Flavius Josèphe. Les Antiquités Juives. Livres I à III. Texte, trad, et notes par Nodet (Etienne) avec la coll. de Berceville (G.), Paul (A.) et Warschawski (É.)

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Flavius Joseph. Les Antiquités Juives. Livres I à III. Texte, trad. et notes par Nodet (Étienne) avec la coll. de Berceville (G.), Paul (A.) et Warschawski (É.). Paris, Ed. du Cerf, 1990 ; 2 vol. 12,5 × 19,5 cm, xlvi-158 et 192 p. Prix : 185 fr. — Recent decades have witnessed, an explosion in Jewish historiography. In particular, attention has been paid to research into specific aspects, such as individual communities, themes or periods, utilizing different critical disciplines to supplement the traditional methods of the historian. In this context of spiralling information about Judaism it became imperative that the French-speaking world, should have access to the corpus of the historian Josephus, our major source for much of the Jewish history in the Hellenistic and early Roman eras. His corpus consists primarily of (1) The Jewish War, an account in seven books of the revolt against Rome in 66-73 C.E., (2) The Jewish Antiquities, a history in twenty books of the Jewish people from Adam to the beginnings of the revolt, composed in Rome in 93-94 C.E.

A major stimulus to the current interest in Josephus has also been the publication of several new annotated translations of his works into various modern languages. In Germany, the Institutum Delitzchianum has completed an edition of the War (1959-1969) while the Antiquities has been translated into Hebrew by A. Schalit (2nd ed., 1967). The English translation of the entire corpus in the Loeb Classical Library, which was begun by the late H. St. John Thackeray (1926), has been completed in 1959 and the two books under review are the first volumes of a new (Th. Reinach’s Œuvres complètes de Flavius Joseph was published in 1900) French translation of the Jewish Antiquities by E. Nodet. The present volumes encompass the first three books of Josephus’s work according to his own distributin and carry the story of his people from the creation to the consequences of the mission to spy out the land of Canaan (Num. 14).

Vol. 1 has two main parts. First comes an introductory section opening with a brief account of Flavius Josephus’s life (pp. VI-VIII) and pointing out the most important earlier editions of his work (IX-X). The introduction then deals succinctly with the authenticity of the ancient table of contents prefixed to each book of the Jewish Antiquities, accepting them as genuine (pp. XI-XII). Next Nodet offers his readers an explanation why his work is to be considered “comme une traduction commentée” (p. XXII), giving nevertheless also a revised edition of the Greek text based on an archetype different from the one used by B. Niese (Berlin 1887) in his classic editio maior of the Josephan corpus.

This part of the book, providing detailed information on the different MSS and their collation, is meticulously crafted and documented, well-organized, well-researched, but in its quest for the three of descent of Josephus’s text, somewhat over-technical (pp. XIII-XXII). Is there still anyone out there writing for the common, but interested,
reader? Why are academics so keenly drawn to purely technical theorizing? Of course there has been a growing tendency toward internal specialization in all academic fields, and this holds true for the historical academy as well. But what results is a tendency whereby the intellectual can find satisfying expression only by remaining with the academy, speaking to fellow specialists, and not having to worry about that nuisance, real or imagined, known as the common reader. The freewheeling intellectual of an earlier day reaching several audiences and coping clearly with a number of subjects, is all but gone. Therefore one may, every now then, call for the return of the kind of scholar, who writes for the more general reader, in fact an essential ingredient in a truly democratic culture. Once Nodet turns his attention away from textcriticism, he takes on a more communicative tone when addressing the “présentation de l'édition” and the “Élément de critique littéraire” (pp. XXII-XXVI). Under the heading “présentation de l'édition” he describes how his edition has been prepared afresh and delineates its specific features through background observations concerning the Jewish and non-Jewish sources he will relay upon: “pour la traduction et les notes, les travaux précédents (principalement Reinach, Loeb et Schalit ...) ont été systématiquement exploités, ainsi que les trois premiers volumes de la toute nouvelle Bible d'Alexandrie» (pp. XXII-XXIV). The “Éléments de critique littéraire» (pp. XXIV-XXXIX) surveys the biblical and extrabiblical documentary sources in the Antiquities. Here one may raise an eyebrow reading «sa (Josephus’s) Bible hébraïque, qui vient de Jérusalem, à d'intéressantes parentés avec la Vorlage de la LXX que nous connaissons». Why not mention E. C. Ulrich (1), who has shown clearly that Josephus uses a proto-Lucianic form of the LXX for his Samuel-Kings material?

There are still further places where one would have welcomed fuller discussion and, at least some, bibliography. Indeed, some readers, I am afraid, will be annoyed by E. Nodet's apparent side-stepping of the fact that the well-known thesis of Thackeray about the literary activity of Josephus, that be employed in the composition of different parts of the Antiquities, various assistants who had predilections for classical historians (cfr. E. Nodet, p. XXVI), has been criticized by various scholars (2); who show that allusions to a wide range of classical authors occur throughout the work of Josephus and how he was concerned with producing, also in his other work, literature acceptable to the atticizing tastes of his own day (3). Furthermore, even if the project, of which these two volumes comprise the first-fruits, promises a “general introduction” (p. VI) following the complete publication of the Jewish Antiquities, an unsympathetic reader


might be unhappy because of the scant bibliographical support offered in this section for a number of historical and religious assertions. Indeed Nodet’s inconsistent dept of presentation, belaboring some points (pp. XIII-XXII, critique textuelle), while rushing through others (Josephus as a Pharisee, pp. XXXV-XXXVII) is sometimes frustrating, if not irritating. The reviewer hopes that he has not given too negative an impression of this first part, which otherwise serves a useful purpose by focusing attention on important and complex historical and literary problems when confronting Josephus’s work.

Following a list of abbreviations, the second part, and the bulk of this volume (pp. 155), is given over to the Greek text. At the end of each page, the critical apparatus of this “editio minor” (p. XXII) points out diverging readings, especially of the biblical nomina propria and draws attention to acceptable variants in the manuscripts. The Greek text exhibits a scholar invigoratingly able to achieve a positive and new textual presentation which does not side-step the issues raised by critical rigour and integrity. Despite some criticisms, this edition is surely to be welcomed. It provides readers with a major and sustained attempt to work through its limit a reading of a text fundamental for the knowledge of Hellenistic and early Tannaitic historical and biblical approaches.

The second volume (pp. 1-190), devoted entirely to the annotated translation, is successful in the impossible compromise between literality and readability. The author succeeds in remaining comprehensible to the non-specialist, whilst at the same time catering for those who may want to use his original text for further studies. Nevertheless it remains frustrating not to have the Greek text no the opposite page. Luckily dubious points are discussed in some detail in this heavily footnoted (in eye-tiring small print) work, with its selective array of textual and philological references to earlier literature. It is clear that the translator has learnt a lot from many of the works which he cites, but furthermore he offers also personal comment, often based refreshingly on insights kept alive in talmudic and later rabbinical (f.i. Rashi) literature.

Etienne Nodet is to be congratulated on the combination of careful scholarship and sound sense which contributes not only to this volume’s «user-friendliness», but provides us with a well-argued and viable French translation of the Jewish Antiquities. It deserves to be widely read. The two books under review are the first volumes of a larger project, we look forward to the appearance of the next volumes. — Julien Klener.


Le tome 1.2 contient sept textes de Plutarque (car on ne peut guère donner le nom de traité aux six pages in-folio du de inimicorum utilitate ou aux sept pages que totalisent le de amicorum multitudine, le de fortuna et le de virtute et vitio). Les notices introductives, de longueur inégale comme les textes eux-mêmes, plus étoffées