

STRENGTH TO STRENGTH

ESSAYS IN APPRECIATION
OF SHAYE J. D. COHEN

Edited by
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The Two Gentlemen of Trachonitis

A History of Violence in Galilee and Rome (Josephus, Vita 112–113 and 149–154)

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Two powerful men, fleeing loyalist territory, ride into a rebel town, bringing arms and money. The local people are suspicious: these new arrivals belong to another ethno-religious group and should demonstrate their loyalty. The rebel general, however, dismisses these demands as coercion and insists that the refugees be treated as guests. Resentment grows. The local people now accuse the outsiders of witchcraft, claiming that they have harmed their efforts against the Empire. Again, the rebel leader stands against the crowd and mocks the idea that witchcraft can do real harm. His stand has little effect: the people attempt to lynch the refugees and the leader engineers their “escape,” back into the enemy lands whence they had fled.

Readers of Josephus’s *Vita* will recognize the story, the episode of the gentile refugees from Trachonitis, which the historian tells during his long account of his time as “governor” of Galilee in 66–67 CE. The narrative is not found in parallel sections of his *Bellum judaicum*, or any other historical source, and it seems to have no impact on the larger story of the revolt or even the machinations around personal leadership in Galilee that loom so large in the *Vita*. Perhaps consequently, it has attracted little direct comment or extended study from scholars.¹ Nevertheless,

Shaye Cohen generously supervised a “Special Topic” on Hellenistic and early Roman Judea when I was a graduate student in the Harvard Classics Department. At a key moment in my academic career, Shaye broadened my horizons. One of our areas of study was the *Vita* of Josephus: in notes from a meeting with him on 17 September 2009, I find that I wrote and underlined that the work was “a v. interesting window into the local issues”; this chapter is a belated investigation of one of those “local issues” and is offered in thanks for the initiation into Josephus and his world.

1. The exception is study of the demand that the refugees be circumcised, which has figured in studies of conversion to Judaism: see Shaye J. D. Cohen, “Respect for Judaism by Gentiles according to Josephus,” *HTR* 80 (1987): 409–30, here 421–23; Simon Claude Mimouni,

the episode represents well the challenge and value for historians of the Roman world-at-large of studying Josephus's account of his time in Galilee. In this particular case, Josephus provides us with a rare and relatively detailed account of an outburst of popular violence in which he personally participated and that has the potential to help us understand the dynamics of intracommunal violence in ancient communities.

The problem of violence in antiquity has attracted growing interest from ancient historians, in part due to contemporary experiences and the realization that forms of violence outside the conventional sphere of "war" were pervasive in ancient societies, despite the classical ideal of "order."² For students of the Roman Empire, this new historiography of ancient violence can also join with the well-established study of riots in the cities of the empire (though the latter scholarship has often approached the problem from the perspective of "order").³ One of the central challenges of studying violence, however, is that the term is extremely hard to define and may well be, as Brent Shaw has recently lamented, "radically undertheorized": some social theorists see violence almost everywhere in human society and as integral to all institutions, while others narrowly define it as illegitimate or illegal force.⁴ Fortunately, Shaw and Ari Bryen,

La circoncision dans le monde judéen aux époques grecque et romaine: Histoire d'un conflit interne au judaïsme, Collection de la Revue des études juives 42 (Paris: Peeters, 2007), 93–94.

2. See the representative essays in Jerzy Styka, ed., *Violence and Aggression in the Ancient World*, *Classica Cradoviensia* 10 (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2006); Martin Zimmermann, ed., *Extreme Formen von Gewalt in Bild und Text des Altertums*, *Münchener Studien zur Alten Welt* 5 (Munich: Herbert Utz, 2009); Werner Riess and Garrett G. Fagan, eds., *The Topography of Violence in the Greco-Roman World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016); Ioannis K. Xydopoulos, Kostas Vlassopoulos, and Eleni Tounta (eds.), *Violence and Community: Law, Space and Identity in the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean World* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2017). See also the works of Brent Shaw and Ari Bryen, cited below. The centrality of war to ancient societies has long been recognized, for instance in the important essay by M. I. Finley, *Ancient History: Evidence and Models* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 67–87.

3. On urban riots during the empire (Rome itself looms large in these studies, for evidentiary reasons), see Ramsay MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order: Treason, Unrest, and Alienation in the Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 163–91; Thomas W. Africa, "Urban Violence in Imperial Rome," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 2 (1971): 3–21; W. J. Slater, "Pantomime Riots," *CIAnt* 13 (1994): 120–44; Paul Erdkamp, "A Starving Mob Has No Respect': Urban Markets and Food Riots in the Roman World, 100 BC–400 AD," in *The Transformation of Economic Life under the Roman Empire: Proceedings of the Second Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire (Roman Empire, c. 200 B.C.–A.D. 476)*, Nottingham, July 4–7, 2001, ed. Lukas de Blois and John Rich (Amsterdam: Gieben, 2002), 93–115; Benjamin Kelly, "Riot Control and Imperial Ideology in the Roman Empire," *Phoenix* 61 (2007): 150–76.

4. Brent D. Shaw, *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 4. This is not the place for an extended discussion of the history of theories of violence: the influence of Hobbes's polemic view of society, Max Weber's identification of the state as a monopoly of legitimate violence, and the ambiguity of the German word *Gewalt* have cast long shadows. For introductions

in sophisticated studies of violence in the Roman Empire, have argued convincingly for an approach to understanding violence in our evidence for antiquity as inseparably composed of rough actions (punching, kicking, beating, stabbing, burning) and rhetorical claims (insults, threats, complaints, charges, memorializations).⁵ Following this lead has utility for the ancient historian: it means that representations of violence were not independent from the perpetration of harm, but rendered it legible to participants. In this way we can interpret violence as part of the wider tangle of social interactions between individuals and groups, rather than view it as an ineluctable breakdown of society.

The story of the refugees from Trachonitis in the *Vita* is well suited to analysis on these terms, since Josephus presents us with an extended cycle of violent words and actions in a particular local context. I turn to this narrative, therefore, to examine how Josephus relates this violent episode in one of his texts and to ask what was behind this instance of communal violence. In this case, I argue, the violence that appears at first sight to be a matter of “horizontal” local relationships in Galilee is a product of the “vertical” interactions between provincial actors and the Roman imperial center. This is not to claim that the fate of the refugees was Rome’s “fault” or simply a mechanical consequence of the revolt, but rather to explore how local interactions in the Roman world, even violent ones, could be shaped by imperial power.

This argument involves facing up to the problem, approached directly by Shaye Cohen’s *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, of how to read the *Vita*: how can we move from tendentious narrative to historical questions?⁶ As the work of Shaye and other Josephan scholars has emphasized, we must not

to modern thinking about violence for students of premodern societies, see Ari Z. Bryen, *Violence in Roman Egypt: A Study in Legal Interpretation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 65–73; Roderick Campbell, “Introduction: Toward a Deep History of Violence and Civilization,” in *Violence and Civilization: Studies of Social Violence in History and Prehistory*, ed. Roderick Campbell, Joukowski Institute Publication 4 (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2014), 1–22.

5. Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 4: “The violent deeds were living extensions of the rhetoric in which their values and causes were formed. The acts of physical harm and material damage served specific tactical ends that must be understood.... The interpretations and representations of violence fed on themselves and were seedbeds for novel and innovative acts of physical harm.” Bryen, *Violence in Roman Egypt*, 74: “Violence is not so much a thing to be defined as it is a label used in a process of defining the actions of another, and locating those actions (and sometimes also the motives and character) of others within a discourse of claim-making. In other words, using the label ‘violent’ to describe an action or a person is a way of declaring unacceptable something that another thought appropriate, natural, or necessary.” My reading of the books by Shaw and Bryen has particularly informed my approach in this essay.

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

ignore the literary or rhetorical qualities of the text; however, neither do we need to abandon historical questions about the world that the author represents.⁷ I start with the story as told by Josephus, before turning to the perspective of “the crowd” in Taricheae. In the conclusion, I consider the sources of this outbreak of local violence in the context of the Roman imperial system.

Josephus: Facing Down the Mob

It was Josephus who made the episode of the refugees into a violent story: decades later, as author of his autobiographical *Vita*, he chose to memorialize this story as an outbreak of xenophobic violence.⁸ Understanding the violence in Taricheae, therefore, means following the way that Josephus told the story and used the language of violence to cast the crowd as a mob and their demands as coercive and irrational.

Josephus tells the story of the refugees in two parts. In the first section (112–113), the author relates how two men of significance (μεγιστᾶνες) came to him from Trachonitis, an area under the control of Agrippa II, bringing arms, horses, and money.⁹ This was the start of the trouble:

The Judaeans were insisting that they [the refugees] be circumcised if they wished to live among them, but I did not allow them to be forced to do this [οὐκ εἶασα βιασθῆναι], saying that every man should worship God according to his own choice and not from violence [μὴ μετὰ βίας], and that it was necessary that those who had fled to us for safety should not come to regret it. The mass was persuaded, and I provided generously to the new arrivals for all their usual sustenance.¹⁰

7. Writing history from Josephus has been at the center of much methodological debate since *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*: see James S. McLaren, *Turbulent Times? Josephus and Scholarship on Judaea in the First Century CE*, JSPSup 29 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998); Steve Mason, “Contradiction or Counterpoint? Josephus and Historical Method,” *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 6 (2003): 145–88; Steve Mason, “What Is History? Using Josephus for the Judaeo-Roman War,” in *The Jewish Revolt against Rome: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Mladen Popović, JSJSup 154 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 155–240; Zuleika Rodgers, ed., *Making History: Josephus and Historical Method*, JSJSup 110 (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Daniel R. Schwartz, *Reading the First Century: On Reading Josephus and Studying Jewish History of the First Century*, WUNT 300 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).

8. Numerical references in the text without qualification refer to the *Vita*.

9. Josephus does not specify where the refugees found him, but the logic of the story and the location of his regular headquarters strongly support Taricheae (Magdala) as the location of the story. Steve Mason provides learned and full commentary (*Life of Josephus* [Boston: Brill, 2003], 75–76 and 86–87).

10. *Vita* 113: τούτους περιτέμνεσθαι τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἀναγκαζόντων, εἰ θέλουσιν εἶναι παρ’ αὐτοῖς, οὐκ εἶασα βιασθῆναι, φάσκων δεῖν ἕκαστον κατὰ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ προαίρεσιν τὸν θεὸν εὐσεβεῖν, ἀλλὰ μὴ μετὰ

The passage opens with a group that Josephus calls “Judeans” (Ἰουδαῖοι). Only here in the *Vita* does the writer refer to the ordinary people of Galilee in this way; elsewhere he uses the term Galileans (Γαλιλαῖοι) or the name of a particular community.¹¹ The effect is to suggest that the call for circumcision of the Trachonitans comes from a group whose Judean identity has become salient. In his response, Josephus makes clear that he sees this demand as violent, by twice employing forms of the morally loaded word βία (violence, force), and contrasting it with both the choice (προαίρεσις) belonging to all people in matters of worship and the safety (ἀσφάλεια) that the refugees had sought among the rebels.¹² The construction of the insistence on circumcision as violent is successful, according to its proponent: “the mass” is persuaded (πεισθέντος δὲ τοῦ πλήθους).

The author leaves off from this story to relate three other events: a successful military operation against the Romans, an attempt by John of Gischala to strip Galilean support from Josephus, and the notorious Dabaritta affair. In the latter story, Josephus was accused of misappropriating funds from a bandit raid and, under the threat of execution, was forced to appease the people of both Taricheae and Tiberias with promises to use the funds for the construction of fortifications. The placement of the story of the refugees allows the historian to comment ironically, as Steve Mason has argued, on his interactions with the people of Taricheae.¹³ In his speech in self-defense on the use of the Dabaritta funds (142), Josephus flatters the townspeople by remarking on their exceptional hospitality (τὴν γὰρ πόλιν ταύτην φιλοξενωτάτην οὖσαν ἐπιστάμενος). Mason suggests that the ironic juxtaposition of this compliment with the treatment of the noble refugees that falsifies it is intended to signal to readers that Josephus was willing to control the masses through flattery, as any good statesman might be expected to do.¹⁴ Even with such rhetorical maneuvers, the historian writes, he was able to avoid an attack by an armed gang on his lodgings only through a demonstrative act of discipline against the most aggressive member of the opposition.

At this moment in his narrative (149–154), Josephus claims that “certain men” (τινες) incite the people of Taricheae, now “a mob” (ὄχλος), to

βίας, χρῆναι δὲ τούτους δι’ ἀσφάλειαν πρὸς ἡμᾶς καταφυγόντας μὴ μετανοεῖν. πεισθέντος δὲ τοῦ πλήθους τοῖς ἤκουσιν ἀνδράσιν τὰ πρὸς τὴν συνήθη δίαιταν ἅπαντα παρείχον δαψιλῶς.

11. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee*, 206–7.

12. See W. E. Moore, “ΒΙΑΖΩ, ΑΠΙΑΖΩ and Cognates in Josephus,” *NTS* 21 (1975): 519–43, for the clear negative moral semantics of βία (and consistent link with physical violence) in Josephus; and Mason, *Life of Josephus*, 75–76, on the philosophical and rational connotations of the latter two terms.

13. Steve Mason, “Figured Speech and Irony in T. Flavius Josephus,” in *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome*, ed. Jonathan Edmondson, Steve Mason, and James Rives (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 243–88, here 279–80.

14. Mason, *Life of Josephus*, xlv, citing Plutarch, *Precepts of Statescraft* 818e–819b.

repeat the demand for circumcision as a condition of residence for the refugees. They also add a charge that the incomers were sorcerers and were helping the Romans, which the historian casts as irrational nonsense (φλύαρος).¹⁵ I will discuss below this accusation as a claim of violence, but it is significant that Josephus refutes that proposition directly in a second speech:

When I learned of these claims, I again taught the people that they should not persecute those who had fled to them; I mocked the nonsense of the accusation of witchcraft, pointing out that the Romans would not maintain so many soldiers, if they could defeat their enemies with sorcerers. When I had said this, they were persuaded for the moment, but, when they had withdrawn, they were whipped up again by wicked men against the notables. At a certain moment, they armed themselves and advanced upon the house of the refugees in Taricheae to kill them.¹⁶

Josephus presents this as an authoritative address—he “teaches the people” (τὸν δῆμον ἀνεδίδασκον), no longer a mob, apparently, but a *dēmos*, a less threatening collectivity—and makes a rhetorical contrast between the nonexistent sorcerers and actual, violent Roman soldiers. The attempt to de-escalate fails, real harm *is* now imminent, and Josephus scrambles to avert the killing, which he says would have been the completion of “a defilement” (μύσος). Finally, he reluctantly sends the two refugees back to royal lands, via the lake. They would be pardoned, but he has himself become the victim of the violence (βιασθείς). This, he writes, was the end of the story: καὶ τὰ μὲν περὶ ἐκείνους τοῦτ’ ἔσχε τὸ τέλος.

Josephus tells the story artfully: the division of the episode in the wider narrative of the *Vita* emphasizes the repetitive nature of the local hostility to the Trachonitans and works to increase the drama before the final outcome.¹⁷ Initially, each part follows a parallel structure: ill feeling toward the notable arrivals leads to open hostility from the local people before Josephus intervenes successfully with speech to dampen their aggression. In the conclusion of the second section, however, Josephus does not try to calm a third outbreak of hostility with rhetoric but concedes that the refugees must leave. Repetition also highlights difference: the second part

15. The transmitted text for the accusation of sorcery (149) is clear in sense, but it is hard to determine the exact phrase Josephus used: see Mason, *Life of Josephus*, 86 n.704.

16. *Vita* 150–151: πυθόμενος δὲ περὶ τούτων ἐγὼ πάλιν τὸν δῆμον ἀνεδίδασκον μὴ δεῖν διώκεσθαι τοὺς καταφυγόντας πρὸς αὐτούς· τὸν δὲ φλύαρον τῆς περὶ τῶν φαρμάκων αἰτίας διέσυρον, οὐκ ἂν τοσαύτας μυριάδας στρατιωτῶν Ῥωμαίους λέγων τρέφειν, εἰ διὰ φαρμακῶν (P: φαρμάκων) ἦν νικᾶν τοὺς πολεμίους. ταῦτα λέγοντος ἐμοῦ πρὸς ὀλίγον μὲν ἐπείθοντο, πάλιν δ’ ἀναχωρήσαντες ὑπὸ τῶν πονηρῶν ἐξηρεθίζοντο κατὰ τῶν μεγιστάνων, καὶ ποτε μεθ’ ὅπλων ἐπὶ τὴν οἰκίαν αὐτῶν τὴν ἐν Ταριχέαι ἀπήλθον ὡς ἀναιρήσοντες.

17. Mason points out the habit of Josephus to divide stories for the sake of suspense (*Life of Josephus*, xxiii).

of the story involves not just the crowd but the incitement of the mass by wicked leaders (*πονηροί*), which works as both explanation and a link to neighboring episodes.

In sum, the historian characterizes the crowd and its demands as violent and irrational. Rather than see this attitude as reflective of Josephus's actual sentiments, I suggest that we read this violent tale as strategic and as part of his elite social performance, at Rome and even decades after the event.¹⁸ As Shaye argued in his *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, the *Vita* is more than just a defensive reply to Justus of Tiberias, as it used to be read but also gives a broader account of the author's *ethos* in the context of Galilean politics of the mid-60s CE.¹⁹ This episode fits one of the key arenas for that account of self: the interaction between elites—Josephus and his rivals—and the masses in Galilean towns.

The elite class in the Roman Empire, a culturally integrated group of rulers of both the empire and its subject communities, had a strong moral vision of the expected behavior of the masses and the appropriate responses of members of their own class. From their perspective, the crowd in the imperial cities could be expected to be fickle and prone to spasms of violence, the stereotypical mob.²⁰ Indeed, Cicero and Horace portray Judeans as particularly prone to coercive uproar.²¹ On the other side, Benjamin Kelly has recently argued that the elite were expected to respond to the crowd with personal appeals and seek alternatives to the use of (Roman) force.²² The ideal was propagated in the famous first simile of the *Aeneid*, which compares the end of a storm at sea to the resolution of an urban riot by the mere appearance of a distinguished noble (*Aen.* 1.148–156). The story type was familiar in the eastern regions of the empire too: an anecdote from Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* (1.15) tells of an extreme case, when the hero, who had undertaken a vow of silence, managed to quell a crowd brandishing torches in Pamphylian Aspendos

18. Cohen suspects a Roman audience for the story (*Josephus in Galilee*, 147 n. 159).

19. *Ibid.*, 101–80. The work of Mason has broadened this reading of the *Vita* as a positive account of Josephus's *ethos* and emphasizes a Roman audience: see Mason, "Should Any Wish to Enquire Further (*Ant.* 1.25): The Aim and Audience of Josephus's *Judean Antiquities/ Life*," in *Understanding Josephus: Seven Perspectives*, ed. Steve Mason, *JSPSup* 32 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 64–103, here 103; *Life of Josephus*, xlvi–l. See also Jerome H. Neyrey, "Josephus' *Vita* and the Encomium: A Native Model of Personality," *JSJ* 25 (1994): 177–206.

20. Zvi Yavetz captures the moral view that underlies the stereotypical depiction of the urban crowd at Rome (*Plebs and Princeps* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969], 141–55).

21. Cicero, *Flac.* 66–67: *ob hoc crimen hic locus abs te, Laeli, atque illa turba [sc. the Judeans] quaesita est; scis quanta sit manus, quanta concordia, quantum valeat in contionibus ... multitudinem Iudaeorum flagrantem non numquam in contionibus pro re publica contemnere gravitatis summae fuit*; Horace, *Sat.* 1.4.142–143: *ac veluti te / Iudaei cogemus in hanc concedere turbam*.

22. Kelly, "Riot Control," 160–62. Cf. Wilfried Nippel, *Public Order in Ancient Rome*, Key Themes in Ancient History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 106, assuming that the ideal was a practical reality.

by significant gestures and a strongly worded letter.²³ Two well-known speeches by Josephus's near contemporary Dio Chrysostom, to the peoples of Prusa and Alexandria, can similarly be read as bravura performances of elite persuasion in the face of a riotous populace (*De tumultu* and *Ad Alexandrinos*). Kelly suggests that such stories reflect an actual elite ambivalence about using force to repress urban protest; more probably (and more cynically) the story type justified the social prominence of local elites, the fact that they did at times have to make political and economic concessions to restless urban populations, and state violence as a response of last resort to a truly intractable crowd.

Although conditions in Galilee during the revolt were irregular—probably strikingly so to Roman readers—the crowd at Taricheae and Josephus played their roles perfectly: an unreasonable mob and a persuasive elite.²⁴ Even modern readers have assented to the narrative: Per Bilde, for instance, suggests that the crowd at Taricheae was made up of “religious fanatics.”²⁵ The arguments that Josephus claims to have used in the moment play to his readership too. His refusal to accept the circumcision of the refugees is defended with philosophical ideals of freedom of choice and a hint of the widespread philosophical notion that one divine principle lurks behind all systems of worship.²⁶ His rationalizing mockery of witchcraft and appeal to Roman military logistics likewise speak to the values of an imperial readership.²⁷ Finally, the violence of the crowd may also have been an explanation for the specific outcome of this incident: Josephus's choice to extradite the refugees back to Roman territory rather than allow the (polluting) violation of Mediterranean norms of hospitality.

The violence in Taricheae, therefore, was extremely useful to the historian writing in Domitianic Rome. Rather than constituting a threat to his social performance, the violence was an integral part of Josephus's rhetorical display, because it permitted him to match the imperial expectation of local elites as keepers of order in the face of the irrational mob. Recent

23. See also Lucian, *Demon*. 64 for a similar story, set in Athens.

24. A. M. Eckstein argues that the narrative of the rational statesman restraining an irrational people is a distinctively Polybian theme in Josephus (“Josephus and Polybius: A Reconsideration,” *ClAnt* 9 [1990]: 175–208, here 195–98); my argument here is that it is better understood as an adoption of Roman imperial discourse.

25. Per Bilde, *Flavius Josephus, between Jerusalem and Rome: His Life, His Works and Their Importance*, JSPSup 2 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988), 44.

26. Peter Van Nuffelen has studied imperial philosophical (harmonizing) theories of traditional cults (*Rethinking the Gods: Philosophical Readings of Religion in the Post-Hellenistic Period*, Greek Culture in the Roman World [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011]). Cohen argues that the negative view of conversion here (found also in the *Antiquitates*) is part of an apology for Judaism in a Roman context (“Respect for Judaism,” 428).

27. The Josephan interest in Roman military organization is well known (esp. *B.J.* 3.70–109) and is a “Polybian” touch (Shaye J. D. Cohen, “Josephus, Jeremiah, and Polybius,” *History and Theory* 21 [1982]: 366–81, here 368).

studies have convincingly argued for Josephus's actual social marginality in Rome, but this episode fits with his concern, particularly visible in the *Vita*, to present a provincial elite "face" to his readers.²⁸

The People: Fear and Loathing in Taricheae

We could leave the story there, with Josephus's retrospective account of violence in Galilee, but I contend we should also try to reconstruct the story on a different plan from the *Vita*, to understand the position of "the crowd" and their final turn to riot. I have already emphasized the extent to which that account is shaped by its author, but I see no reason to suspect that he was making up the basic claims of the people or the eventual denouement of the episode. If this is correct, we are able to take them at their word and to use contextual and comparative evidence to find a different pattern of violence at Taricheae from the one that Josephus presents.²⁹

First, we should look briefly at the wider context of the episode in the late first-century southern Levant. By late 66 CE, Taricheae was a city at war, a participant community in the Great Revolt against Rome. The revolt had commenced earlier in the year in Jerusalem, with local conflict there and in Caesarea and an ensuing destructive march on Judea led by Cestius Gallus.³⁰ At this moment, Josephus claims, significant communal violence burst out in the hellenized cities and towns of southern Syria between Judeans and their Syrian neighbors (*B.J.* 2.457–265 and 559–561; *Vita* 25–27). He mentions clashes at Philadelphia, Heshbon, Gerasa, Pella, Scythopolis, Gadara, Hippos, Kedasa, Ptolemais, Gaba, Sebaste, Ascalon, Anthedon, Gaza, and Damascus. Over the previous decades, these urban

28. On the social position of Josephus at Rome, see Hannah Cotton and Werner Eck, "Josephus' Roman Audience: Josephus and the Roman Elites," in Edmondson, Mason, and Rives, *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome*, 37–52; Jonathan J. Price, "The Provincial Historian in Rome," in *Josephus and Jewish History in Flavian Rome and Beyond*, ed. Joseph Sievers and Gaia Lembi, JSJSup 104 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 101–18. For a reminder, though, both that ancient publication was a local affair and that Josephus assumed an elite audience, see Steve Mason, "Of Audience and Meaning: Reading Josephus' *Bellum Judaicum* in the Context of a Flavian Audience," in *Josephus and Jewish History in Flavian Rome and Beyond*, 71–100.

29. A methodological point: since the following analysis consciously goes beyond the text, we are not able to "prove" it in the typical manner of significant quotation from ancient sources. Instead, this is an argument from contextual and comparative probability. In order to limit this argument, however, I assume that the reported demands of the crowd, even if not the manner in which they put them, are real and sincere; it might be possible make an argument that this whole dispute was, for example, "in the final analysis" about peasant resentment of the rich, but there could be no kind of check on this argument.

30. See now Steve Mason, *A History of the Jewish War, AD 66–74* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 281–334, on the first phase of the uprising.

communities seem to have come to encompass side-by-side citizen bodies, ethnic Syrians, Arabs, and Itureans living in political communities understood in Greek terms (as *poleis*) and Judeans living according to their own ancestral norms.³¹ It is impossible to know how harmonious or contentious these arrangements had been, but the outbreak of the revolt and the arrival of large Roman military formations generated murderous riots between the two groups in cities across the region.³² In the lachrymose account of Josephus, the Judeans suffered more harm than they inflicted, though we should note that in the *Vita* he was intent on using these events to portray the “necessity” (*ἀνάγκη*) of the revolt (27).

None of the cities mentioned in the previous paragraph were in Galilee.³³ The region was not, however, free from violence: part of Cestius Gallus’s strategy for containing the incipient uprising was a *razzia* into the lower Galilee under the command of Caesennius Gallus, which Josephus claims led to the deaths of two thousand rebels (*B.J.* 2.510–512). In the years before the revolt, Galilean society itself had been divided: outside of two larger settlements, at Sepphoris and Tiberias, there is good evidence that the population was polarized between people living according to the particular cultural patterns of Judea and those who had adopted the practices of the wider Hellenistic cultural koine. Recent archaeological analysis by Andrea Berlin has emphasized that the two groups were distinguished even in terms of quotidian material culture.³⁴ Communities like the town

31. Nathanael Andrade captures well the double nature of these urban communities in the first century (“Ambiguity, Violence, and Community in the Cities of Judaea and Syria,” *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 59 [2010]: 342–70).

32. See Martin Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judaea: The Origins of the Jewish Revolt against Rome, A.D. 66–70* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 18, arguing that this violence was “the consequence not the cause of the revolt”; *pace* Uriel Rappaport, “Jewish–Pagan Relations and the Revolt against Rome in 66–70 C.E.,” *Jerusalem Cathedra* 1 (1981): 81–95. Only in Caesarea in early 66 CE did the violence seem to anticipate conflict between the imperial state and Judeans. Note also, for the sake of comparison, the connection of war and (what he calls) massacre in Jacques Sémelin, *Purify and Destroy: The Political Uses of Massacre and Genocide*, Comparative Politics and International Studies (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 131–47.

33. The history of Galilee before and during the revolt has been the subject of extensive study (in part because the question overlaps with the quest for the historical Jesus): see, with varied positions on the Judean identity of the region, Seán Freyne, *Galilee, from Alexander the Great to Hadrian, 323 B.C.E. to 135 C.E.: A Study of Second Temple Judaism*, University of Notre Dame Center for the Study of Judaism and Christianity in Antiquity 5 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980); Freyne, “The Revolt from Regional Perspective,” in *The First Jewish Revolt: Archaeology, History and Ideology*, ed. Andrea M. Berlin and J. Andrew Overman (London: Routledge, 2002), 43–56; Richard A. Horsley, *Galilee: History, Politics, People* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995); Mark A. Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee: The Population of Galilee and New Testament Studies*, SNTSMS 118 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

34. Andrea M. Berlin, “Romanization and Anti-Romanization in Pre-Revolt Galilee,”

of Taricheae (Magdala) avoided imported pottery from the Mediterranean coast and adopted the use of lamps manufactured in Jerusalem. Whether we choose to think about this population as primarily an ethnic or religious group, they were living according to the ancestral norms of the inhabitants of Judea and were sentimentally attached to the cult practiced in Jerusalem. In Taricheae itself, this attachment was apparently materialized: a recent excavation of a remarkable pre-70 CE synagogue in the settlement revealed a large stone block that was carved with a menorah, a symbol of the temple cult.³⁵ In the opening phase of the revolt, in 66–67, the town seems to have served as the headquarters for Josephus, who had been sent to Galilee from Jerusalem. The nature of his mission has been highly controversial, but he was accepted in Taricheae as a man of authority.³⁶ In the *Bellum judaicum* Josephus portrays the natives of Taricheae as opposed to the revolt and friendly to Agrippa, though this is hard to reconcile with their actual behavior (3.492); he also reveals that the town had filled with Judean refugees by the time of the arrival of the Flavians (*B.J.* 3.463, 542). The actual composition of “the crowd” in our story, therefore, could have been a mix of locals and other refugees; as mentioned above, the term *Judean* used by Josephus seems to indicate that it was this common identity rather than place of origin that was significant in the moment.

The gentile refugees at the center of the story in the *Vita* were from Trachonitis, an area of basalt uplands (the modern Leja in Syria) to the northeast of Galilee and south of Damascus. Josephus is otherwise laconic about the identity of these two men, though this place of origin can tell us something about who they were. In the 60s CE, Agrippa II was the nominal ruler of this territory, which was settled by a people that our sources call “Itureans.” The area was notorious for banditry, which both Josephus (*A.J.* 15.344; 16.274) and Strabo (*Geogr.* 16.2.20) regard as the characteristic way of life in the region.³⁷ In a wide-ranging study of “banditry” in

in Berlin and Overman, *First Jewish Revolt*, 57–73; Berlin, “Jewish Life before the Revolt: The Archaeological Evidence,” *JSJ* 36 (2005): 417–70; Berlin, “Identity Politics in Early Roman Galilee,” in Popović, *Jewish Revolt against Rome*, 69–106. See, though, the caution in Mark A. Chancey, “Archaeology, Ethnicity, and First-Century C.E. Galilee: The Limits of the Evidence,” in *The Wandering Galilean: Essays in Honour of Seán Freyne*, ed. Zuleika Rodgers, *JSJ-Sup* 132 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 205–18.

35. Mordechai Aviam, “The Decorated Stone from the Synagogue at Migdal: A Holistic Interpretation and a Glimpse into the Life of Galilean Jews at the Time of Jesus,” *NovT* 55 (2013): 205–20; Richard Bauckham and Stefano De Luca place the stone in the context of the current state of archaeological work in Taricheae/Magdala (“Magdala as We Now Know It,” *Early Christianity* 6 [2015]: 91–118).

36. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee*, 209. For the controversy regarding Josephus’s mission, see the opinionated summary by Bilde, *Flavius Josephus*, 43–46.

37. See also *OGIS* 424, a decree of a “King Agrippa” from Seeia, a sanctuary in Trachonitis, which asserts that people in the area live like wild beasts (θηριώδης κατάστασις) and are accustomed to “hide in holes” (ἐνφωλεύσ[αντες]), almost certainly anti-“bandit” polemic.

Syria, Shaw has persuasively argued that this label was applied to the pre-political mode of economy and governance (mafioso-like “big men”) that was common in the mountainous borderlands of the late Hellenistic and Roman Near East.³⁸ Bandits of this kind could be persuaded to cooperate with more complex forms of polity, often as providers of military manpower, but were liable to exercise independent agency. The status term that Josephus applies to the two refugees, *μεγιστᾶνες*, may support the idea that they were men of this sort: elsewhere he uses the term for powerful feudal lords in the courts of Achaemenid Persia, Adiabene, and Parthia. Given the ecology of their origin and their decision to defect from the king, the likelihood is that the refugees were such “bandits” from Trachonitis; it is perhaps little wonder that they came to Josephus with weapons, horses, and money (112: *ἐπαγόμενοι τοὺς ἑαυτῶν ἵππους καὶ ὄπλα, χρήματα δ' ὑποκομίζοντες*). As we have seen, they were coming into a tense situation, in a region that was already polarized and now shaken by the start of a conflict.

As we read it in the *Vita*, the population's first response to these new arrivals was to make circumcision a condition of their sojourn. We have seen how Josephus casts this demand as coercive and religious (about how to worship god), but we should be open to the possibility that it may not have been understood that way by those people who were making it. In the previous months and across the region, a wave of communal violence had crashed over the mixed communities of the southern Levant. By contrast, the people of Taricheae offered a different possibility: since the Trachonitans had made the choice to join their revolt, they proposed an entrance into their Judean political community.³⁹ Circumcision was *the* way to cross over to becoming a Judean in the Second Temple period; as Josephus himself puts it in the second part of his story, the expectation of the crowd was for the refugees to adopt their customs (149: *μεταβῆναι ... εἰς τὰ παρ' αὐτοῖς ἔθνη*).⁴⁰ There was precedent for understanding such a crossing in political terms: when the Hasmonean Aristobulus had made

38. Brent D. Shaw, “Lords of the Levant: The Borderlands of Syria and Phoenicia in the First Century,” *Scripta Classica Israelica* 33 (2014): 225–42, esp. 234–36 on Zenodorus, an Augustan-period big man in Trachonitis, building on his “Bandits in the Roman Empire,” *Past & Present* 105 (1984): 3–52, and “Josephus: Roman Power and Responses to It,” *Athenaeum* 83 (1994): 357–90.

39. For the revolt as an attempted revolutionary foundation of a new community, see now James S. McLaren and Martin Goodman, “The Importance of Perspective: The Jewish–Roman Conflict of 66–70 CE as a Revolution,” in *Revolt and Resistance in the Ancient Classical World and the Near East: In the Crucible of Empire*, ed. John J. Collins and J. G. Manning, CHANE 85 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 205–18.

40. On circumcision and becoming a Judean or Jew in the Second Temple period, see John J. Collins, “A Symbol of Otherness: Circumcision and Salvation in the First Century,” in *Seers, Sybils and Sages in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism*, JSJSup 54 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 211–35; Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties*, HCS 31

conquests in Iturean lands, the population had adopted the customs of the Judean conquerors, including circumcision, as a symbol of their bond with the polity.⁴¹ It is clear, however, that the incomers were reluctant to become Judean on these terms.

The next phase of the dispute was much less pacific; the refusal of the refugees to become Judean seems to have stoked distrust and fear in the crowd. Now the locals claimed that *they* were the victims of violence, with a new charge that the Trachonitans were sorcerers and using unseen magic to hinder the war effort against the Romans (149). We should not forget that the origin and status of the Trachonitans may have encouraged a perception that they had previously been bandit leaders and dangerous men. It is easy to agree with Josephus that the idea that they were sorcerers must have been nonsense, but much evidence points to the intensity of the fear of witchcraft in the Roman Mediterranean.⁴² Shaw has compared the attitude of the crowd in Taricheae with the story in the Synoptic Gospels of Jesus's exorcism of the demon called Legion as both constituting magical explanations of Roman military power.⁴³ Comparative evidence from further afield may also provide a parallel for the link between militarized violence and an accusation of witchcraft: the Americanist Mary Beth Norton has suggested that the famous witch-hunt that started in Salem Village in 1692 was grounded in settler anxieties regarding contemporary wars with the native populations of New England. Notably, accusers there claimed that the minister George Borroughs, the alleged ringleader of the witches, had bewitched the soldiers who had failed to protect Maine settlers from Wabanaki raids in the preceding decade.⁴⁴ In this light, the accusation that the refugees were sorcerers signified a perception that they had, in cooperation with the Romans, harmed the community.

Josephus makes it seem that he was able to cast doubt on this accusation, at least for a short while, but even he admits that this persuasion was short-lived. He writes that the crowd was incited again by "wicked men," but his choice, years later in a work that is often dedicated to the settling

(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 123–25; Mimouni, *La circoncision dans le monde judéen aux époques grecque et romaine*.

41. Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, 109–39. In *A.J.* 13.318, Josephus casts this as coercive (he uses the same verb as for the crowd in Taricheae—*ἀναγκάζω*), but as Cohen points out, an alternative version found in the Greek historical tradition implies voluntary acculturation (*Beginnings of Jewishness*, 112–13, 136–37).

42. For this fear, see the illuminating study by R. Gordon, "Imagining Greek and Roman Magic," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 159–275. In Taricheae, the accusation could also have been supported by an appeal to biblical law, which forbids the presence of (foreign) sorcerers among the people (Deut 18:10).

43. Shaw, "Josephus," 365. Cf. Mark 5:1–20, Matt 8:28–34, and Luke 8:28–39.

44. Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 120–32.

of scores, not to name names suggests either that he only supposed such agents or that he was making excuses. In addition, the authority of Josephus may well have been shaken by the Dabaritta affair. At any rate, the crowd's perception of violence on the other side provoked them to action; they seized arms and marched on the residence of the refugees. In doing so, they were not persecuting innocent men but responding to violence with violence. It is possible that even here we are faced with something closer to a threat than actual attempted murder: Josephus still has time to dig a canal (διώρυγα) for their escape.

This is a different story of violence from the one told directly by Josephus in the *Vita*. Violence was located not in an unreasonable and murderous crowd but in the harm perpetrated against the Judeans by the Romans and by the gentile inhabitants of southern Syria. In response to such violence, the crowd had responded first with an attempt to integrate the outsiders into their distinct Judean community and then, when the Trachonitans had been linked with the losses suffered at the hands of the Romans, with a final resort to self-defense.

Galilean Violence as Roman Imperial Violence

The riot at Taricheae was a contingent and local event. The violence there was the result of a unique chain of decisions by Josephus, the Trachonitan nobles, and the people of Taricheae. It is only legible to us because of the choices made by Josephus as author and various communities of copyists to preserve the story in the *Vita*. But these accidents of chance should not prevent us from asking about the social forces that fomented the intracomunal violence. Each of the two stories of the incident that I have (re)told in this chapter offers a different answer to this question: Josephus blames the attachment to identity and xenophobia of the crowd; the people of Taricheae, if we take their enunciated claims seriously, blame the men from Trachonitis and, beyond them, the Romans.

The impression given by Josephus is that the violence arose from an irrational mobilization of Judean identity. In this, he anticipates (for different reasons) a significant current of modern liberal and secular discourse that casts groups with strong ethnic and religious identities as susceptible to violence.⁴⁵ There is also an old school of thought, dating back at least to Hume and more recently associated with Jan Assmann, that sees monotheism as inherently intolerant.⁴⁶ Anthropological and historical studies

45. For a recent representative of this view, see Vasily Rudich, *Religious Dissent in the Roman Empire: Violence in Judaea at the Time of Nero*, Routledge Monographs in Classical Studies (New York: Routledge, 2015), 322–23 (on the violence of “irrational” religious dissent).

46. David Hume argued for monotheistic intolerance in his *Natural History of Religion*

of ethnic and “sacred” violence, however, have raised significant doubts about the necessity of such connections.⁴⁷ As was the case in Galilee before the revolt, mixed populations can coexist in single urban or regional spaces for long periods even when group boundaries are firmly drawn; it almost always takes more than simple difference to provoke groups to rampage.

Instead, I propose that we consider the answer of the crowd and understand the violence in Taricheae as a response to Roman power. We will, of course, have to leave behind their idea that the Romans and Trachonitans relied on witchcraft but look instead for a more realistic mechanism. Much work since the 1970s on the political structure of the early and high Roman Empire has converged on a model that is dominated by the limited capacity of the state.⁴⁸ The basic constraints and technological conditions of a premodern agrarian economy left the central government with relatively weak ability to impinge on social life. Instead, the Roman imperial régime was reliant on local elites, who were bound to the center largely by discursive means: a bundle of shared values, common narratives and language for the mutual recognition of status.⁴⁹ This rather pacific scholarly image of the empire, however, must be tempered by the fact that the Roman state maintained an army of significant size (as Josephus pointed out to the crowd at Taricheae) and did use this military power against internal populations, at least intermittently.⁵⁰ The response to the Great Revolt is a famous example of the application of state violence, but imperial history contains many others, often on a much smaller scale.⁵¹

It is these two modes of imperial rule—the poetics and the pragmatics of empire—that each produce the violence that we have encountered in

(1757); for his modern successor, see Jan Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

47. For criticism of the analytical concept of “identity,” see Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity,’” *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 1–47. On the insufficiency of ethnic or religious identity as an explanation of intracommunal violence in particular historical cases, see David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 18–124; Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 771 and passim.

48. The model is presented accessibly in Peter Garnsey and Richard P. Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture*, 2nd ed. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015). See also Fergus Millar, “The World of the Golden Ass,” *JRS* 71 (1981): 63–75, for a brilliant illustration of the model from a single source.

49. Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire*, *Classics and Contemporary Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Carlos F. Noreña, *Imperial Ideals in the Roman West: Representation, Circulation, Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

50. See, recently, Christopher J. Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire: Soldiers, Administration, and Public Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Gil Gambash, *Rome and Provincial Resistance* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

51. Thomas Pekáry gives a list of known disturbances (“*Seditio*: Unruhen und Revolten im römischen Reich von Augustus bis Commodus,” *Ancient Society* 18 [1987]: 133–50).

Taricheae. On the one hand, the shared discourse by which metropolitan and local elites, including Josephus, coordinated the governance of even small communities was behind the production of the story of violence in the *Vita*. As we have seen, the story corresponds to the imperial plot of good elite facing down irrational mob; by writing it into his autobiography the historian was engaged in a project of self-fashioning. The logic of this story type, particularly its production of images of unruly populations, also justified the application of the other form of Roman governmental power: military force. Thus, on the other hand, the march of Cestius Gallus with the Twelfth Legion to southern Syria, the raid by Caesonius Gallus into the lower Galilee, and the fighting that followed seem to have been a key factor in the physical violence in Taricheae. The fear that was engendered by these destructive military maneuvers led to the salience of group identity, indicated also by the riots in southern Syrian cities in 66 CE, to the sense of victimhood and, finally, to the violence that manifested at Taricheae.⁵² In this sense, the crowd was right: the violence at Taricheae was Roman imperial violence.

52. Cf. Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 796–801, 805–6, for the application of state violence as provocative of waves of sectarian violence in both the Africa of Augustine and Northern Ireland in the wake of Bloody Sunday (30 January 1972).