JOSEPHUS FLAVIUS OR JOSEPH BEN MATTITHIAH

In 1972 the Franz Delitzsch Institute of Judaica, as part of its annual series of lectures at the University of Münster, hosted Willem Cornelis van Unnik, the New Testament scholar, who delivered four lectures on the study of Josephus. These lectures have been finally published, just a few months after the author's death.¹

In his first lecture Professor van Unnik gives a brief assessment of the research done on Josephus, an assessment which is summed up in the title of this lecture, "Josephus, der Vernachlässigte", later qualified by "der Fluss geht weiter, aber sehr, sehr ruhig", by which he means that the same themes in Josephus are treated over and over again. Van Unnik contends, however, that Josephus still has much to yield to the researcher, and he offers some examples in which Josephus' statements take on new meaning when viewed in their hellenistic setting.

The second lecture is devoted to a discussion of the literary formula "neither adding nor omitting anything". This phrase (or a variation of it) is found several times in Josephus' works and presents an obvious problem in those instances where Josephus claims that he will merely transmit the Scriptures in Greek without adding to, or omitting from, what is written therein, when in fact he does change the Biblical account left and right.

By an examination of the contexts in which this phrase is used by Josephus and by contemporaneous hellenistic authors van Unnik shows that it is not merely a dead rhetorical device but a formula that was used by hellenistic writers for different purposes and with different meanings.² In regard to historiography (and to the apparent contra-


² That one of these meanings is dependent upon a translation which may not be certain does not bother van Unnik. In BJ 1.26 Josephus says that he will recount the story of the war and, inter alia, descriptions of Jerusalem, its Temple, the functions and clothes of the priests, and finally a description of the Holy of Holies. Then he says, οὐδὲν οὐτε ἀποκρυπτόμενος οὐτε προστιθέεις τοῖς περιφραγμένοις. Van Unnik, relying on the translation of Michel-Bauernfeind (τοῖς περιφραγμένοις = "von den Ergebnissen meiner Forschung"), says that the literary formula is deliberately different here—"nothing being concealed, nothing added"—since Josephus is not working with known information...
diction in Josephus) the formula means that the events or sources are transmitted truthfully; nothing was changed for the sake of adulation or enmity. This does not deny the possibility of the author's own editing, composition, and elucidation, as was the case with Josephus' treatment of the Bible.

In his third lecture van Unnik presents a most interesting thesis. From the account of Josephus' surrender to Vespasian we see the historian's attempt to present himself to his readers as a prophet. He could thus escape the charge of being a traitor—he had to surrender in order to foretell "the fate of the Jews and the destinies of the Roman sovereigns" to the Roman general, knowledge which God had revealed to Josephus (BJ 3.354). In this light van Unnik shows that Josephus, when talking of himself, will employ various termini technici used of prophets or prophecy or will describe his own periods of inspiration in the same terms he uses to describe those of the Old Testament prophets. We thus understand also the full detail given to Jeremiah (Daniel is the only other "prophet" treated in detail), who repeatedly foretold Jerusalem's capture by Babylon, pleaded against his contemporaries for Jerusalem's surrender, and was therefore branded a traitor. Josephus, in other words, saw in Jeremiah his own prototype.

The final discussion concerns the relationship of Josephus to New Testament studies. By a series of stimulating questions, thoughts for further research, and examples van Unnik makes the convincing point that Josephus can be a great help in the study of early Christianity. As insightful as this little book is, there is one major criticism I do have of the author's method of research. From reading van Unnik's lectures one would never know that Josephus Flavius was born Joseph ben Mattitiah. Josephus was born and bred in Judaea. He received an education there in the "ancestral tradition". His knowledge of "Jewish ("Vorgegebenes") from which he could remove some facts, but with his own as yet unpublished research which he could partially conceal. Thackeray, however, translates τοῖς περιφερεμένοις as "to facts which have been brought to light", referring to already known information (see his footnote, ibid.).

The distinction proposed by van Unnik is in any case unclear and unsubstantiated. Unclear—at what point does that which is susceptible to "concealment" become susceptible to "removal"? By "concealing" part of the results of his research the historian is "removing" this information from that which has happened. Unsubstantiated—he offers no proof at all that ἀποκρύπτω is used by hellenistic writers for unknown information, while ἀφαιρέω is used for that which is known. In fact, his citations from the authors other than Josephus seem to show just the opposite.
learning”, both in halakhic and in aggadic matters, is not only attested to by himself (Vita 8-9, 108; Ap. 1.54, cf. 2.47; AJ 20.263) but has been proven by scholarship. “[Josephus] ist also ein Kind des Rabbinismus; er hat in seiner Jugend die Sagen und Auslegungen der Rabbinen gehört, hat die Bibel mit den Erweiterungen, wie sie in Palästina gelehrt wurden, gekannt; diese rabbinischen Kenntnisse durchziehen seine Werke, und so erklären sich die verschiedenen Zeugen mündlicher Überlieferung bei Jos. Josephus ist Träger lebendiger rabbinisch-palästinensischer Tradition”.

No one will deny that Josephus was a hellenized Jew. No one will deny the validity of examining hellenistic pagan authors and hellenistic culture for insights into Josephus, as van Unnik does. But let us not forget that the term “hellenized” merely modifies the Jew that Josephus was. It sounds, therefore, ludicrous when van Unnik says, “Wer den Dichter will verstehen, muss in Dichters Lande gehen” (p. 15), and then expects to find the “Dichters Land” in hellenistic sources to the complete exclusion of Rabbinic sources. It is amazing that van Unnik, in discussing the neglect of study of the first eleven books of Antiquities, cites as notable exceptions three works which deal with hellenistic historiography (p. 22, nn. 19, 20), yet fails to mention Rappaport’s work quoted above or works dealing with halakhah in Josephus.

As I said before, in dealing with the formula “neither adding nor omitting anything” van Unnik cites only hellenistic authors. But wouldn’t it add something to the discussion to know that a Rabbinic source from Josephus’ land and time uses this formula in exactly the same way as Josephus? B. Shab. 116b says: אֲנָאָלָא לֶמֶּסֶת מַלְאָרִיָהָה דָמָּהָשׁ אֲוּרִיהָ התַּחַי. Moreover this particular lecture is really a spin-off from van Unnik’s much larger and more comprehensive article on the use of this formula in antiquity.

4 “De la règle Μὴτε προσθείναι μὴτε ἀφελεῖν dans l’histoire du canon”, Vigiliae Christianae, III (1949), 1-36. This article deals with Rev. 22:18-19, “If any man shall add unto these things . . . if any man shall take away . . .” as a parameter for the NT canon. Van Unnik was unaware of Eccles. Rabbah on 12:2: ייִוחַר וַחֲמָה בֵּין חוֹר מְתוּרָם שְכָלִיל הַפָּכִים בְּחַדְרוֹן ייִוחַר מְתוּר מֵאֵי מְתוּרָם שְכָלִיל הַפָּכִים בְּחַדְרוֹן ייִוחַר מְתוּר מֵאֵי מְתוּרָם שְכָלִיל (in a later period we find Maimonides describing the “canon” of the Talmud by the same formula; Commentary on the Mishnah, Introduction). In this article Van Unnik missed also Ben Sira 42:21 (p. 14); his quotation of J. Levy (pp. 21-22) is not Levy but Rashi on B. Erub. 13a; and his translation of Tos. Meg. 4:41 (p. 22) is incorrect; see S. Lieberman, Tosefta Kifshutah, ad loc.
But even here, where Rabbinic sources are examined, this source is omitted. And this is all the more surprising since the article deals with the New Testament canon, and this Aramaic statement purportedly was spoken by Jesus and is quoted verbatim from the Evangelion.

Again, wouldn’t it add something to the discussion of Josephus as a prophet to note that R. Johanan ben Zakkai also prophesied to Vespasian, after surrendering to him, that he would become emperor (B. Git. 56a-b).

Van Unnik’s sole regard to Rabbinic material in this book is a reference to Strack-Bilbeck for the statement that prophecy ended with Haggai, Malachai, and Zechariah (p. 47, n. 21), a statement which supposedly is in conflict with Josephus’ view of himself as a prophet. But halakhah—which represents reality in a way aggadah does not ⁶—supports Josephus when it determines the laws governing a false prophet (M. Sanh. 11:5-6; T. Sanh. 13:13-15). That these laws are not the result of theoretical exegesis but were formulated for practical purposes is attested to in turn by Josephus when he tells the story of Judas the Essene (AJ 13.311-312, BJ 1.75-80). This man, thinking that he had prophesied falsely, said that therefore “it would be well for him to die as one who had spoken falsely”. This shows that the Biblical penalty of death for a false prophet (Deut. 18:20-22) was still in force at this time (104 or 103 BCE), a fact reflected in the halakhah.

With this fact in hand we may now perhaps offer a more accurate translation of the parallel account in BJ 1.79: “Ah me! Now it is right that I die, since truth has died before me and one of my prophecies has been falsified”.⁶ (Thackeray: “Ah me! Now were I better dead ...”)

Continuing with the matter of false prophets, there is another parallel between Josephus and Rabbinic literature, this time aggadic (not noticed by Rappaport). In paraphrasing I Kings 22 (= II Chron. 18) Josephus recounts that after the prophets had foretold victory to Ahab, “Josaphat ... saw by their words that they were false proph-

⁵ That is to say, the words used in halakhah are the words of the real world; the words of aggadah (parable, parable, etc.) reflect the real world through interpretation. For the interpretation behind the various Rabbinic views on the cessation of prophecy, see E. E. Urbach, הַאֲדוֹנָה הַקָּפָל, Tarbiz, XVII (1946), 1-11.

⁶ Προποτις, νῦν ἐμὸς καλὸν ... καὶ θανάτῳ, ὥστε μοι προτέρῃν ... ἄλλης καὶ τόν ὅτ’ ἐμὸς προφήτην διέψευσκαί. With my translation I only mean to bring out the connotation of resignation to the inevitable rather than of wishful thinking, which connotation Thackeray’s translation conveys here, and properly in BJ 4.163 ἦν καλὸν γ’ ... ἦν ἐμὸ τεθνάναι πρὶν ἐπιθεῖν ... “Truly, well had it been for me to have died ere I had seen ...”.

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ets".7 In the aggadah the verse “But Jehoshaphat said: ‘Is there not here besides a prophet of the Lord? . . . ‘” is understood to mean that Jehoshaphat knew that the other prophets were false prophets. He knew so “by their words”, since no two prophets utter the same prophecy in exactly the same words as they did (I Kings 22:13, II Chron. 18:12: “The words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth”).8

Examples of Josephus being elucidated by contemporaneous Rabbinic material, and vice versa, can be multiplied many times over; I have dealt here only with the two topics discussed by van Unnik. Before concluding I should like to touch upon Josephus’ language itself. If it is true that Josephus’ education, upbringing, and years in Judaea can be discerned in the content of his work, they should have influenced also his language. Yet to date only a few Semitic phrases have been discovered.9 Here are three more: BJ 2.322, γιμνόνχες δὲ τὰ στέφνα τῶν ἐσθῆτων διεργαγμένων is related to the phrase κρῖνε τὸν ἄνθρωπον (already noted by Hadas on IV Macc. 16:24, ed. Dropsie University); AJ 6.149, ἀποθανεῖν μᾶλλον ἢ παραβαίνειν = ητερ ἄλλα ἡμᾶς παραβαίνοντα (already noted by Schalit on II Macc. 16:24, ed. Dropsie University); AJ 18.271, ἐπὶ τὰ πρόσωπα κείμενοι = καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ πρόσωπα κείμενοι

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7 AJ 8.402: συνελέ ἐκ τῶν λόγων Ἰσωσάφατος οτι ψευδοπροφήται τυγχάνουσιν ...
8 B. Sanh. 89a: διάρκει καὶ ἥνι οὐκ εἶδον ὑπερμάχοντα ...