

SELF-MADE ‘MEN’: THE PROGRESSIVE EMASCULATION OF THE BROTHERS ASINAEUS AND ANILAEUS IN JOSEPHUS, *ANTIQUITIES* 18*

ABSTRACT

This article analyses how Flavius Josephus presents the conquests of Asinaeus and Anilaeus, two robber-bandits who established a fiefdom in first-century Babylonia. In dialogue with common Roman tropes about gender and his previous writings on the notable physical features of men in times of war, this article focusses on how Josephus progressively effeminizes Asinaeus and Anilaeus. Although their military feats abound, their increasingly risky behaviour and their growing neglect of Jewish ways of life jeopardize their own character and the safety of their Jewish kin. With this strategy of emasculation, Josephus undermines those who self-interestedly seek power and influence.

Keywords: Babylonia; *Antiquities of the Jews*; *Jewish War*; physiognomy; masculinity; orientalism

1. INTRODUCTION¹

After narrating the death of Gaius Caesar (41 C.E.), in *Antiquities* 18.310–79 Josephus turns to Jewish affairs in Babylonia and the declining relationships between Jews around

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¹ Abbreviations: *CIL* = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*; *GELS* = T. Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Leuven, 2009); LCL 210 = H.St.J. Thackeray (transl.), *Josephus. The Jewish War, Volume III: Books 5–7*, Loeb Classical Library 210 (Cambridge, MA, 1928); LCL 320 = F.H. Colson (transl.), *Philo. On the Decalogue. On the Special Laws, Books 1–3*, Loeb Classical Library 320 (Cambridge, MA, 1937); LCL 433 = L.H. Feldman (transl.), *Josephus. Jewish Antiquities, Volume VIII: Books 18–19*, Loeb Classical Library 433 (Cambridge, MA, 1965); NETS = A. Pietersma and B.G. Wright (edd.), *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (New York, 2007).

Works frequently cited: N.G. Cohen, ‘Asinaeus and Anilaeus: additional comments to Josephus’ *Antiquities of the Jews*’, *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute* 10 (1976), 30–7; D.R. Edwards, *In the Court of the Gentiles: Narrative, Exemplarity, and Scriptural Adaptation in the Court-Tales of Flavius Josephus* (Leiden, 2023); E. Glas, *Flavius Josephus’ Self-Characterisation in First-Century Rome: A Historiographical Analysis of Autobiographical Discourse in the Judaean War* (Leiden, 2024); C. Goldberg, *Roman Masculinity and Politics from Republic to Empire* (London, 2021); S. Hübner and D. Ratzan (edd.), *Growing Up Fatherless in Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2009); S. Mason, ‘Figured speech and irony in T. Flavius Josephus’, in J. Edmonson, S. Mason and J. Rivers (edd.), *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (Oxford, 2005), 243–88; S. Mason, ‘Flavius Josephus in Flavian Rome: reading on and between the lines’, in A.J. Boyle and W.J. Dominik (edd.), *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text* (Leiden, 2003), 559–90; S. Mason, ‘Of despots, diadems and *diadochoi*: Josephus and Flavian politics’, in W.J. Dominik, J. Garthwaite and P.A. Roche (edd.), *Writing Politics in Imperial Rome* (Leiden, 2009), 323–49; I.M. McAvoy, ‘The effeminate East: orientalism in Roman military contexts (c. 200 BCE to c. 200 CE)’ (Diss., Cardiff University, 2017).

the world and regional powers, the former in the crisis under the rule of Gaius, and hereafter, catastrophes in Babylonia.² The primary subjects of this section of his *Antiquities* are two brothers from Neerda (Nehardea, now located in Iraq), Asinaeus and Anilaus, who establish an independent fiefdom of sorts in Babylonia through their cunning military exploits. However, Josephus is not merely interested in the political and strategic military achievements of the two brothers. Rather, his narrative develops questions of gender, virtue and obedience to the Jewish laws. In their effort to prove themselves as men over the course of their lives, their virtue sours to vice, their attention to the Jewish law turns to disobedience, and their attempts to maintain their masculinity result in the slaughtering of their own people.

These brothers are the real lens through which wider narratives may be understood. For Josephus, the story of Asinaeus and Anilaus is not fundamentally about the history of Jewish banditry in Mesopotamia in the mid-first century C.E. His overarching focus in *Antiquities* 18.310–79 is the persecution and slaughter of Jewish people in the region, most especially Babylonia. The ultimate cause of this violence toward the Jewish people is Asinaeus and Anilaus' vain pursuit to be considered masculine in the eyes of their surrounding culture. As Mason points out, characters are the focus rather than a systematic overview of Jewish experiences in Babylon; Josephus 'does not describe . . . "Babylonian affairs" but the moral behaviour of the brothers Anilaus and Asinaeus, as well as the consequences of that behaviour' (Mason [n. 1, 2003], at 570).

The many social forces that held some influence over him while he wrote his works have been well studied, such as his immediate readership in Rome, the changing Flavian imperial court and critics of his earlier writings.³ He was at times concerned with maintaining an almost apologetic stance with regards to his own people, while operating as both an outsider and insider in Roman literary circles (although not the most elite).⁴

² A. Schalit, 'Evidence of an Aramaic source in Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews*', *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute* 4 (1965), 163–88, at 163–71 argues that it is reasonable to think that the whole narrative is derived from an Aramaic source which Josephus himself received in Greek, based on a reconstructed technical phrase in *Antiquities* 13.343. This analysis was adopted in LCL 433 and bolstered by Cohen (n. 1). For the historical background for first century C.E. Parthia and for the arguments around the identification of Artabanus as Artabanus III, see D. Goodblatt, 'Josephus on Parthian Babylonia (*Antiquities* XVIII, 310–379)', *JAOS* 107 (1987), 605–22. At 619, Goodblatt disagrees with Schalit's reconstructed source argument. R. Fowler, 'Kingship and banditry: the Parthian Empire and its western subjects', in T. Rajak, S. Pearce, J. Aitken and J. Dines (edd.), *Jewish Perspectives on Hellenistic Rulers* (Berkeley, 2008), 147–62, at 150 argues that the rule of Asinaeus and Anilaus in Mesopotamia occurred sometime in the 20s–30s C.E. This puts the account within living memory of Josephus himself. There is no known ancient written source other than Josephus that documents the two brothers. Fowler (this note), 151 argues, 'There is a distinct odor of oral tradition underlying this text. Although attempts at source criticism have, as Tessa Rajak notes, proved rather speculative and unproductive, nevertheless the tone is clearly not typical of Josephus, and rather redolent of popular historiography.' Without further evidence, the exact source of Josephus' digression on the two brothers remains unknown and we put forward no suggestion here, crediting the narrative shape to Josephus himself. See further n. 14 below.

³ For Josephus as a situated author and the scholarship of such, see Glas (n. 1), 12–21; Mason (n. 1 [2003]); S. Mason, 'Of audience and meaning: reading Josephus' *Bellum Judaicum* in the context of a Flavian audience', in J. Sievers and G. Lembi (edd.), *Josephus and Jewish History in Flavian Rome and Beyond* (Leiden, 2005), 71–100; U. Westwood, *Moses among the Greek Lawgivers: Reading Josephus' Antiquities through Plutarch's Lives* (Leiden, 2023), 9–16.

⁴ On Josephus as both outsider and inside see T. Rajak, 'Josephus in Rome: the outsiders' insider and insiders' outsider', *SCI* 33 (2014), 191–208. On Josephus' readership, see Edwards (n. 1), 11–12; J. Klawans, *Josephus and the Theologies of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford, 2012), 3–4; Mason (n. 1 [2003]), 563–7; G.E. Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephus, Luke-Acts and Apologetic Historiography* (Atlanta, 1992), 297–308. Sterling (this note), 16–19 advocates *Antiquities* as 'the greatest representative of this tradition' of apologetic historiography, meaning that Josephus uses a

In general, we should be sensitive to these competing factors when analysing Josephus’ writing, when trying to find a sense of his own perspective on any given theme. He was a complex author, with a far-reaching body of work written over multiple decades. For our purposes, we should note that Josephus wrote history to make a point. His characters, particularly in his *Antiquities*, are sketched for the benefit of his readers, to provide a case study in the consideration of a moral life.⁵ So what may his readers have made of the brothers Asinaeus and Anilaeus?

2. FATHERLESS SONS AND WEAVERS OF CLOTH

From the moment that Josephus introduces Asinaeus and Anilaeus, Roman audiences would have understood that something was amiss. The brothers themselves have interesting names. Whether intentional or not, Asinaeus (Ἀσινῳῖος) has a verbal resonance with the word ‘unhurt’ or ‘unharm’d’ (ἀσινής) or may otherwise refer to the action of ‘doing no harm’ (*GELS*; *LSJ*). Anilaeus (Ἀνιλαῖος) appears close to terms for ‘unmerciful’ or ‘merciless’ (ἀνελεήμων, ἀνηλεής, ἀνίλεως).⁶ As shall be seen, these names are relatively fitting for the way that Josephus portrays the two men.

The first biographical detail we learn about them is that ‘they were orphans of a father’ (πατὴρ δ’ ἦσαν ὀρφανοί, *AJ* 18.314).⁷ Josephus depicts those without fathers (ὀρφανός) as generating pity and compassion among crowds while those who make children fatherless face animosity (*AJ* 17.17; *BJ* 1.555, 1.560). In the absence of biological fathers, finding step-fathers in their place was important (e.g. Esther having Mordecai, *AJ* 11.198; cf. *BJ* 1.557) since a child deprived of a father had various social, economic and educational deficits.⁸

The importance of fathers in the moral (and thus masculine) development of their sons is found widely in ancient Greek and Roman literature. A few examples illustrate this. In Plato, those without legitimate fathers (νόθοι) are characterized as being disabled, a common trope in wider Greek literature (*Resp.* 535c–d).⁹ In the *Iliad*, the fatherless hero Diomedes lacks empathy and compassion, especially through his violent brutality that leaves others fatherless as well (e.g. 6.222–3; 11.391–4). As Pratt argues, since

mode of history writing which responds to ethnographic classifications of a people from an insider’s perspective. This can be understood as an insider writing expressly against outsider perspectives for an outsider audience.

⁵ The arguments put forward by this paper add weight to this claim. We are convinced by Edwards’s (n. 1) presentation of the figures of Joseph the Patriarch, Joseph and Hyrcanus the Tobiads, Agrippa I and Esther as interconnected figures for audience consideration of a moral life. See also a similar summary of *Antiquities* in Glas (n. 1) at 36–7; Mason (n. 1 [2005]) at 272. Attention to exemplarity in Josephus has been recently developing; see C. Bay and J.W. van Henten, ‘Exempla in 1 Maccabees and Josephus’ *Bellum Judaicum*: doing Jewish exemplarity in the Greco-Roman world’, *JSJ* 55 (2024), 169–95; Edwards (n. 1); Glas (n. 1); Mason (n. 1, [2003]), 569.

⁶ *GELS*; *LSJ*. B. Niese, *Antiquitatum Iudaicarum Libri XVI–XX et Vita*, vol. 4 of *Flavii Iosephi Opera* (Berlin, 1890), 197 n. 9 notes that in the margins of A (Codex Bibliothecae Ambrosianae F128) a scribal hand has written out ἀνίλεως next to the first mention of Anilaeus in *AJ* 18.314 as an explanation of a different spelling using γρ to indicate ‘as is written’. At least this scribe understood his name to mean ‘merciless’. This note can be seen on page 580 (297v) of the digitized manuscript, <https://digitallibrary.unicatt.it/veneranda/0b02da82800acbda>.

⁷ All quotations of Josephus’ *Antiquities* Book 18 are taken from LCL 433.

⁸ S. Hübner and D. Ratzan, ‘Fatherless antiquity? Perspectives on ‘fatherlessness’ in the ancient Mediterranean’, in S. Hübner and D. Ratzan (edd.), *Growing Up Fatherless in Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2009), 3–28, at 8.

⁹ On this see D. Ogden, ‘Bastardy and fatherlessness in ancient Greece’, in S. Hübner and D. Ratzan (edd.), *Growing Up Fatherless in Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2009), 104–19, at 116–17.

Diomedes has himself been deprived of a father, he cares little about perpetuating fatherlessness among his enemies.¹⁰ Statius speaks about the fatherlessness of a certain Crispinus, which normally can corrupt youths and stifle their future (*Silv.* 5.2.61–78). To Crispinus' advantage, however, is the inherent virtue in his life (self-control, moderation, piety) and the numerous other guardians he has to act as surrogate fathers.¹¹ Finally, and most significantly, Josephus himself does not use the term 'orphan' often, but he does introduce a comparison between sobriety and drunkenness; the king who drinks a particularly strong wine will possess understanding only to the degree an orphan or one requiring a guardian possesses (*AJ* 11.39).¹²

One deficit for the two young men from Neera is that fatherlessness deprives them of someone who embodies the masculine ideal for his sons and can guide the development of their masculinity. The construction of fatherhood around setting an example for their sons is an oft deployed motif in so-called wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible and beyond.¹³ The lack of such a figure puts their moral formation and masculinity into doubt. In combination with this lack and as a further result of their father's death, Anilaus and Asinaeus come under the care of their mother who puts them to work in a profession widely known in Greek and Roman cultures as work for women.

Josephus says that in the absence of a father, 'their mother ordered them to learn how to make woven things, it not being unbecoming to the locals for men to work with wool among themselves' (ἡ μήτηρ προσέταξεν ἰστών μαθήσει ποιήσεως, οὐκ ὄντος ἀπρεποῦς τοῖς ἐπιχωρίοις ὥστε τοὺς ἄνδρας ταλασιουργεῖν παρ' αὐτοῖς, *AJ* 18.314).¹⁴ Setting aside Josephus' explanatory comment for the moment, let us initially explore the cultural and social implications of wool working for Josephus' Roman audience. Although the term ἰστός refers to the beam of a loom (or a battering ram, *BJ* 3.21), in the context of 'working with wool' (ταλασιουργέω) it is clearly used metonymically to refer to things that the beam has produced, such as 'a hundred finely woven linen sheets' (βυσσίνης ὀθόνης ἰστόντες ἑκατόν, *AJ* 12.117).

The recent work of Lemmer-Webber has shown that women were involved both in the commercial and production levels of the textile industry in the Roman Empire.¹⁵ The social construction of 'wool spinning' as being a solely womanly activity projects the

¹⁰ L. Pratt, 'Diomedes, the fatherless hero of the *Iliad*', in S. Hübner and D. Ratzan (edd.), *Growing Up Fatherless in Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2009), 142–61, at 153.

¹¹ On this passage, see N.W. Bernstein, 'Cui parens non erat maximus quisque et vetustissimus pro parente: paternal surrogates in imperial Roman literature', in S. Hübner and D. Ratzan (edd.), *Growing Up Fatherless in Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2009), 241–56, at 244–5.

¹² Josephus reworks First Esdras here to lower the orphan's intellectual capabilities, whereas in the source text such wine 'makes equal the thoughts of both the king and the orphan' (1 Esd. 3.18). Compare *Antiquities*, where the king is only set on this intrinsic lower level.

¹³ E.g. Prov. 1:8, 10, 15; 2:1; 3:1, 11, 21; 4:10, 20; 5:1, 20; 6:1, 3, 20; 7:1; 19:27; 23:19, 26; 24:13, 21; 27:11; Qoh. 12:12; Sir. 6:23, 32; 16:24; 21:1; 31:22.

¹⁴ Cohen (n. 1), 31–6 notes that the Latin version of Josephus adapts this trade to one 'occupied with the sea', indicating some confusion over the exact occupation of the brothers. It may be that the Latin version has altered the tradition to give the brothers a more masculine occupation. Further clues may indicate that in an original Aramaic source, the brothers were associated with some kind of martial occupation, with Cohen suggesting weapons-making for heavy-armoured cavalry. In any case, this honourable portrayal which Schalit (n. 2), 177–8 proposes as the earliest story layer quickly translated into a narrative about the downfall of law breakers; in Josephus' hands this has become a much more negative story, which provides a different moral lesson. Whether his innovation or not, Josephus presents the brothers as having been trained in a profession with different and much more negative social connotations. See similar in Goodblatt (n. 2), 620.

¹⁵ M.A. Lemmer-Webber, 'Women and wool working in the Roman Empire' (Diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2021).

virtuous ideals of the time over the realities of the past. Still, working with wool was, in ancient Roman culture, stereotyped as a virtue and profession in the domain of women. Musonius Rufus (first century C.E.), the Stoic philosopher, addresses critiques of women studying philosophy that suggest they should be at home spinning wool (fr. 3 [Lutz]). Musonius does not disagree; women should not abandon their homely duties (like weaving) for philosophy but must balance both tasks together. Elsewhere, the historian Livy relays the story of Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus' boasting among the company of Sextus Tarquinius (son of the king of Rome, Superbus), about whose wife was the most virtuous. In a drunken stupor the men visit their wives to see what occupies their time. While the maidens of the king feast in luxury, Collatinus' wife Lucretia sits late at night weaving her wool among her assistants (Livy, 1.57.9–10). By this behaviour, Lucretia shows herself to be the most virtuous woman among the company of women involved. Inscriptions of Claudia (second century B.C.E., *CIL* 6.15346), Murdia (first century B.C.E., *CIL* 6.10230) and Allia Potestas (fourth century C.E., *CIL* 6.37965) from Rome praise women for their wool-working skills. The impression from these varied sources is uniform in either assuming or constructing wool-working as a virtuous activity specifically for women. As Peskowitz summarizes: 'Text after text and image after image made spinning and other kinds of wool work into work for women, and into metaphors for womanhood and femininity.'¹⁶

For Roman men pursuing *uirtus* (courage) to become *uir* (a man), to be connected to spinning wool, however, was an effacement of their masculinity.¹⁷ Even when Pliny the Elder argues that men can participate in spinning flax, he implies that generally the spinning profession is an unmanly affair (*HN* 19.3).¹⁸ In fact, men involved in textile production were often enslaved or formerly enslaved and, thus, of low social status.

Josephus is also aware of this gendered association of wool working. In *Antiquities* 18.314 he acknowledges the stigma of men working with wool, that is, in a woman's profession, when he provides an excuse for why Asinaeus and Anilaus worked wool: in the far 'barbarian' lands of Mesopotamia, the locals were accustomed to working with wool. None the less, while the two brothers might not have been out of place in their local context, for Josephus' Roman readers, the profession of these two men would have rendered them effeminate.¹⁹ This perhaps coheres more broadly with Roman perceptions of the Parthian empire as effeminate, a place where men do women's work. Long-standing ideas about the 'East' in Roman culture clearly stand behind this presentation.²⁰

¹⁶ M.B. Peskowitz, *Spinning Fantasies: Rabbis, Gender, and History* (Berkeley, 1997), 80.

¹⁷ L. Larsson Lovén, 'Wool work as a gender symbol in ancient Rome: Roman textiles and ancient sources', in C. Gillis and M.-L.B. Nosch (edd.), *Ancient Textiles: Production, Craft, Society* (Oxford, 2007), 229–36, at 232. We parallel concepts of *uirtus* and ἀρετή, which indicate notions of courage and self-control. Similar motifs are known in the oft-depicted story of Heracles and Omphale, where Heracles is made to adopt elements of women's dress and roles. See further K. Heineman, 'Oechalia, Delphi, and Omphale', in D. Ogden (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Heracles* (Oxford, 2021), 251–65, at 258–61.

¹⁸ On the difference between spinning wool and flax see Peskowitz (n. 16), 80.

¹⁹ Regarding the purpose of explanatory comments, A. Avidov, 'Peer solidarity and communal loyalty in Roman Judaea', *JJS* 49 (1998), 264–79, at 273 notes that Josephus tells this story at a cultural distance and as such he presents the activities of the Parthian king to his audience with attendant explanations. Josephus conveys much the same point when addressing how the king offered assurances to Anilaus for safe passage in *AJ* 18.328–9.

²⁰ See McAvooy (n. 1); T. Hölscher, 'Images of war in Greece and Rome: between military practice, public memory, and cultural symbolism', *JRS* 93 (2003), 1–17, at 10. See though L. Audley-Miller, 'Orientalism, Roman Empire', in R.S. Bagnall, K. Brodersen, C.B. Champion, A. Erskine and S.R. Huebner (edd.), *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History* (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444338386.wbeah30152>, who notes that (at least according to Strabo 11.9.2–3) the Parthians were thought to be

As McAvoy observes, this nexus of ideas was commonly applied across time and ethnic group: ‘Roman descriptions of Easterners often tally, highlighting luxuriousness, effeminacy and military cowardice’.²¹ That Asinaeus and Anilaeus are wool workers undermines their masculinity, simultaneously contributing and responding to wider Roman conceptions of the ‘East’.

A further confirmation of their precarious masculinity is the fact that in their wool working they received beatings. Josephus says that ‘the one who was set over their work—for they had learned it from him—accused them of not showing up on time and punished them with blows’ (τούτοις ὁ τοῖς ἔργοις ἐφεστώς, καὶ γὰρ ἐμεμαθήκεσαν παρ’ αὐτῶ, βραδυτῆτα ἐπικαλέσας τῆς ἀφίξεως ἐκόλασε πληγαῖς, *AJ* 18.314). Asinaeus and Anilaeus are not only lazy but servile. Their overseer beats them just like an enslaving *dominus* might beat his enslaved workers.²² There is a subtle irony in the scene that while their wool-working mentor’s own masculinity is jeopardized by his profession, nevertheless he has control over the bodies of the two brothers. In other words, their lack of bodily autonomy or self-control places them in an even lower masculine category than the ‘effeminate’ man who taught them how to weave. Josephus portrays the two brothers with compounding emasculation, first with working wool and then being treated as enslaved persons. These beatings are the last straw for Asinaeus and Anilaeus, who consider the punishment to be a violation (ὑβρις, *AJ* 18.315). From here the men vow never to be under the thumb of another again, and they set off down a path of domination rather than submission that leads to the ruin of the Jewish communities in Babylon. This serves as the catalyst for Josephus’ narrative wherein already effeminate men attempt to establish their own *uirtus*, giving Josephus the opportunity not only to teach historical lessons but moral ones as well.

3. ‘COURAGEOUS’ AND ‘BOLD’ WARRIORS IN THE COURTS OF KINGS

Courage, particularly in war, was a central concept in Roman constructions of masculinity.²³ As put by McAvoy, ‘militarism was viewed as a touchstone or litmus test of both masculinity and *Romanitas* (“Romanness”)’.²⁴ This was no less true for some texts of the Hebrew Bible; indeed, defeated enemies are feminized in many texts.²⁵ This conception

‘more warlike than other eastern peoples’. This tendency can also be found in representations of Carthage in the epic poetry of Silius Italicus: A.M. Keith, ‘Engendering orientalism in Silius’ *Punica*’, in A. Augoustakis (ed.), *Brill’s Companion to Silius Italicus* (Leiden, 2010), 355–73.

²¹ McAvoy (n. 1), 7.

²² This was also the case for the professionalized soldiers of the Roman empire following the reforms of Augustus: W.T. Wilson, ‘Pious soldiers, gender deviants, and the ideology of Actium: courage and warfare in Philo’s *De fortitudine*’, *StudPhilon* 17 (2005), 1–32, at 29. See further on the idealization of the male body as integral through its boundaries and free to act as willed: J. Walters, ‘Invading the Roman body: manliness and impenetrability in Roman thought’, in J.P. Hallett and M.B. Skinner (edd.), *Roman Sexualities* (Princeton, 1998), 29–43, at 37–40, particularly on beatings as transgressions of bodily integrity, and how this manifested in professional soldier identity.

²³ Goldberg (n. 1), 17; J.E. Lendon, ‘The rhetoric of combat: Greek military theory and Roman culture in Julius Caesar’s battle descriptions’, *CLAnt* 18 (1999), 273–329, at 310; A. Mermelstein, ‘Conceptions of masculinity in the scrolls and the gendered emotion of anger’, *Dead Sea Discoveries* 26 (2019), 314–38, at 320–1; C.A. Reeder, ‘Gender, war, and Josephus’, *JSJ* 46 (2015), 65–85, particularly at 69.

²⁴ McAvoy (n. 1), 6.

²⁵ See particularly C. Bergmann, ‘We have seen the enemy, and he is only a “she”: the portrayal of warriors as women’, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69 (2007), 651–72. While not in the Hebrew Bible, the Book of Judith also engages in this kind of feminization of the defeated enemy (even before their

has been well-analysed, and it is important here simply to raise the common trope, certainly known by the period in which Josephus writes his works and well attested throughout much ancient literature, that manly men are courageous in war. Their moral character is shown through their combat prowess.²⁶ People would evaluate public persona through military and moral demonstrations. Victory in warfare relied on masculine qualities of bravery, but specifically bravery managed carefully through self-control rather than recklessness. Excessive violence or intemperate behaviour would often result in disaster.²⁷ Within this wider framework, Asinaeus and Anilaus hope to establish their masculinity through combat prowess by taking up weapons and becoming warriors.

Intending never again to be subject to the emasculation caused by their mother and their wool-spinning overseer, Asinaeus and Anilaus steal the weapons of the latter and begin recruiting and arming poor young men in order to establish their own fiefdom. Forming this band of disaffected and taking to banditry, they built a 'citadel' (ἀκρόπολις) in a place called the 'parting of the waters'²⁸ and exacted tribute from the surrounding people (*AJ* 18.315–16).²⁹ Although later in the narrative the brothers start gaining a reputation for being 'bold' and 'courageous' (which, as will be shown, Josephus clearly intends to be ironic), the means by which they extort the locals into becoming vassals is far from courageous.³⁰ They offered protection through coercion; if the locals chose not to frequent their services, then the brothers would kill their cattle (*AJ* 18.316). The adjective Josephus repeatedly uses characterizes these campaigns as 'evil' or perhaps 'cowardly' (κακός). On the narrative level, we should be in no doubt about how Josephus presents these activities.

Examples of their wicked behaviour can be readily seen when the two brothers recruit the poor. Josephus writes that nothing stops them from being rulers of evil (τῶν κακῶν ἡγεμόνες οὐκ ἐκωλύοντο εἶναι, *AJ* 18.315). They would ambush those whom they dominated (18.317), moving swiftly 'to do evil' (κακουργεῖν). When the governor of Babylonia intervenes, he does so to prevent greater evil from them (βουληθεῖς ἔτι φρομένους κολῦσαι πρὶν τι μεῖζον κακὸν ἐξ αὐτῶν ἀναστήναι, 18.318). The wicked behaviour of the brothers anticipates the wickedness of Anilaus' future wife who through her idolatry also brought evil among them (ἀλλὰ σὺν τινὶ μεγάλῳ κακῷ διὰ τοιαύτην αἰτίαν, 18.343). From Josephus' characterization of these men as 'evil', it should be clear that anything that appears on face value to be praise toward the behaviour

defeat): B. Schmitz, 'Holofernes's canopy in the Septuagint', in K.R. Brine, E. Ciletti and H. Lähnemann (edd.), *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies Across the Disciplines* (Cambridge, 2010), 71–80. On the shame of being killed by a woman in Judith especially, see T.M. Lemos, 'Shame and mutilation of enemies in the Hebrew Bible', *JBL* 125 (2006), 225–41, at 234. As noted by *CQ*'s reader, the famous *Judaea Capta* coins in the wake of the Revolt also participate in this strategic feminization.

²⁶ Success in battle may even be connected by Roman authors to the moral character of the fighters, at least in the long view of history; McAvoy (n. 1), 61–2.

²⁷ On the characterization of Herod the Great see H.K. Bond, 'Josephus on Herod's domestic intrigue in the *Jewish War*', *JSJ* 43 (2012), 295–314, at 305.

²⁸ Named διάρρηξιν. This term is a hapax legomenon in Josephus. Similar terms for 'tearing/breaking' (e.g. διαρρήγνυμι) are used in *AJ* 5.300 and *BJ* 1.189 for bursting, with reference to bonds of Samson and walls of Pelusium. See further in *BJ* 2.126, 229, 322, 518; 3.233; 5.86; *AJ* 10.95; 11.141.

²⁹ B.D. Shaw, 'Tyrants, bandits and kings: personal power in Josephus', *JJS* 44 (1993), 176–204, at 180 notes that 'up to this point in their rise to power Asinaios and Anilaos were following a classic pattern of banditry'.

³⁰ Josephus' view towards tyrants was already well explored in his *War*, which sheds light on Josephus' political philosophy; Mason (n. 1 [2009]).

of Asinaeus and Anilaeus should be taken with a fine grain of salt. What is more, analysis of Josephus' speeches in particular should be sensitive to his use of irony; superficial readings of the content may mislead the reader against what Josephus intended to convey.³¹ Josephus' use of direct speeches often conveys irony, wherein characters express ideas which Josephus as narrator wishes to subvert.

Before we arrive at the speeches, let us consider how the relationship between Asinaeus and Anilaeus is portrayed. Although they appear to rule together, Josephus depicts Asinaeus and not Anilaeus as being in charge. When an army of both Parthians and Babylonians planned a sneak attack upon the brothers and their army on the Sabbath, it is Asinaeus who orders someone to spy out the approaching forces (*AJ* 18.320–1). When the men argue that it is not lawful to fight on the Sabbath, it is Asinaeus who first breaks the Sabbath by taking up his weapons to fight (18.323).³² This is recapitulated subsequently in the narrative, where Anilaeus once again opts to break the Sabbath for military advantage (18.354–5). When the brothers are summoned by Artabanus III of Parthia, Asinaeus sends his brother (18.327). When Josephus narrates Artabanus' worry that the brothers would join with disgruntled Babylonians to rebel against him, he calls the clan 'those of Asinaeus' (18.331). During the fifteen years of stability the brothers enjoyed in local power, honour was paid to him by the Babylonians and not to his brother Anilaeus (18.339).

In keeping with this primacy, it is no surprise then that when Artabanus wishes to meet with the brothers, he wants to meet specifically with Asinaeus. Asinaeus is credited with the successful rout of the Babylonian satrap's forces, and this impressive military victory piques Artabanus' interest (*AJ* 18.318–25). To enable this meeting, he promises safe conduct to the brothers should they come before him. Shaw writes that 'it was this "boldness" (τολμήματα, *AJ* 18.325) of the brothers that most struck the Parthian king, and that so provoked him to wish to see and to speak with them'.³³ Artabanus' impression of 'boldness' is soon stifled when only Anilaeus appears without his brother. Artabanus asks Anilaeus why Asinaeus did not come, and the narrative implies that Asinaeus is afraid (*AJ* 18.328). Hoping to turn their exploits to his advantage, the king gives assurances that he will not harm the two of them and sends Anilaeus away so that Asinaeus might come. Upon Anilaeus' return with Asinaeus, the king is taken aback at Asinaeus' physical appearance; he

was astonished at Asinaeus' courage in action (ἐν ταῖς πράξεσιν εὐψύχου), when he observed that he was quite short (βραχύς) in outward appearance and thus gave those who got sight of him for the first-time reason to disregard him and judge him of no account. Indeed, the king said to his friends that Asinaeus had a soul that by comparison was greater than his body (*AJ* 18.333).

³¹ For example, S. Mason, 'Speech-making in ancient rhetoric, Josephus, and Acts: messages and playfulness, part II', *Early Christianity* 3 (2012), 147–71, at 159 discusses an episode in which Josephus uses irony in Agrippa II's speech on the futility of revolt against Rome in *BJ* 2.345–401. See also Mason (n. 1 [2009]), 348; Mason (n. 1 [2005]), 271.

³² Debate around the legitimacy of fighting during the Sabbath received much attention in ancient Jewish sources. An excellent summary of the sources and also how Josephus interacts with such traditions can be found in Klawans (n. 4), 153–8. In the Mishnah (m. Šabb. 6.4), the Sages disagree with Rabbi Eliezer who argues that weapons are 'ornaments' and therefore lawful. The Rabbis, drawing up the logic of Isaiah 2:4 ('And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation will not raise sword against nation, neither will they learn war anymore') argue that weapons are a disgrace for the Sabbath.

³³ Shaw (n. 29), 181.

Asinaeus’ appearance causes a problem of perception. In this pericope, we catch a glimpse into Josephus’ use of physiognomy.³⁴ Light is also shed on at least the Parthian king’s perception that combat prowess shows something of the inner quality of a person.

4. UNEXPECTED BODIES AND COMBAT PROWESS

Asinaeus is presented as being ‘quite short’. The term βραχύς (‘slight’, *GELS*; ‘short’, *LSJ*) is applied by Josephus to topics addressed in brief, small locations or periods of time, a small quantity (of heat), a group of a few people, small quantities of food, a small trumpet, and used in the context of the passage about a little finger being thicker than the father’s loins (*AJ* 8.217).³⁵ The children of Ptolemy V Epiphanes, Philometer and Physcon, are described as being young in age or in maturity using the term βραχύς, since age and size are typically paired with one another (12.235).

Of particular relevance to the description of Asinaeus as βραχύς is Onias the high priest, whom Josephus describes in *AJ* 12.158 as ὁ Ὀνίας βραχύς ἦν τὴν διάνοιαν καὶ χρημάτων ἥτων (‘Onias “the Small” was inferior of intelligence and wealth’).³⁶ Here, Onias’ physical appearance is related to his complete moral ineptitude. His shortness is a manifestation of character in short supply, particularly of wits and wealth. Like Asinaeus and Anilaus, Onias’ personal (im)moral decisions have detrimental effects on the wider Jewish nation. Onias refuses to pay a tax of twenty talents of silver to Alexander and Ptolemy out of his own pocket as his predecessors had done. When Ptolemy Euergetes discovers Onias’ refusal to pay, he threatens to seize Jerusalem and set up a garrison in the land, a threat that troubles and endangers the Jewish people (*AJ* 12.159, 162). Onias’ love of money (φιλοχρηματία) overrode his obligation to take care of his people. Asinaeus and Anilaus’ focus on personal autonomy also eventually leads to the persecution of their Jewish compatriots.

In the context of Asinaeus’ banditry, Artabanus’ observation about his stature can be read as connecting prowess in battle with physical appearance. There may be some general idea of what a warrior should look like, and power may be somewhat commensurate with physical size. Yet we find two other episodes in Josephus’ *Jewish War* where Jewish soldiers and Roman besiegers undertake single combat and physical conditions are mentioned alongside their respective acts of daring. A third account is also relevant to compare here as it details combat actions undertaken by people to whose physical bodies Josephus draws attention.

Most similarly to Asinaeus, Josephus describes the actions of a certain Jonathan (*BJ* 6.169–76). Towards the end of the siege of Jerusalem, the Romans have advanced to the walls of the Temple and are continually resisted by the Jews. Jonathan taunts the Romans, requesting they fight him. Initially resistant, one Roman named Pudens rises to the challenge and is struck down, at which point a centurion shoots Jonathan with a bow,

³⁴ Josephus, for instance, comments approvingly on how Augustus is able to detect an imposter on the basis of physiognomy. See *BJ* 2.107.

³⁵ Takamitsu Muraoka provides six ways in which the Septuagint uses the term, as in significance, in number, in quantity, in length of time, in degree, or as a substantive noun: *GELS* 122.

³⁶ There is no reason for Josephus to use the definite article to refer to Onias since when he refers to Onias elsewhere (e.g. in the section right before *AJ* 8.154) the definite article is absent. Nicknames related to height were common, especially for terms like μικρός. See I.T. Soon, ‘Little James: μικρός as an indication of height or affection not comparative age in Mark 15.40’, *NTS* 69 (2023), 462–71; I.T. Soon, ‘The little messiah: Jesus as τῇ ἡλικίᾳ μικρός in Luke 19:3’, *JBL* 142 (2023), 151–70.

killing him. Pudens' name (meaning 'modest', 'shamefaced' or 'bashful') perhaps alerts readers to the limited value of his actions.

Jonathan is said to be 'a man of mean stature and despicable appearance' (*BJ* 6.169, LCL 210). Again, this is σῶμα βραχύς ('in body, short') and ὅπιν εὐκαταφρόνητος ('in outward appearance, despicable'). This use of βραχύς corresponds to Josephus' subsequent description of Asinaeus in the same manner. The Romans recognize that Jonathan does not represent an opportunity for glory, which sheds light on the use of this same descriptor for Asinaeus. The majority of onlookers 'treat (him) disdainfully' (ὑπερηφανέω, *GELS*; cf. *BJ* 5.539), while some of the wiser among them understand that such a challenge can only result in their death or in 'no great victory' (*BJ* 6.171). Josephus uses this story to comment on the fortunes of war, Jonathan 'illustrating how swift in war is the nemesis that overtakes irrational success' (*BJ* 5.176, LCL 210).

A parallel case is that of the Roman soldier Sabinus (*BJ* 6.54–67). After undermining one wall, the Romans are dismayed to see a second wall standing behind it. Titus thus encourages his soldiers with a lengthy speech, and Sabinus, a member of an auxiliary unit and 'native of Syria' (*BJ* 6.54, LCL 210) takes it upon himself to scale the second wall. He dashes to attack, leading eleven others onward. Many fall to projectiles in this attempt but Sabinus achieves his goal. The defenders flee before him and, once again, Josephus uses this moment to comment on the nature of war. Sabinus slips and falls. Thus indisposed, he is quickly surrounded and, although he fights to the end, is finally overcome. Josephus notes that 'here one cannot but censure Fortune as envious of feats of valour and ever thwarting marvellous achievements' (*BJ* 6.63, LCL 210).

This account differs from Josephus' subsequent remarks on Jonathan. Josephus ascribes a certain hubris to this defender, and in a manner discredits his success as both a failing on the part of Pudens in rising to a futile challenge, and the poor character and judgement of Jonathan, as one 'supremely conceited and contemptuous of the Romans' (*BJ* 6.172, LCL 210). This perspective was clearly out-of-step with Josephus' impression of the Romans, who only fail under poor commanders or through exceptional circumstances. This presentation of Roman military prowess owing to good order in contrast with dangerous recklessness is a consistent theme throughout Josephus' war narratives.³⁷ As Reeder identifies particularly in the speeches of Titus, 'the contrast with the disciplined, orderly, military masculinity of the Romans undermines the reckless, daring manliness of the Jews even as it is asserted'.³⁸ On the one hand, we can view Pudens' rising to the challenge to be a breakdown of the orderliness which characterizes the Roman forces. Sabinus, on the other hand, rises to Titus' speech (as no other Romans actually do) and is emboldened to make an impressive attack on the defences. He causes those there to flee, but misfortune strikes him down.

Earlier in the siege of Jerusalem, there is another episode that also coheres with our theme (*BJ* 5.473–85). A group of Jews sally forth to attack the siege machines, namely Gephthaeus, Magassarus and Ceagiras. Josephus comments that 'Ceagiras' (Κεαγίρας)

³⁷ The *stasis* between opposing sides in Jerusalem is also another motif, where Josephus both connects Jewish experience of civil war with Roman history and demonstrates that the war is not divinely approved, but Roman victory is assured because the deity has determined they should win. On *stasis* in Josephus, see Mason (n. 3 [2005]), 97–9; N. Wiater, 'Reading the Jewish War. Narrative technique and historical interpretation in Josephus's *Bellum Judaicum*', *MD* 64 (2010), 145–85, at 150–64. *Stasis* is also an important motif in the decline of the Hasmoneans through to Herodian rule in *Antiquities*: Edwards (n. 1), 110.

³⁸ Reeder (n. 23), 75.

means *χωλός* (‘with a mobility impairment of the feet’).³⁹ These three attack the Roman earthworks and siege equipment. More join them and push back the Roman sentries until Titus leads a counteroffensive.

Shortly before narrating this episode, Josephus describes the arrival of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, king of Commagene. His bodyguard of Macedonians are described as ‘all of the same age, tall, just emerged from adolescence’ (*ἥλικας πάντας, ὑψηλοῦς, ὀλίγον ὑπὲρ ἀντίπαιδας*, *BJ* 5.460, LCL 210). *ὑψηλός* can indicate ‘physically high or elevated’ but also those who are ‘arrogant’ and again ‘those worthy of high esteem’ (*GELS*).⁴⁰ Here, there is likely some irony going on. Titus allows Antiochus to attack the walls of Jerusalem, and his Macedonians rush at it. While Antiochus avoids harm, most of his companions fall (*BJ* 5.464). This episode juxtaposes outward appearance and prowess in battle. Bravery can become foolhardy. Indeed, Josephus again also separates such activity from the Romans. It is their allies who act as such.

These episodes show that these descriptions of men whose bodies Josephus deems worthy of comment are used in his *War* to capture certain truths about warfare. While subverting notions which combine a certain outward appearance with either strength or weakness of character, with a tendency towards fear or courage, Josephus can create a narrative space wherein the reader may be temporarily uncertain over the ultimate outcome. Yet in each case, typical conventions are reasserted. Jonathan dies ignobly, Sabinus is undone by a careless error, Gephthaeus, Magassarus and Ceagiras are repelled by Titus. Initial success belies what audiences may expect from such figures, but ultimately, they do not affect the outcome of the battle. They temporarily escape the expectations of such appearances, only for them to ultimately fail.

The connection between height and rulership is well established in biblical texts and related literature.⁴¹ Those who are ‘born to rule’ are physically elevated, which was interpreted as a sign of their right to rule over others. Returning to Asinaeus in Artabanus’ court, we can ask whether the king views Asinaeus’ physical appearance in a positive light. His treatment of Asinaeus, especially as portrayed in the reported speeches and conversations, suggests otherwise; ‘the king said to his friends that Asinaeus had a soul that by comparison was greater (*ὥς μεΐζονα*) than his body’ (*AJ* 18.333). In other words, there is a physiognomic mismatch; whereas Asinaeus’ soul is large, his body remains small. Although at first this appears to be a compliment, it does not suggest that the king favours Asinaeus. He is still, after all, denigrating Asinaeus’ physical appearance.⁴² On the narrative level, while Artabanus views Asinaeus’ ‘soul’ as courageous, Josephus had earlier established that the deeds of the two brothers are ‘evil’. Artabanus’ praise of their ‘courage’ and ‘boldness’, and the ‘large soul’ of Asinaeus might be tongue in cheek.

³⁹ Translation adapted from LSJ’s ‘lame in the feet, halting, limping’. For every instance this term is used in the Septuagint, *πῶς* is used in the Masoretic Text; Lev. 21:18; Deut. 15:21; 2 Sam. 5:6, 8; 9:13; 19:27; Job 29:15; Mal. 1:8, 13; Isa. 33:23; 35:6. Thackeray notes that this draws from the Aramaic *hagga*, which he translates as ‘lame man’; LCL 210, 151 n. b. This is used in the Targum of all the above except for 2 Sam. 5:6, 8; 9:13; Isa. 36:5 (all four in Tg. Ps.-J.).

⁴⁰ Cf. the description of war prisoners in *BJ* 7.118, those who were tall and handsome selected to show off in triumph by Titus.

⁴¹ On the phenomenon of the tall messiahs see Soon (n. 36, ‘Little messiah’), 170. This also intersects with aspects of beautiful leaders; see for instance concerning king Saul (and literature cited herein), E. Lyell and J. Scales, ‘Uncovering the dead, dethroning the king: divine embodiment in 1 Samuel 28:14’, *Hebrew Studies* 62 (2021), 97–115, at 101–5.

⁴² *Contra* D. Lincicum, ‘Josephus and the signifying body’, *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 7 (2016), 385–96, at 391, who overlooks the fact that Asinaeus is called courageous specifically in the speech and thought of his characters, rather than in narrative, enabling Josephus to deploy irony more effectively.

The ‘boldness’ (τολμήματι) that Artabanus ascribed to the brothers might instead be ‘recklessness’.

Certainly, the king treats Asinaeus in an ambivalent way. When he presents Asinaeus to one of his generals, Abdagases, the general asks Artabanus for permission to kill him (*AJ* 18.334–5). After recognizing Asinaeus as an enemy on his own along with the sight of his ‘small’ body, Abdagases thinks he is an easy target. Artabanus had already given Asinaeus his ‘right hand’, an indication that no harm would come of him from the king. But then through the side of his mouth, he orders Abdagases that the general does not need the king’s permission and if he wants to attack Asinaeus he may. Upon allowing Asinaeus to leave he calls him ‘young man!’ (ὦ νεανία). Here, Artabanus again mocks Asinaeus’ physical appearance. Asinaeus might be a youthful warrior, but someone who is small also resembles someone who is young. At the same time, a ‘youth’ is not yet a man. Overall Artabanus mocks Asinaeus in his court, gives one of his generals leave to assassinate him and reminds Asinaeus of his unmanliness. Rather than battle scars of glory or physical prowess, Asinaeus has only the intangible size of his soul to rely upon for visible displays of his masculinity. Although he is no longer spinning wool under the thumb of a teacher/master who can beat him like a slave, Asinaeus finds himself yet again in an emasculated position.

Even Josephus’ comment that ‘there was none his equal of all who had ventured from such a beginning (ἐκ τοιαύτης ἀφορμῆς) to grasp the reins of office’ (*AJ* 18.338, LCL 433) is not as much of a compliment as one might think. It is not a universalizing statement, but relative to Asinaeus’ original station as an enslaved wool-spinner. In other words, there is no equal to Asinaeus’ exploits who came from that same effeminate and enslaved class. The underlying subtext is that Asinaeus is not an equal to those born above his effeminate station nor are his exploits equivalent to theirs.

5. BEGUILED AND LAWLESS MEN

After his meeting with Artabanus, Asinaeus’ fiefdom flourishes. He erects new fortresses and becomes ‘large’ or ‘great’ in a little time (μέγας τε ἐν ὀλίγῳ γέγονει, *AJ* 18.338). Josephus’ contrast concerning size should not be overlooked. Though his body is small and detestable, ridiculed by the Parthian king, Asinaeus’ ‘bold’ (or perhaps ‘reckless’) efforts bring about a larger-than-life reputation that even earns the honour of the Parthian governors who are sent to him (18.339).⁴³ At the same time, however, when Babylonian governors give honour, Asinaeus thinks that their offering is ‘small’ (μικρός) and ‘inferior to his corresponding virtue’ (μικρὸν γὰρ ἐδόκει καὶ τῆς κατ’ αὐτὸν ἥσσαν ἀρετῆς). Here again, Asinaeus wrestles with being emasculated, but this time not from the Parthians but from the Babylonians. Asinaeus believes that he deserves more honour due to him from the Babylonians, who seem to give honour only according to what they believe matches Asinaeus’ size. In other words, in the eyes of the Babylonians, his virtue is little just as he is little. In his own estimation, Asinaeus believes his virtue is great, greater than the size of his body (and perhaps he has taken the words of Artabanus to heart). Courage or virtue (*uirtus*) is pivotal for Roman masculinity and if Asinaeus lacks virtue or only has a little, his masculinity hangs in the balance.

⁴³ Josephus says that Asinaeus ‘took hold of deeds with boldness/recklessness’ (ἀψασθαι πραγμάτων ἐν τόλμῃ γεγονότων, *AJ* 18.338).

The quality of Asinaeus’ virtue is tested when after fifteen years of prosperity, Anilaus’ lawless choices lead to the downfall of the two brothers. Josephus states that the reason for their downfall was when ‘they turned the virtue in which they had advanced to great power into arrogance toward the transgression of the ancestral laws under passion and pleasure’ (ἐπειδὴ τὴν ἀρετὴν, ἣ προὔκοψαν ἐπὶ μέγα δυνάμειος, ἐκτρέπουσιν εἰς ὕβριν ἐπὶ παραβάσει τῶν πατρίων ὑπὸ ἐπιθυμιῶν καὶ ἡδονῆς, 18.340). It might seem like Josephus acknowledges that the brothers were virtuous men, and thus that their masculinity was not in question. However, given that his statement follows from the discussion of Babylonian governors who only give Asinaeus a little honour corresponding to the amount of virtue they think he deserves, Josephus’ comment should be read differently: as acknowledging that the brothers were able to achieve these things despite the little virtue that they had.⁴⁴ Additionally, Asinaeus’ overestimation of his virtue (18.339) suggests that if he had a more realistic conception of his own virtue he and his brother would not so easily succumb to the vices of pleasure and passion.

In the meantime, Anilaus falls in love with the wife of a Parthian general, committing adultery with her (18.342). In a series of events reminiscent of David and the wife of Uriah, Bathsheba, when the woman’s husband is killed in battle, Anilaus marries her immediately (18.343). Not only does she bring her non-Jewish gods into the house, committing idolatry (18.344), but when his Jewish subjects protest his allowance of the worship and sacrifices to foreign gods, Anilaus murders one of them (18.346). Additionally, not only are these acts transgressions against the Jewish law, but they signal that the brothers, especially Anilaus, have lost control. Certainly, twice in the narrative Josephus mentions Anilaus’ inability to control himself. Once, Josephus describes Anilaus’ desire to enslave the woman and make her his while he acknowledges at the same time that his lust for her was unconquerable (in the sense of not to be argued against, *δυσαντίλεκτος*, 18.342).⁴⁵ Later, when petitioned by the people to stop allowing his brother’s idolatry, Asinaeus ‘handed out excuses (for his brother) as he was being dominated by the superior evil of lust’ (συγγνώμην νέμων ὡς ὑπὸ κρείσσονος κακοῦ τῆς ἐπιθυμίας νικωμένου, 18.350). Anilaus has been ‘unmanned’ by these vices; his loss of self-control over his desires and his giving over to lustful passion is effeminizing and emasculating.

When petitioned yet again by the people to speak to Anilaus, Asinaeus refuses to do anything until he is constantly pestered every single day—an indication of his sense of justice as a ruler (or lack thereof). Although Asinaeus pleads with his brother to send her away, Anilaus’ wife poisons Asinaeus’ food and murders him (*AJ* 18.352).⁴⁶ The ‘Unharmful’ ironically meets his end through a quotidian but deadly meal. Perhaps tellingly, this woman is both an idolator and a poisoner, jointly condemned in the covenant code through the association of poisoning with sorcery in the Septuagint (Exod. 22:17 [LXX 22:18]; cf. *AJ* 4.279),⁴⁷ and surely representing the most dangerous aspects of permitting such an association with a foreign woman. This association is made clear by Philo in his *Special Laws* 3.93–103, wherein he discusses poisoning and the use

⁴⁴ This perhaps also corresponds with the justification for fighting on the Sabbath presented by Josephus in a mixed fashion. See n. 32 above.

⁴⁵ We thank *CQ*’s reader for this note.

⁴⁶ On the connotations of poisoning, see E. Höbenreich and G. Rizzelli, ‘Poisoning in ancient Rome: the legal framework, the nature of poisons, and gender stereotypes’, in P. Wexler (ed.), *History of Toxicology and Environmental Health: Toxicology in Antiquity* (Amsterdam, 2015), 2.42–51.

⁴⁷ J. Korytko, *Death of the Covenant Code: Capital Punishment in Old Greek Exodus in Light of Greco-Egyptian Law* (Leiden, 2023), 179–83.

of certain ‘magic’ (μαγική) which is a counterfeit and ‘associated with base tactics’ (κακοτεχνία) by ‘charlatan mendicants and parasites and the basest of the women and slave population’ (LCL 320). Although it is within his right to punish her, Anilaeus does nothing to avenge his brother’s death. Here, not only does Anilaeus’ behaviour reinforce his loss of self-control toward lust but also that he is devoid of justice, and therefore unfit to rule.

Asinaeus’ refusal to keep Anilaeus’ behaviour in check ultimately leads to his own demise. With Asinaeus gone, Anilaeus has no person to guide or restrain his behaviour. He continues to seize property, breaks the sabbath and upon capturing Mithridates (son-in-law of the Parthian king) forces him to ride upon a donkey naked (*AJ* 18.356). What is more, having shamed him in such a way, Anilaeus refuses to kill Mithridates, reasoning that this would be a step too far against the Parthian king, and releases him. We should recall that one possible meaning of Anilaeus’ name is ‘merciless’. Here, it is precisely an act of mercy which is his undoing. In an eventual showdown, Anilaeus, accompanied by various dubious characters (*AJ* 18.364, 366–7), is defeated in battle and barely escapes with his life.

Eventually, the Babylonians find out where Anilaeus is encamped and catch him and his men in the night while indisposed. In a reversal of the lack of drink when he was first overtaken, Anilaeus and his men have imbibed too much, being found drunk (μεθύω) and asleep (*AJ* 18.370).⁴⁸ This is a shameful end for Anilaeus: dead-drunk. Anilaeus’ failure to deal with Mithridates appropriately, either by treating his prisoner more respectfully or by dispatching him once and for all, seals his fate. We cannot know what outcomes may have resulted, only that because of Anilaeus’ choice he undid his position, and with him the position of the Jews in Babylonia more broadly (*AJ* 18.371–9).

Although they are touted as ‘bold’ warriors, the two brothers Asinaeus and Anilaeus do not die with courage on the battlefield, with scars on the front of their bodies. Rather, they die during dinner and while insensate. Are these masculine deaths? Are they noble deaths? We suggest that, as with the resolutions of battle-pericopes in *War*, Josephus provides an extended narrative wherein power-seizure by those unworthy to reign results in downfall. The story of the short-lived autonomy of Asinaeus and Anilaeus recalls the trajectory of the revolt against Rome. There was temporary success on the basis of military prowess, but their virtues, manifested through the use and appearance of their bodies, reveal that such figures are not suited to rule, and disaster will follow.⁴⁹

6. CONCLUSION

It is telling that Josephus situates this story of tyrannical power-seizure in the midst of a narrative about dynastic power transfer in the Julio-Claudian dynasty.⁵⁰ Josephus makes the point that power must be held by those with the right moral character. He warns his

⁴⁸ Cf. Holofernes in the Book of Judith, who after drinking a vast amount succumbs to assassination (*Jdt* 12:20; 13:2, NETS). This intemperance contributes towards a presentation of Holofernes’ lack of self-control, and additionally to his emasculation, culminating in his beheading via his own sword; see Schmitz (n. 25).

⁴⁹ We anticipate that this analysis will have further impacts in this area, given the parallels to this material for the trajectories of multiple other ruler/tyrants in the last books of *Antiquities*, all of which build towards the outbreak of *stasis* in Judaea and Rome.

⁵⁰ Mason (n. 1 [2009]), 324, 338 draws attention to the longer narrative from *Antiquities* fourteen to nineteen, wherein repeatedly dynastic succession and the obsessions of power-hungry men form the basis of a lesson in good rule. On tyranny in *Antiquities*, see Mason (n. 1 [2003]), 579–85.

audience to be wary of those unworthy of holding power, embedding this warning in an extended meditation on the perils of monarchic succession involving those of inferior moral quality. Asinaeus and Anilaeus fulfil this function. Their story is deployed carefully within a wider framework of ideas about human bodies, tyranny and conflict. The Babylonian pericope coheres well with Josephus' broader narrative purposes and furnishes us with a greater insight into his perspectives on fitness to rule.

Beginning with the brothers' background, occupation and break with normative social structures, Josephus establishes a story wherein the characters' masculinity is undermined and belittled. Through their exploits, the brothers attempt to assert their masculinity, become *uiri*, but they are unable to do so effectively. Despite their martial prowess, the brothers do not observe proper customs of the Jews. Their eventual downfall is perhaps sealed early on. Yet for all this negative characterization, they are also used to further Roman conceptions of the East, wherein even such unworthy men are able to outman the Parthians.

Reading about the martial exploits of Asinaeus as a man remarkable for his shortness alongside other instances in Josephus' works where warriors' bodies undertake a narrative function is particularly instructive. Here we can see that Josephus' description of Asinaeus takes part in a wider discourse of the nature of war and ideal male bodies. Although the brothers have some victories, they behave poorly. Anilaeus' willingness to subordinate himself to a woman seals his brother's fate, and his uncontrolled violence against Mithridates leads to his own end. His association with disreputable types and undisciplined drinking bring about his death and the end of the security of the Jews of Babylonia. The story of the brothers is a moral lesson about the intertwining relationship between masculinity and leadership, and Jewish national safety.

One implication of this study is that we should be cautious about positive descriptions of figures in Josephus. At first blush, although Artabanus' description of Asinaeus appears positive, in dialogue with Josephus' wider portrayal of military figures as well as his narrative undermining the masculinity of Asinaeus and Anilaeus, we can see that such a description is actually not positive at all. Robust analysis of physiognomic descriptions in Josephus are tethered to questions of gender and also require sensitivity to the ways that Josephus uses irony through dialogue. In the end, Josephus once again proves himself adept at weaving a moral narrative together, itself intended to be instructive to his audience and to provide a commentary on their sense of social order.

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