

JOSEPHUS'S *LIFE* AND *JEWISH WAR* COMPARED TO
THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

Jordan Henderson

Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY, USA

Although scholars debated the genre of the Synoptic Gospels through most of the twentieth century, an increasing number of scholars today view them as some form of ancient biography. Richard Burridge, among others, has argued that this implies that as we study the Synoptic Gospels, our focus should be on the subject of the biographies—Jesus¹—rather than on the hypothetical communities supposedly responsible for creating the biographies.² If we accept this premise, this still begs the question of how much historically reliable information we can expect from these ancient biographies. This question becomes especially pertinent when we consider the differences among the Synoptic Gospels: What range of variation would have been accepted, and therefore expected, by first-century listeners who would have heard these documents as ancient biographies?

Two of Josephus's works offer a test case to explore this question: his autobiographical *Life* and *The Jewish War*, which contains

1. Richard Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2nd edn, 2004), p. 249: 'This emphasis on the centrality of the person of Jesus is a hermeneutical consequence of the Gospels being βίοι' (see pp. 233-51). Cf. Richard Bauckham (ed.), *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Richard Burridge, 'Reading the Gospels as Biography', in Brian McGing and Judith Mossman (eds.), *The Limits of Ancient Biography* (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2006), pp. 31-49.

2. For instance, Michael Grant writes regarding Suetonius's biographies, 'It is only from Suetonius that we get a plausible idea of what sort of people [the twelve Caesars] were' ('Foreword' in Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars* [trans. Robert Graves; New York: Penguin, 1979], pp. 7-11 [10]). He does not posit a community that read its experiences back into the lives of the Caesars, then assert that in reading Suetonius's work, all we can really know about is this community.

autobiographical information overlapping with that in his *Life*. In examining the common material between the two works, and in particular the discrepancies in this common material, we have a test case by which to compare the differences among the biographies of Matthew, Mark and Luke.³ In looking at this material, I will argue that no one overarching theory accounts for all the discrepancies in Josephus; rather, I will arrange the types of discrepancies in *Life* and *Jewish War* topically and use a multifaceted approach in addressing them. I will then briefly reflect on what this analogy might tell us about reading the Synoptic Gospels as ancient biographies.

Scope, Strengths and Limitations

This article will focus especially on the differences between common material in Josephus's *Life* and *Jewish War*.⁴ I will not discuss in detail differences among the Synoptic Gospels, focusing instead on the analogy provided by Josephus's works. These works provide a worthwhile analogy in that they fall within the same range of time between the life of the subject and the writing of the biography.⁵ It is important, however, to note some limitations in this comparative study. Craig Keener has conducted a similar study on the Roman emperor Otho, comparing the material in the biographies of Suetonius and

3. I will limit my study to the Synoptic Gospels and will not discuss the differences between the Synoptics and John.

4. Quotations of *Jewish War* are taken from 'The Jewish War', in Flavius Josephus, *The New Complete Works of Josephus* (trans. William Whiston; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), pp. 667-936, while quotations from *Life* are from the newer translation of Steve Mason (Steve Mason [ed.], *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*. IX. *Life of Josephus* [trans. Steve Mason; Leiden: Brill Academic, 2001]).

5. I accept the standard dating for the Gospel of Mark around 70 CE, separating the earliest extant biography of Jesus from his crucifixion by roughly one generation. Josephus's *Life* 'focuses almost entirely on the five or six months from his commission in the Galilee to the period before the siege of Iotapata, thus apparently from about December 66 to mid-May 67' (Steve Mason, 'Introduction to the *Life* of Josephus,' in Mason [ed.], *Life of Josephus*, pp. xiii-liv [xxi]). If *Life* was originally an epilogue to *Antiquities*, that would put the work roughly c. 93-94 CE, or 26 to 28 years after the bulk of the subject matter occurred, with his earlier *Jewish War* having been composed c. 75-79 CE, approximately 8 to 13 years after most of the common events recorded in both works.

Plutarch with information about him in Tacitus's *Historiae*.⁶ He notes the importance of examining 'a biography about a then-recent historical figure to demonstrate that numerous elements match elements about that figure in a historical work of comparable date'.⁷ As this study will follow a similar line of argumentation, it is worth noting a significant difference and limitation: with Josephus's *Life*, we are examining an *autobiography*, and the historical work (*Jewish War*) is written by the same person. This limits our ability to examine ancient biographers' use of sources in this case, as Keener has done with Otho, because 'we would expect the same author to have access to the same accounts'.⁸ We are further limited by the fact that we have no work of history in the same time period focusing on the ministry of Jesus that would be analogous to *Jewish War* as the Synoptic Gospels are analogous to *Life*. Nevertheless, although none of the evangelists wrote an autobiography, Josephus's *Life* still stands as a subtype of the common genre of biography shared with the Gospels, just as the genre of biography is a subtype of ancient historiography. This comparison will therefore serve as a case study to examine the outer range of variation that might have been accepted in a work of biography and a work of history covering the same historical figure.

Reading the Synoptic Gospels as Ancient Biographies

Though he was not the first to make the case that the canonical Gospels best fit the genre of ancient biographies, Burrige's *What Are the Gospels?* has proven definitive in arguing this point. Graham Stanton notes, 'I do not think it is now possible to deny that the Gospels are a sub-set of the broad ancient literary genre of "lives", that is, biographies'.⁹ The key word in Stanton's statement is 'broad', which may acknowledge some scholars' hesitance to accept this generic classification. For instance, Eddy and Boyd note that 'everyone concedes [the Gospels] have elements that are not typical of this genre', and that those who apply this generic classification 'have to stretch the definition of the genre to the point that, it could be argued, its

6. Craig Keener, 'Otho: A Targeted Comparison of Suetonius' Biography and Tacitus' *History*, with Implications for the Gospels' Historical Reliability', *BBR* 21 (2011), pp. 331-56.

7. Keener, 'Otho', p. 334.

8. Keener, 'Otho', p. 335.

9. Burrige, *What Are the Gospels*, p. ix.

distinctiveness as a genre is threatened'.¹⁰ This seems to me an overstatement. While the Gospels certainly have a number of unique elements, this may be more the result of the unique character of their subject, Jesus, than their being *sui generis*. Furthermore, Burridge makes the case before looking specifically at the Gospels that ancient biography is best seen as a flexible genre 'nestling between history, encomium and moral philosophy, with overlaps and relationships in all directions'.¹¹ This leaves room for the unique features found in the Gospels without threatening the ancient biographical genre's distinctiveness. As Burridge says,

Using the idea of 'family resemblance', we may compare the Gospels to children of the same family: each child is indeed different, unique and special in its own right, but intimate knowledge of them from the inside and comparison with others outside the family show their shared family features arising from a common ancestry.¹²

Given the broad generic similarities noted by Burridge, Raymond Brown is likely correct that '1st-century hearers/readers familiar with Greco-Roman biographies would not have been so precise' in noticing the differences as to assign the Gospels to a new unique genre.¹³ As Mark Allan Powell notes, 'a Roman bookstore or library probably would have put our New Testament Gospels on the same shelf as *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* by Diogenes Laertius and *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* by Philostratus'.¹⁴ In this article I will therefore assume, rather than argue, that the Synoptic Gospels are ancient biographies and hence analogous to Josephus's *Life*.

10. Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd, *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), p. 323.

11. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels*, p. 65; see also pp. 59-67.

12. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels*, p. 236.

13. Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), p. 103.

14. Mark Allen Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), pp. 82-83.

Past Attempts to Account for Contradictions between Josephus's Life and Jewish War

The ninth-century Patriarch of Constantinople, St Photius the Great, includes two entries pertinent to our study in his encyclopedic *Bibliotheca*, in which he reviews 279 books he has read: Josephus's *Jewish War*, known to Photius as *The Suffering of the Jews*,¹⁵ and Justus of Tiberias's *Chronicles of the Kings of the Jews who Are in the Pedigrees*. This Justus appears as Josephus's rival in *Life*, but nowhere else in Josephus's extant works. While Photius praises Josephus as having a 'pure style, and...[being] apt at expressing his meaning with dignity',¹⁶ he accuses Justus of 'omit[ting] a great deal that is of the utmost importance' in his history. He notes that Justus was a political opponent of Josephus and that his history is 'in great part fictitious, especially where he describes the Judaeo-Roman war and the capture of Jerusalem'.¹⁷ This disagreement between Justus and Josephus, as summarized by Photius, the latest extant writer to have known both works independently, is significant because 'it remains the starting point in almost all research' concerning Josephus's *Life*, including attempts to explain the discrepancies with *Jewish War*.¹⁸

Though Josephus's works were preserved and appreciated by Christians for centuries, largely because he mentioned Jesus¹⁹ and attributed the destruction of the temple to God's wrath visited upon the Jews,²⁰ the glaring contradictions between the *Life* and *Jewish War* do not seem to have garnered much attention until the nineteenth century. Shaye Cohen points out that 'pre-nineteenth-century scholars noted that [*Life*] and [*Jewish War*] were parallel, and that the two texts frequently disagreed, but they were unable to come to grips with the

15. Photius, *Bibl.* 47: Ἀνεγνώσθη ΙΩΣΗΠΠΟΥ Ἰουδαίου τὰ κατὰ Ἰουδαίους πάθη.

16. Photius, *Bibl.* 47. All English quotations of Photius are taken from J.H. Freese, *The Library of Photius*, I (London: SPCK, 1920).

17. Photius, *Bibl.* 33.

18. Mason, 'Introduction', p. xxvii.

19. Note that Photius chides Justus of Tiberias because, in contrast to Josephus, 'he does not even mention the coming of Christ, the events of His life, or the miracles performed by Him' (*Bibl.* 33).

20. Josephus, *J.W.* 4.323; *Ant.* 20.164-166.

issue'.²¹ For instance, an annotated German translation of *Life* in 1806 often has 'cf. BJ [*Bellum Judaicum*]' in the notes, but no further analysis of the contradictions.²²

*Nineteenth-Century Attempts*²³

The first to deal seriously with the differences between the two accounts was the great Jewish historian I.M. Jost, who attempted to harmonize the two accounts by surmising that Josephus did not have a copy of *Jewish War* available to him to consult when he composed *Life*, and he had simply forgotten many of the details.²⁴ Twenty-five years later, J. Salvador argued that both *Life* and *Jewish War* taken together reflect an 'inherently contradictory situation' between Josephus's 'covert and declared purposes'.²⁵ Both Jost and Salvador essentially 'combined [*Life*] and [*Jewish War*]' by accepting [the account in *Life*].²⁶ This was challenged in the next major contribution to the subject by E. Reuss, who saw *Jewish War* and *Life* to be fundamentally incompatible and viewed *Life* as 'more an apology against Justus' than a biography, thus paving the way for future discussions on the topic.²⁷ Unfortunately, most nineteenth-century scholars following Reuss did not take his arguments for the incompatibility of the two accounts seriously enough and tended to follow Salvador's basic solution to the problem.²⁸

21. Shaye J.D. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome: His Vita and Development as a Historian* (Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition, 3; Leiden: Brill, 1979), p. 8.

22. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, p. 9 n. 21.

23. This is by no means an exhaustive survey. I am relying heavily on the literature review of Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, pp. 8-16 for works from the nineteenth century.

24. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, p. 9. See I.M. Jost, *Geschichte der Israeliten*, II (2 vols.; Berlin: Schlesinger, 1820-28).

25. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, p. 10. See J. Salvador, *Histoire de la domination romaine en Judée* (Paris: A. Guyot et Scribe, 1847).

26. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, p. 10.

27. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, p. 11. See E. Reuss, *Nouvelle revue de theologie* 4 (1859), pp. 253-319.

28. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, pp. 11-16.

Modern Attempts

At the end of the nineteenth century, Emil Schürer expanded upon Reuss's view of *Life* as primarily an apology against Justus of Tiberias, and most scholars of the twentieth century have followed his lead.²⁹ This argument is summarized by Mason as follows:

Josephus introduces Iustus [Justus] early and at some length (*Life* 36-42). In that passage, he mentions Iustus' competing account of the war, blames the Tiberian and his brother for most of the problems in Galilee, and promises to elaborate upon this 'as the story unfolds' (41). Not much later, Josephus' chief opponent in Galilee, Ioannes [John] of Gischala, wins over Iustus as his ally (87-88). One might hypothesize, therefore, that whenever Josephus attacks Ioannes and his associates, which he often does, he is tacitly attacking Iustus' account, which would have told Ioannes' side of the story. When Josephus finally opens his formal digression on Iustus (336-367), and notes that Iustus' work concerned 'these things' (i.e., the events of the foregoing narrative), we should understand that he has been implicitly responding to Iustus all along.³⁰

This basic argument has been followed to one degree or another by scholars addressing the problem in the twentieth century.

An exception, however, can be seen in Richard Laqueur's biography of Josephus in 1920. In reacting against some of the excesses of source criticism so popular at the time, 'Laqueur was especially interested in contradictions and shifts in opinion [in the time between the writing of the two works], because these would reveal the development of Josephus' attitudes and, by extrapolation, the evolution of the circumstances in which he worked... The numerous contradictions between [*Life*] and [*Jewish War*] resulted when one work had a purpose or point of view different from the other's.'³¹ Laqueur proposed that the kernel of *Life* was actually written prior to *Jewish War* when Josephus was in Galilee in 67 CE, and was a response 'to complaints made by the Galileans under his control' at the time, rather than later criticisms of

29. Mason, 'Introduction', p. xxvii. See Emil Schürer, *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi* (Leipzig: Hinrich, 1898-1901).

30. Mason, 'Introduction', pp. xxvii-xxviii.

31. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, p. 16. See Richard Laqueur, *Der jüdische Historiker Flavius Josephus: Ein biographischer Versuch auf neuer Quellenkritischer Grundlage* (repr., Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1970).

Justus.³² He later added references to Justus in his second edition of the *Life* and appended it to *Antiquities*. Though this highly hypothetical reconstruction received much criticism, it also gained widespread support.³³

Shaye Cohen's *Josephus in Galilee and Rome* remains the most comprehensive modern study of the problem. In this brilliant work, Cohen examines Josephus's use of sources by looking at *Antiquities*' use of biblical materials, noting that 'on the whole Josephus was faithful to his sources... However, he did not confuse fidelity with slavish imitation. Like all ancient historians, he molded his material to suit his own... aims.'³⁴ With regard to overlapping material between *Antiquities* and *Jewish War*, Cohen detects a 'Josephan technique of self-paraphrase... identical with the Josephan technique of paraphrasing other sources', although he finds Josephus inconsistent in his approach.³⁵ In then looking at the *Jewish War/Life* parallels, he finds much the same relationship: *Jewish War* 'thematically arranges the chronological sequence found in [*Life*]'.³⁶ In other words, Cohen agrees with the basic premise of Laqueur noted above: *Life* was composed in some form prior to *Jewish War*, perhaps even as notes for this forthcoming composition. In *Jewish War* Josephus then arranged this material thematically. When he later revised *Life* in response to Justus of Tiberias, he used the already thematically organized material from *Jewish War*, along with his original version of the *Life*, and organized it chronologically.

Since Cohen's study, Bilde³⁷ and Rajak³⁸ have each argued against the idea that *Life* should be read primarily as a response to Justus, and claim that the apologetic sections specifically dealing with Justus of

32. Mason, 'Introduction', p. xxx.

33. It was endorsed, for instance, by the great Josephan scholar H. St John Thackeray, *Josephus: The Man and the Historian* (New York: Jewish Institute of Religion Press, 1929). For a survey of both supportive and contrary perspectives, see Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, pp. 16-23; Mason, 'Introduction', pp. xxx-xxxii.

34. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, p. 47. See pp. 24-47.

35. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, p. 65. See pp. 48-66.

36. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, p. 83.

37. Per Bilde, *Flavius Josephus, between Jerusalem and Rome: His Life, his Works, and their Importance* (JSPSup, 2; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988).

38. Tessa Rajak, *Josephus: The Historian and his Society* (London: Duckworth, 1983).

Tiberias should not be read back into the rest of the text. Bilde in particular argues that we should read this text primarily as what it claims to be—an autobiography—thus bringing the question of Josephus's aim full circle from nineteenth-century scholars such as Reuss and Schürer.³⁹ Bilde, who notes that Josephus's accounts in the two works 'vary a great deal',⁴⁰ nevertheless offers a 'comparatively positive interpretation of Josephus's person, life and goals'⁴¹ and tries to harmonize the varying accounts when possible. Meanwhile, Steve Mason argues on the grounds of placing the *Life* in its proper historical and literary contexts that Josephus in this work is less concerned with historical accuracy and more concerned with displaying his own character and vilifying his enemies by means of contemporary Roman rhetoric.⁴²

Historical Background

As Berlin and Overman note, 'Neither Judea nor trouble in Judea were new to Rome in 66 CE'.⁴³ Since the Hasmoneans established relations with Rome in the second century BCE, Judea had been 'officially part of Rome's orbit, concern, and propriety'.⁴⁴ However, this relationship had proven weak, particularly since Pompey's invasion of Jerusalem in 63 BCE. The tension with Rome, felt throughout the first century CE, came to a boiling point during the reign of Nero in 66 CE when revolt broke out in Judea, and Nero sent Vespasian to deal with it. He arrived with his son Titus, who would also eventually become emperor. Following the first victory over the Jewish rebels at Jotapata, the revolt would last several years before the Romans proved victorious in 70 CE, their triumphant victory symbolized in the destruction of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. The general Vespasian had by now been made

39. Bilde, *Flavius Josephus*, pp. 108-10.

40. Bilde, *Flavius Josephus*, p. 38.

41. Bilde, *Flavius Josephus*, p. 28.

42. Mason, 'Introduction', pp. xxxiv-1. See also Zuleika Rodgers, 'Justice for Justus: A Re-examination of Justus of Tiberias' Role in Josephus' Autobiography', in McGing and Mossman (eds.), *Limits of Ancient Biography*, pp. 169-92.

43. A.M. Berlin and A. Overman, 'Introduction', in A.M. Berlin and A. Overman (eds.), *The First Jewish Revolt: Archaeology, History, and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 1-14 (2).

44. Berlin and Overman, 'Introduction', p. 2. See 1 Macc. 8.

emperor, having been the last of several to hold this position the previous year, known famously as the ‘year of four emperors’.

Josephus had become involved in Roman affairs when, at 26 years of age, he worked successfully to secure the release of several priests who had been imprisoned by Felix the Procurator.⁴⁵ This incident brought him into prominence with the Jews, as ‘either officially or unofficially Josephus became their champion’.⁴⁶ The revolt was just beginning as he returned from this mission to Rome.⁴⁷ Josephus initially fought on the side of the rebels at their defeat at Jotapata before switching sides and predicting Vespasian would succeed Nero as emperor.⁴⁸

Roughly eight years later, ‘while he was in Rome enjoying the benefits granted him by his patron’,⁴⁹ he composed *Jewish War*, first in Aramaic, then in Greek.⁵⁰ This seven-volume work begins with the Jewish conflicts with Antiochus IV Epiphanes in the second century BCE and concludes with the aftermath of the revolt in 66–70 CE. During this period, Josephus already ‘was contemplating writing the complete history of the Jews from the creation to his own time’.⁵¹ Towards the end of the first century, however, he received encouragement from his patron Epaphroditus and ‘finally succeeded in completing his great project’.⁵² He notes at the conclusion of this massive twenty-volume work, ‘And now it will not be perhaps an invidious thing if I treat briefly of my own family, and of the actions of my own life’,⁵³ thus segueing into his *Life*, which was appended as an epilogue. Thus, for instance, when Eusebius later quotes from *Life*, he does not treat it as a separate work, but as ‘words attached to the end of *Antiquities*’.⁵⁴

45. Josephus, *Life* 13-16.

46. R.J.H. Shutt, *Studies in Josephus* (London: SPCK, 1961), p. 2.

47. Josephus, *Life* 17.

48. Josephus, *J.W.* 3.399-408. However, both Tacitus (*Hist.* 2.79) and Suetonius (*Vesp.* 2) have Vespasian hailed as emperor earlier in Egypt.

49. Shutt, *Studies in Josephus*, p. 7.

50. Josephus, *J.W.* 1.3.

51. Bilde, *Flavius Josephus*, p. 80. See Josephus, *Ant.* 1.6-7. Bilde notes objections to whether such a project had actually been planned that far back.

52. Bilde, *Flavius Josephus*, p. 80.

53. Josephus, *Ant.* 20.266.

54. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.10.8-11.

Examination of Parallel Accounts in War and Life

Rather than composing a comparison chart of the parallels between the *Jewish War* and *Life*, I will instead rely on and comment upon Mason's detailed chart.⁵⁵ Perhaps taking a cue from Josephus, I will arrange the following material thematically rather than chronologically following the material as it appears in either work. I will begin with what I consider to be more easily reconcilable differences between the two works and proceed towards the more difficult contradictions. After considering the differences, I will present my proposed solutions.

Proper Names

A number of people and places are mentioned in both works but called by slightly different names. For example, in *Life* 48, we are introduced to Varus, who is said to have been governing the kingdom at that time.⁵⁶ He is referred to as Noarus in *J.W.* 2.481. In *Life* 131, Josephus sends for 'the two principal men, Dassion and Ianneus the son of Levis'. In *J.W.* 2.597, Josephus does not mention Dassion, but refers to Ianneus as Eneas. He mentions the fortified cities in Upper Galilee of Iamnia, Ameroth and Acharabe in *Life* 187-188, which have been changed from Achabari, Jamnith and Meroth, in *J.W.* 2.574, as well as Seth, not mentioned in this passage in *Life*. The names of the fortified cities in Lower Galilee are different as well. Likewise, the members of the delegation from Jerusalem in *Life* 197 (Ionathes, Ananias, Simon and Iozar) differ from those in the parallel passage of *J.W.* 2.628 (Ioedruss [=Iozar] and Ananias; no mention of Ionathes being part of the delegation; instead, Simon and Judas are included and are said to be sons of Ionathes).

Varying Numbers

There are numerous discrepancies here.⁵⁷ *Life* 127 records 500 gold pieces taken at Dabaritta while *J.W.* 2.595 has 600. Six hundred soldiers surround Josephus's house in *Life* 145, while in *J.W.* 2.610 it is

55. Mason, 'Appendix C: Synopsis: Parallel Episodes in Josephus's *Life* and *War*', in Mason (ed.), *Life of Josephus*, pp. 213-22. For an excellent survey of the differences, see Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, pp. 3-8, including a comparison chart, which I also consulted in compiling these differences.

56. Josephus, *Life* 49-53.

57. The examples here are noted in Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, p. 7.

2,000.⁵⁸ In *Life* 200-201, John of Gischala receives 1,000 reinforcements from Jerusalem, while in *J.W.* 2.628, he receives 2,500. In the ultimatum to John's followers in *Life* 370, they are given a time limit of twenty days, while in *J.W.* 2.624 they are given a limit of five days. In *Life* 371-372, 4,000 soldiers desert John of Gischala while 1,500 remain. In *J.W.* 2.625, 3,000 desert while 2,000 remain.

Chronology

Though it is not readily apparent in Mason's comparison chart, there are a number of chronological differences between the two accounts. In *J.W.* 2.570-571, Josephus establishes a supreme council, 'as he chose seven judges in every city to hear the lesser quarrels; for as to the greater causes, and those wherein life and death were concerned, he directed they should be brought to him and the seventy elders'. This is immediately followed by and connected to the fortifications of the Galilean cities in *J.W.* 2.572-575. However, the establishment of the council and the fortifications are separated in *Life* 79 (supreme council) and 187-189 (fortifications). Similarly, *Life* 85 has John of Gischala go to Tiberias. This precedes the episode in *Life* 126-148 where 'some audacious young men of Dabarittan origin' rob Ptolemy's wife, leading to Josephus being accused of being a traitor. In *J.W.* 2.595-613, these two events happen in the opposite chronology and are joined together, whereas they are separated in *Life*. Likewise, the delegation from Jerusalem in *Life* 190-335 comes before the dispersal of John's followers in 368-372, whereas the order of these two events is also reversed from *J.W.* 2.624-625 (dispersal of John's followers) and 2.626-631 (delegation from Jerusalem).

Unique Elements in Life

Perhaps most significantly, Justus of Tiberias is completely missing from *Jewish War*, as well as Josephus's other works, whereas he occupies a prominent enough place in *Life* to convince numerous scholars that the entire work is an apologia against him. Also notable is the material on Gamala and Philip son of Iacimus in *Life* 46-61. Cohen also notes that, although neither work is friendly to John of Gischala, only the *Jewish War* 'vilifies him'.⁵⁹

58. In this and the following example, it is interesting that Josephus has decreased the number in the later work rather than expanding it.

59. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, p. 8.

Contradictions in Various Details

Examples abound of parallel material in the two works with the details changed only slightly. For instance, Soemus is mentioned in *Life* 45 as a tetrarch, but in *J.W.* 2.481 as a king. In *J.W.* 2.592, John of Gischala buys four amphorae of oil for the equivalent of four drachmas, whereas in *Life* 75, he can buy eighty pitchers for four drachmas.⁶⁰ In this same account, the oil is for the Jews of Caesarea Philippi in *Life* and for the Jews of Syria in *Jewish War*. In the 'Dabaritta affair' mentioned above,⁶¹ Ptolemy is attacked in *J.W.* 2.595, whereas his wife is attacked in *Life* 126. Josephus is counseled to commit suicide by four bodyguards in *J.W.* 2.600-601, but by only one in *Life* 137. In *J.W.* 2.612, following the Dabaritta affair, Josephus whips a group of people, 'until every one of their inward parts appeared naked'. By contrast, in the parallel account in *Life* 147, he only whips one man,⁶² then forces him to cut off his own hand and hang it around his neck, a detail absent from the account in *Jewish War*.

Nature of the Galilee Mission

This is by far the most significant of the differences between the two works. Reuss's pertinent questions emphasize his reason for declaring the two works incompatible and unharmonizable:

In whose name, with what intention, for the defense of what interest did [Josephus] go to Galilee? Was it to pacify the spirits and reconcile the parties, or was it to excite the passions and organize the resistance? Was he the agent of the moderates or the demagogues? What were all those interminable quarrels which absorbed him there, which he recounts with so much emphasis, but whose origin and resolution we do not understand?⁶³

60. As Mason notes, that is a rate of .05 drachmas per pitcher in *Life* rather than one amphora for one drachma (Mason [ed.], *Life of Josephus*, p. 64 n. 414).

61. See 'Chronology' above.

62. This discrepancy is similar to the different number of angels at Christ's tomb in the various Gospels.

63. Quoted in Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, p. 11.

Making Sense of the Differences: A Synthetic Approach

Before attempting to account for the differences between these two works, I wish to say a few words about methodology. In response to much skeptical New Testament scholarship, Eddy and Boyd note that there are in fact many scholars who argue strongly ‘that the burden of proof should remain on those who claim that any given portion of the Gospels is not reliable’.⁶⁴ I would advocate this somewhat sympathetic reading of any ancient document, and perhaps any document, for that matter. I am not advocating a naïve reading, but rather suggesting that we should not have a hyper-skeptical approach that prejudices us against our author a priori.⁶⁵ Rather, we should give texts the benefit of the doubt, taking into account their intended genre, unless we have been given specific reason to doubt their reliability. This is the approach I take to Josephus’s writings, attempting to read them *critically* but not *hyper-skeptically*.

In this regard, the work of Per Bilde has proven to be a refreshing shift in Josephan scholarship on the *Life*, reading it ‘as what it purports to be, namely, an autobiography’.⁶⁶ In other words, rather than detecting apologetic arguments against Justus of Tiberias behind the text throughout *Life*,⁶⁷ he allows those passages that directly address Justus to function apologetically as they were intended, while the rest of the text that purports to give autobiographical information is allowed to do so as well. Steve Mason helpfully nuances Bilde’s position by taking into account practices of ancient rhetoric, features of Greco-Roman biography, and ‘advice to the public figure’ as found in Plato, Aristotle and Xenophon among others, and finally, models for the military leader as seen in the *Commentarii* of Julius Caesar.⁶⁸ In light of rhetorical practice of the day, he cautions against ‘anticipating simple truth anywhere in his writing, and against simplistic assessments of his “lies”’. Like all ancient writers, Josephus was concerned not to tell the truth for the truth’s sake but to make a point—in this case, about his character.⁶⁹ We note, however, that a work can

64. Eddy and Boyd, *Jesus Legend*, p. 367.

65. See Eddy and Boyd, *Jesus Legend*, pp. 369-74.

66. Bilde, *Flavius Josephus*, p. 109.

67. Bilde, *Flavius Josephus*, p. 108.

68. Mason, ‘Introduction’, pp. xxxvi-xlvi.

69. Mason, ‘Introduction’, p. xxxviii.

be both autobiographical and apologetic (cf. Gal. 1), as apologetic is not a genre, but a motive. These two are technically not mutually exclusive categories.

I arranged the discrepancies between *Life* and *Jewish War* above thematically to make a point: The types of discrepancies we see in the two works vary greatly. Therefore, rather than construct an argument that tries to account for everything from spelling differences to the nature of Josephus's mission to Galilee on the basis of one overarching thesis, a multifaceted approach that takes into account various reasons for different types of discrepancies is in order.

The variation in proper names can be accounted for in a number of ways. For instance, in the discrepancy between Varus and Noarus noted above, Mason opines that Noarus may indicate his native name.⁷⁰ In the case of Ianneus and Eneas, when we consider that this is a Hebrew name that has been transliterated, such 'errors' do not really amount to much. This would be especially the case if in writing about Ianneus/Eneas in the *Life* he is using notes written in Hebrew or Aramaic as his source and is freshly transliterating the name into Greek.

The discrepancies between numbers could result from not consulting his sources and relying on his faulty memory, as first suggested by Jost in the nineteenth century.⁷¹ Numbers also could have been changed for rhetorical purposes, but this does not always make sense, as, for example, in the case noted above where we might expect the 2,000 troops surrounding Josephus's house in *Jewish War* to be inflated over the time between the two writings instead of deflated as it has been to 600 in *Life*. While rhetorical purposes may account for some of the discrepancies in numbers, it seems to me as often as not simply sloppiness on the part of Josephus, whether due to not having access to sources while writing *Life* or simply not consulting them.

The same goes for the differences in details noted above (e.g. whether Ptolemy or his wife was attacked). Rhetoric can account for some of these, but this explanation often obscures rather than clarifies. Why, for instance, would Josephus have four bodyguards try to convince him to commit suicide in *Jewish War* then later deflate the number of bodyguards to one for rhetorical purposes? We should at least be open to the possibility that in such cases he had inflated the

70. Mason, 'Introduction', p. 52 n. 291.

71. See Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, pp. 9-10.

number in *Jewish War* but was now writing for an audience that had first-hand knowledge of the event. This approach, however, goes against the general trend of presuming a friendly audience for *Antiquities* and *Life*.⁷²

Any attempt to account for the material unique to *Life* will be highly theoretical, as it is impossible to determine precisely why an author chooses to include certain things at one time and not at another, short of the author explicitly explaining their motivations. At the risk of claiming more than I am able to prove in this regard, I will simply state the obvious: the circumstances that called forth Josephus's writing of *The Jewish War* did not necessitate his mentioning Justus of Tiberias, Philip, or Gamala, whereas in *Life* he felt the need to include them. In the case of Justus, we can say that his criticism of and rivalry with Josephus was much more pertinent when *Life* was written, and that Josephus felt the need to respond to Justus's public criticisms, with which his audience was familiar.

With regard to chronology, although it is interesting to note the discrepancies between the two works, we can account for the differences by reading *Life* as a sub-type of ancient biography, which 'did not need to follow a chronological sequence', with most biographers feeling 'free to rearrange their material topically'.⁷³ I do find plausible the theory first proposed by Laqueur and modified by so many that Josephus had written a version of the *Life* prior to *Jewish War*, used it as a source and organized the material topically, then used both as sources for the revised *Life* later.⁷⁴ However, I think such a complicated theory is unnecessary to account for discrepancies in chronology.

Finally, the most difficult contradiction to account for is the aim of Josephus's Galilee mission. *Jewish War* clearly portrays Josephus as a 'general selected by an assembly to carry on the war against Rome', while *Life* 'claims that Josephus and two others were sent as emissaries of the Jerusalem aristocracy to maintain peace in Galilee'.⁷⁵ Even with a sympathetic reading of Josephus, giving the text the benefit of the doubt unless we have specific reason to suspect it, we are left with a

72. See Rodgers, 'Justice for Justus', p. 174.

73. Craig Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 82.

74. See above.

75. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, p. 8.

glaring contradiction, and indeed, a very specific reason to doubt the truthfulness of at least one account. I think our best solution here is to see rhetorical purposes at work and read each work against the political and social backgrounds in which it was written. Along with the current trend in Josephan scholarship, we can maintain 'that Josephus consistently concerned himself with the issues surrounding Jewish existence in the Roman Empire and the preservation of Jewish rights'.⁷⁶ Keeping this consistent aim in mind, circumstances when he wrote the *Jewish War* demanded (at least to his mind) that he portray himself as a general, while the audience of *Antiquities/Life* necessitated (again, at least to his own mind) that he be portrayed as a pacifist in this account.

Implications for the Study of the Synoptic Gospels

Craig Keener's study of Otho, mentioned at the beginning of this article, concludes by noting nearly fifty points of correspondence between Suetonius's biography of Otho and the works of Tacitus and Plutarch, illustrating that ancient biographers, at least in this case, 'sought to make their points on the basis of historical information available to them'.⁷⁷ I must be more reserved in my conclusion due to the complexity of the comparison I have made: Josephus is the author of both the history and the biography in this case, and the material I am testing in both cases is *autobiographical*. This limits the analogy to the Synoptic Gospels, along with the lack of a work of history comparable to *Jewish War* covering the life of Jesus. On the other hand, Josephus's two works under consideration do have a lot of material in common. The distinctive opportunity Josephus provides is to examine the range of divergence that even a single author could deem acceptable. Josephus might go farther than most, but does illustrate that a range of variation existed.⁷⁸ Whether he was seen by his original readers to have stayed within this range in his two works is impossible to say with certainty, but he does give us a concrete external point of comparison among the extant ancient biographies written so soon after the events they narrate.

76. Rodgers, 'Justice for Justus', p. 169.

77. Keener, 'Otho', p. 355.

78. Keener notes the value of studying the divergence in Josephus's two accounts in 'Otho', p. 335. I am very grateful to Dr Keener for his insights in personal correspondence about the value of studying these divergences in relation to the Gospels.

The differences noted above, therefore, do shed some light on our reading the Gospels as ancient biographies, as Josephus's *Life* is a subset of the same genre. Furthermore, many of the differences noted above have similar parallels in the Synoptic Gospels, such as discrepancies in numbers (how many angels were at the tomb?), names (e.g. variations in the lists of the apostles), details of stories, chronology and material unique to only one writer (e.g. the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke). When we consider the fact just noted that the same author writing about his own life in two separate works can have such discrepancies and even glaring contradictions, we can get a sense of the possible outer range of variation that might have been accepted in a work of biography and a work of history covering the same historical figure. Given the number of discrepancies noted above, whatever the reason behind them, we can see the Synoptic Gospels falling well within this broad range of variation. No contradiction occurs in the Synoptic Gospels, for instance, comparable to Josephus's contradictory claims about the aim of his mission to Galilee. With Josephus, therefore, though he may or may not represent the outer range of variation that would have been accepted, he certainly does offer us one concrete example among extant ancient biographies that illustrates such a range of variation within which the Synoptic Gospels would certainly fall. I do not believe, however, that we have completely determined these outer limits of ancient biography for the following reason: No extant writer that I was able to find prior to the nineteenth century was troubled by these contradictions. Eusebius, for instance, knew both works but says nothing about the disagreements between them. This suggests the need for further research in this area.⁷⁹

Conclusion

This article has explored the discrepancies between Josephus's *Life* and *Jewish War*, arguing that no one overarching theory will account for all the discrepancies. Rather, I have taken a synthetic approach, addressing the various types of differences topically. I have tried to give Josephus the benefit of the doubt rather than impose ill motives on him, and I

79. See McGing and Mossman (eds.), *Limits of Ancient Biography*, especially Tim Whitmarsh, "This in-between book": Language, Politics and Genre in the *Agricola*, pp. 255-334, and Simon Swain, 'Beyond the Limits of Greek Biography: Galen from Alexandria to the Arabs', pp. 395-433.

have attempted to reconcile differences where possible. We are still left in the end with some notable contradictions. Josephus's work therefore stands as an example of the range of variation that might have been accepted in the genre of ancient biography, though we cannot say for certain whether he would have been seen to exceed the limits of this range. When we compare the discrepancies in the Synoptic Gospels, we probably do not see as much variation, which is notable considering that the *Life* and *Jewish War* come from the same author about events to which he was eyewitness. Nevertheless, the need remains for further examination of the outer limits of the genre. This examination could perhaps focus on the reception of Josephus and why these discrepancies were ignored by his readers for so many centuries.