹³ This is suggestive of a number of things about Josephus: Josephus supporting the priests of his faith, and his people (the Judaeans), and his prowess with words and his gift of persuasion (virtuous and elitist traits), skills which possibly save him, to a point, at Jotapata, though Josephus would have his readers believe that his survival at Jotapata was due to priestly connections to God, and his gift as seer.¹⁴ What it suggests of Nero is that he is not beyond listening to the considerations of, and siding with, a people who have religious beliefs differing to those of Rome, which seems in conflict with Josephus' characterisation of Nero in Jose.BJ.13.1. However, conforming with Josephus' characterisation in Jose.BJ.13.1, it reminds the reader of Nero's love of the stage, directly associating him with an actor.¹⁵

¹¹ 'Judaea was not a true *provincia* but part of, and subordinate to, the province of Syria.' Barrett et al., 2016, p.164

¹² Jose.Vit.3

¹³ Jose.Vit.3

¹⁴ Rajak, 1983, p.18-19

¹⁵ Jose.Vit.3

2.14.4

Josephus refers back to events which begin in Jose.BJ.2.13.7, the dispute between the Judaeans and the Syrians (an ambiguous term) over the ownership of the city of Caesarea.¹⁶ The Judaeans claim ownership because of the founder King Herod's Jewish heritage. Those opposing Judaeans claim it belonged to the Greeks, due to the statues and temples belonging to Greek religion, and practices, that King Herod had built in the city. Josephus does not offer a personal opinion on who he deems to have the greater claim to the city.¹⁷ Possibly, Josephus offers no opinion so as not to seem to be siding against the Judaeans, holding the belief that they do not have ownership of this Greek city.¹⁸

In Jose.BJ.2.14.4, the reader is made aware of the outcome of the preceding trial, over which Nero presided, finding in favour of the Greeks, Josephus, perhaps, suggesting inevitably so.

Nero's love for Greece, and all things Greek, is evident through his reported acts, such as, creating Greek-inspired games (the Neronia) which took place in Rome.¹⁹ More significant, is Nero offering Greece relief from Roman taxation.²⁰ Nero's 'liberation' of Greece from certain aspects of Roman rule lasted until Vespasian repealed that which Nero had afforded.²¹ Unsurprisingly, Nero was a popular and loved Emperor in this region of the Empire.

Nero's practices and pastimes were also heavily influenced by Greek culture. Nero learnt to play the lyre and would sing Greek themed songs/poetry.²² Nero even put on, and took part in, theatrical performances (both private and public).²³ At the time, a Roman Emperor taking part in such public displays was most certainly unique, and even taboo, given the lowly regarded social status of those who performed on the stage by the Romans.²⁴

Vespasian himself had accompanied Nero on his tour of Greece, reportedly offending Nero by falling asleep during his performances, or skipping them altogether.²⁵

Traditionally grouped with Lucian's works, though thought to be an effort by one of the Philostrati, is the satirical dialogue 'Nero'.²⁶ The dialogue discusses events surrounding Nero's attempt at beginning the digging of the Corinthian Canal, an event which is also mentioned by Suetonius.²⁷ The opening of the dialogue sees two characters discussing Nero's 'Greek spirit', his theatrical tendencies, and godlike delusions, carrying himself in an

¹⁶ Levey, 1975, p.70

¹⁷ Levey, 1975, p.45

¹⁸ Levey, 1975, p.45

¹⁹ Sue.Nero.12.3

²⁰ Gallivan, 1973, pp.230-234

²¹ Gallivan, 1973, pp.230-234

²² Sue.Nero.20.1; Sue.Nero.21.3

²³ Sue.Nero.23.1-24.1

²⁴ Frank, 1931, p.16

²⁵ Sue.Vesp.4.4

²⁶ MacLeod, 1967, p.505

²⁷ Sue.Nero.19

unlike manner for a Roman Emperor (although perhaps not from a modern evaluation of certain emperors).²⁸ However, the attitude to creating, or beginning vast engineering works to aid the Roman economy (and some which were of great expense to it), were very much in line with the practices of a Roman Emperor. Suetonius suggests Nero should be praised for some of his efforts, such as extending a canal from Ostia to Rome to ease the flow of goods into the city and a new style of housing implemented, after the Great Fire in A.D.64, to enable a greater ability to tackle fires in the city.²⁹

As can be seen from the translation of this passage, above (in part one), Florus' actions and his greed are encouraging the Judaeans towards war.

2.14.5

Josephus reports an act of religious sacrilege against the Judaeans and their beliefs. Attending worship on the sabbath, at the entrance to the synagogue, the Judaeans find a man sacrificing a bird on an upturned pot.³⁰ Josephus does not offer the specific reasons to why this is against Jewish Laws (though clearly it is a provocative act). Given Josephus' position as a priest of his faith, and his vast knowledge of Jewish Laws, it may have been an opportunity to offer such insights.³¹ This is perhaps due to such information not fitting the purpose of his history or of little consequence to his intended readership (see conclusion). It is also unclear whether Josephus' suggestion is, given the previous reports of the outrageous behaviour of Florus and his intentions to cover his crimes, that this lone Caesarean has been put up to the task by Florus himself.

A modern interpretation (and possibly what Josephus implies) is that the Caesarean is mocking the Judaeans with their own Laws, with regards to the cleansing of lepers.³² By performing this Jewish ritual in front of the entrance to the synagogue, the Caesarean is suggesting that all those who worship within are suffering from the disease.

Rioting ensues, though it is the violence of the Caesareans rather than the Judaeans that the Roman commander Jucundus is unable to deal with.

The Judaeans remove the Laws from the synagogue, to protect them, and travel to Sebaste to accost Florus to appeal to him. Though yet again the Judaeans have their own Laws turned against them. Florus proceeds to punish them with the blasphemous act of removing the Laws from inside the synagogue.

²⁸ [Lucian].Nero.1-2

²⁹ Sue.Nero.16

³⁰ Levey, 1975, p.43

³¹ Vermes, 1982

³² 'the priest shall command them to take for him who is to be cleansed two live birds and cedarwood and scarlet yarn and hyssop' Lev.14.4; Thackeray, 1997, pp.436-437

2.14.6

The location shifts to Jerusalem where Josephus reports that the Jewish citizens still refuse to commit acts of violence against their oppressors, Florus reportedly sending men to steal money from the temple there. The events described over the last few chapters are seemingly happening at great speed given the way that the story is presented. Events in 2.14.4 are believed to have taken place sometime in May A.D.66.³³ Josephus states that the sacrifice outside the synagogue in 2.14.5 takes place the very next day. The events of the proceeding chapters up to 2.15.1 (the chapters covered in this commentary) happen before June A.D.66, so all in all a duration of around a month.³⁴ Dio Cassius, in his *Roman History*, says that it was whilst in Greece in A.D.68 that Nero learnt of the Jewish uprising and handed Vespasian the task of crushing the rebellion.³⁵ Therefore, how much Nero knew of the events unfolding in Judaea in this particular month (2.14.3-2.15.1) is open to debate.

In 2.14.6 Josephus states that after seeing the temple being robbed the citizens, in despair, call upon the name of Caesar to rid them of Florus. Obviously, Nero is not present before them, it is a figurative invocation. This addition by Josephus, historical fact or not, keeps Nero in the forefront of the reader's mind whilst Florus' persecution of the Judaeans continues and chaos ensues across Judaea. This is Josephus stressing the point of who he believes is really to blame. Also, perhaps Josephus believed Nero did know about the beginnings of the civil unrest but cared little enough about it to do anything.

Josephus offers his own opinion as to what Florus should have done had he wished to calm the unrest, which would have been to return to Caesarea and resolve the outstanding issues there (above).

2.14.7

Florus sends Capito to Jerusalem. Josephus expresses that the Romans under Florus are now openly encouraging the Judaeans to seize arms and fight them, Capito having the front to claim the Judaeans have acted dishonourably toward Florus.

The locations change, and new protagonists may be being introduced, but each chapter repetitively runs with the same ideas: Florus stirring sedition and the Judaeans acting peaceably.

2.14.8

Florus sits at the head of a trial demanding reparation from those who have spoken out against his rule. Those representing the Judaeans, the head-priests, notables and the elite amongst them, refuse to offer up those of the youth who had partaken in the unrest. The notables claiming it was difficult to make sense of who had done what during the chaos, but also fearing the severity of the possible punishment.

³³ Thackery, 1997, p.435

³⁴ Thackery, 1997, p.445

³⁵ Dio.Hist.Rom.63.1a; Cary and Foster, 1925, p.173

Josephus again interjects with his own views, as in 2.14.6, suggesting that this was another opportunity squandered by Florus to calm the unrest.

2.14.9

Florus, impatient with listening to the words of those representing the Judaeans culprits, orders the sacking of the agora and allows the pillaging of peoples' homes, after which a massacre ensues. Some are arrested and crucified. Josephus offers the number of dead at 3600.

Interestingly, Josephus compares the hierarchy of Roman social status with that of Jewish hierarchical social status. For dramatic effect Josephus claims that the social status of the Judaeans that Florus had nailed to the cross were akin to those of Roman equestrian rank. Enabling an image to form in the mind's eye of the reader of a procurator nailing Roman nobility to the cross, representing what a heinous crime this is that has been committed by Florus against the Judaeans.

2.15.1

Again, Josephus stresses Florus' disregard for authority (that which is either below or above, and including, his own station, Roman or otherwise) in the form of his treatment of Queen Bernice, a member of Judaeans royalty (which would have been subordinate to Rome). King Agrippa is not present, having travelled to Alexandria to congratulate Alexander on his newly granted position as governor of Egypt. It is noted that this appointment was made by Nero (who is mentioned by name). Though not explicitly negative it keeps Nero in the forefront of the reader's mind (as mentioned above), and it also adds emphasis to the point that these positions of authority (such as Florus', as procurator) were granted by the Emperor himself. Florus, given Agrippa's absence, has again seized the opportunity to continue his sedition.

The portrayal of Bernice is one of bravery and piousness with willingness to sacrifice herself for her people. Bernice is not mentioned further to any great extent by Josephus in the *Jewish War*.³⁶ She may not have played a vital role in the events which come after the events described in 2.15.1. However, it is reasonable to assume Josephus is treading carefully due to Titus' later affair with the Queen.³⁷ It is suggested a marriage was not considered on Titus' part given the partnership's poor reception, due to the trouble that past relationships between Roman nobility and foreign queens had caused for Rome.³⁸

³⁶ Ilan, 1999, online

³⁷ Ilan, 1999, online

³⁸ Anagnostou-Laoutides and Charles, 2015, pp.17-18

Conclusion

The Greek element has been somewhat of a focus of the commentary, and in the main, from the perspective of Nero, his actions, his decisions, and his pastimes. However, it is a vital element when considering Josephus' document itself. The *Jewish War* is a Greek translation of an earlier record which Josephus had composed in his mother tongue, Aramaic.³⁹ The Greek translation opened up the work to an audience of Greek readers, and speakers. Therefore, it could be considered that the suggested audience for the *Jewish War* were those in the Eastern Roman Empire.

Josephus states that he composed the *Jewish War* to rectify previous beliefs concerning events which were either too flattering toward the Romans or hateful towards the Judeans.⁴⁰ In the particular section of text chosen for this commentary, Jose.BJ.2.14.3-2.15.1 (as well as throughout the *Jewish War*), it is evident that there is an effort on Josephus' part to blame the Judean people, as a whole, for as little as possible in terms of culpability for the uprising against Rome. Though, perhaps, historically accurate to some degree this can easily be viewed as Josephus seeking redemption for his actions at Jotapata and his subsequent relationship with those of the Flavian dynasty from this very group of people.⁴¹

The *Jewish War* can also be viewed as a commemoration to his Flavian masters' (Vespasian and Titus) victorious roles in defeating the rebellion. Josephus was compiling his works under both Vespasian and Titus.

In Jose.BJ.3.1.1, Josephus reports that on hearing of events in Judaea, Nero expresses the view that it is all down to deficient Roman generalship as opposed to the skill and efficiency of the enemy. However, throughout *Jewish War* the Judeans are portrayed by Josephus as a formidable adversary against the might of the Empire, though they are ultimately defeated. Of course, a worthy foe makes for a greater victory, and the victors are Vespasian and his son Titus.

According to Josephus, Nero had no other option to send Vespasian to bring order to the chaos happening in the East, with Josephus stating no other man in Rome was equal to the task.⁴² Suetonius also heaps praise on Vespasian for triumphal excellence as a soldier and commander in Germany and Britain, and for his moderation as governor in Africa.⁴³

With this in mind, and the intended audience, Josephus' history can also be viewed as a warning to those in the territory of the Eastern Empire, and beyond, against taking on the might of the Rome, which was now led by Vespasian as Emperor.

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³⁹ Jose.BJ.1.1

⁴⁰ Jose.BJ.1.1

⁴¹ Jose.BJ.3.7.33-3.8.7; Kelley, 2004, pp.257-258

⁴² Jose.BJ.3.1.2;

⁴³ Sue.Vesp.4.1-3

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