

Westwood, U. 2023. *Moses among the Greek Lawgivers: Reading Josephus' Antiquities through Plutarch's Lives*. Leiden and Boston: Brill. Pp. 264. ISBN 978-90-04-68134-7. €116.00.

Flavius Josephus' account of the life, tribulations and achievements of Moses, which dominates Books 2-4 of his massive *Jewish Antiquities*, occupies an extremely important place in the overall project. To a substantial extent, Josephus is addressing his work to non-Jewish readers, and Moses seems to have been one of very few biblical figures whose name enjoyed wide recognition among non-Jews in the Roman world. Moreover, Moses was commonly known to have been the 'founder' of the Jewish πολιτεία, the framer of its famous and distinctive laws; given the perceived importance of political constitutions to ethical education in ancient thought, the way in which Josephus depicted this figure and the laws which bore his name could therefore have coloured the audience's impressions of Judaism as a whole. As has long been recognised, Josephus created a portrait of Moses strongly shaped by engagement with established Greek traditions about lawgivers, and, while this was hardly an innovation on Josephus' part, nonetheless his portrait of Moses is our most extensive and detailed nomothetic portrait of the founder of Jewish law.¹ Although numerous scholars have noted this element of Josephus' Moses, until now no sustained or extensive examination of Josephus' engagements with Greek lawgiver traditions has been attempted. This is the lacuna which Ursula Westwood's volume (an adaptation of her 2020 Oxford DPhil thesis) aims to fill.

Westwood's proposal is that Josephus' portrait of Moses can be illuminated by reading it in the light of Plutarch's *Lives* of lawgivers (attention is principally devoted to the *Lycurgus-Numa* and the *Solon*, with a passing glance at the *Romulus* for Josephus' account of Moses' assumption). This is clearly not a question of Plutarch's direct literary influence on Josephus (the *Lives* post-date the *Antiquities*), but rather of attempting to use Plutarch as a guide to potential audience expectations and broader tendencies in Greek thinking about lawgivers at the turn of the first-second centuries, in order to see how Josephus' Moses is responsive to such expectations and tendencies. Westwood is keen to avoid the trap (arguably fallen into by her most illustrious predecessor in this field, Louis Feldman) of taking Plutarch as reflective of a static and monolithic 'Greek view' of

¹ For an earlier nomothetic depiction of Moses by a Jewish author, see Philo, *De Vita Mosi* 2.12-24. Westwood's decision not to consider the possibility of a relationship between Philo's works and the *Antiquities* may strike some readers as strange.

nomothetes at this time, and care is taken throughout to stress that Plutarch was a creative and original author responding in his own way to a tradition which was, itself, multi-stranded and fluid.² Such a study promises to offer valuable insights into Josephus' engagements with Greek literary traditions, as well as into evolving thinking about ethnic origins, laws and lawgivers in the Flavian-Trajanic era.

The first chapter (1-36) establishes some essential preliminaries. After a brief survey of prior scholarship (2-9), important questions are addressed about Josephus' audience and aims, his relation to Greek literature, and Plutarch. Westwood's construction of Josephus' principal audience is, in general, plausible: Greek-speaking readers primarily located at Rome, with some level of interest in Judaism (or at least a willingness to give it a fair hearing). More innovative is her claim that Josephus' works can offer a window into the interests and preferences of an otherwise largely overlooked 'sub-elite' reading community outside of the senatorial class (though the equation of senatorial with elite status is problematic here). This potentially raises some issues with the appropriateness of the Plutarch comparison, however. As Westwood herself notes (31), Plutarch's audience was substantially different from Josephus': his primary readers were located in sleepy Chaeronea rather than in the imperial metropolis, while the dedications of the *Lives* indicate at least an aspiration for a readership which Westwood would recognise as genuinely 'elite', unlike Josephus' dedicatee, the freedman Epaphroditus. In a work which is, in general, so sensitive to the importance of thinking precisely about audience, it is strange to see the potential implications of this disconnect for the project not fully addressed. When discussing Josephus' aims, Westwood could be argued to devote too much attention to his prologue (ancient historiographical prologues were rhetorical constructions which did not always accurately reflect the content of the works themselves), which leads to occasional overstatement: for example, the claim that the *Antiquities*, unlike the later *Against Apion*, avoids outspoken critique of aspects of Greek culture (27) seems to ignore, for example, AJ 1.120-121. Nonetheless, the chapter makes some extremely valuable points, not least the salutary observation that, in Josephus scholarship, the word 'apologetic' is often used somewhat indiscriminately, with scholars failing to distinguish between justifying or defending Judaism to outsiders on the one hand and simply explaining it on the other. The second chapter (40-70) surveys the history of Greek and Roman accounts of lawgivers, taking in a range of authors including Plato, Cicero and Dionysius,

² For Feldman on Josephus' Moses, see Feldman, L.H. 1998. *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible*, 374-442. Berkeley and, even more relevant, Feldman, L.H. 2005, 'Parallel lives of two lawgivers: Josephus' Moses and Plutarch's *Lycurgus*', in J. Edmondson, S. Mason, and J. Rives (edd.), *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome*, 209-42. Oxford.

aiming to identify recurrent elements in such narratives, as well as to detect trends and changes over time in how such figures were presented (thus avoiding the pitfalls of the diachronic and, to some extent, artificial model of Szegedy-Maszkak).³ The chapter is engaging and clear, provides numerous valuable insights, and is frequently referenced throughout the work; perhaps particularly relevant for Westwood's broader project is her identification of the increasing tendency in Roman-period accounts to stress two elements of particular importance to Josephus' Moses, the personal virtues of the lawgiver and the (supposed) divine source of his laws.

With this context established, chapters 3-5, which form the core of the book, turn to Josephus' Moses. The short third chapter (71-99) examines Josephus' depiction of Moses in Books 1 and 2, before the giving of the law. It notes how Josephus, in the Book 1 preface, strongly contrasts Moses with other lawgivers by stressing that he began his laws with contemplation of God and creation, and also examines how Moses' decision to write about primordial history saw him uniquely assimilating the role of poet into the role of lawgiver, with his explicit exclusion of *μυθολογία* ensuring that he fulfils Plato's strictures on how lawgivers should approach the divine. Also productive, in this chapter, is Westwood's analysis of how Josephus depicts Moses' sojourn in Midian as political exile, an important element of several Greek lawgiver narratives, and how, perhaps surprisingly, he downplays Moses' reluctance to assume leadership of the people, contrasting this not only with Exodus but also with Plutarch's *Numa*. Chapter 4 (100-155) examines Josephus' accounts of the giving of the laws. Westwood notes an apparent contradiction: Moses is depicted as receiving and interpreting the laws rather than devising them, and yet throughout Josephus unhesitatingly calls him the 'lawgiver'. However, Westwood notes that the distinction is perhaps not as sharp as all that in the Greek tradition either: Plutarch explicitly asserts that both Lycurgus and Numa had a divine source for their laws, while also stressing their own active agency in framing them, as well as their use of claims of divine authorship to entrench their laws' authority. Westwood's overall assessment of Josephus' procedure, 'lifting up the lawgiver's agency while underlining his consistent divine support' (122), seems like a wholly apt reading. The chapter goes on briefly to consider Moses' status as a cultic founder in comparison with this aspect of Greek lawgivers. Some claimed parallels here, especially regarding Numa's establishment of the Vestal flame, felt a little strained to this reader. The final section considers the ambivalent place of writing in lawgiving, noting how Plutarch's Lycurgus left no written laws but authoritative customs to inculcate values and behaviour in citizens. On such a model, as Westwood

³ Szegedy-Maszkak, A. 1978, 'Legends of Greek lawgivers', *GRBS* 19:199-209.

notes, the need for written laws could even be taken as a failure adequately to imprint appropriate values on the people. Josephus accommodates such views by intertwining orality and textuality, emphasizing that regular public readings of the written laws engrave them on the hearts of the people. Thus written laws are not opposed to ethical formation, but are presented as a recurrent feature of lifelong processes of ethical ἄσκησις.

Chapter 5, the final substantive chapter, examines how Moses overcame opposition to his laws (an important feature of a number of Greek lawgiver narratives), as well as the steps which Moses took to ensure the persistence of his law code after death. To a (slightly) greater extent than Plutarch, Josephus emphasizes the role of rational persuasion in Moses' attempts to overcome opposition; however, when rational persuasion is insufficient (as in the case of the revolt of Korah), divine violence resolves the problem, both underlining Moses' close connection to the divinity and exempting him from the charge of tyrannically imposing his laws through force. Westwood's reading here arguably overstates Moses' gentleness in these narratives: although not the perpetrator of the violence which overwhelms Korah and his associates, Moses nonetheless requests it of the deity, in language which scarcely suggests gentleness of temperament (AJ 4.48-50). Westwood then considers Josephus' presentation of Moses' 'constitution', a selection of 48 biblical laws organized under thematic headings and summarized in Book 4 separately from the laws surveyed in Book 3, identifying in it three recurrent key themes: slavery and slavishness, generosity, and justice. The short sixth chapter (228-232) surveys the book's major conclusions and reflects on some potential implications. An index of passages and a general index complete the volume.

Westwood has produced a highly valuable contribution to scholarship on the *Jewish Antiquities*. The Plutarch comparisons are not essential to all of the many insights which the study contains, and I have, above, outlined one or two potential objections to this methodology, but nonetheless the work clearly demonstrates the value of bringing the works of Josephus (which remain unjustifiably marginalized in the field of Classical historiography) into close dialogue with imperial Greek literature. The book deserves a wide readership, and not only among Josephus scholars. Within that field, however, it will surely become essential reading for anyone working on Josephus' portrait of Moses, and it offers valuable perspectives on a much broader range of topics within the *Jewish Antiquities* besides.

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