

RAHAB AND ESTHER IN JOSEPHUS – AN INTERTEXTUAL APPROACH

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Abstract

This study compares the Josephan version of the stories of Rahab and Esther to the respective biblical versions, applying an intertextual approach and demonstrating the advantages that such a method has against a one-dimensional comparison of a Josephan paraphrase with its biblical 'source text'.

1. Introduction

In a recent article published in *Liber Annuus*, Christopher Begg made a detailed comparison between the biblical and Josephan versions of the Rahab story (Joshua 2:1–24 MT and *LXX*; Jos. *AJ* V.1.2–15). Begg's conclusions (2005:126–130) may be summarised as follows: (i) Josephus seems to have utilised both the Masoretic text and the Septuagint version of Joshua 2, since instances of positive agreement with both these versions occur in the Josephan account; (ii) re-arrangements of diverse elements of the story constitute the most conspicuous way in which Josephus rewrote the biblical account; and (iii) the Josephan version has several communalities with other elaborations of the Rahab story in ancient Jewish and Christian tradition.

Begg's approach does, however, call forth some questions regarding methodology and regarding the validity of conclusions drawn from such a comparison. These questions may be formulated as follows:

- (a) Is Josephus' *modus operandi* in "rewriting" the biblical story of Rahab representative of the way he usually/habitually deals with biblical narratives?
- (b) What motives may legitimately be attributed to Josephus for the changes he typically makes in paraphrasing – or "rewriting" – biblical narratives?
- (c) Which criteria should be used for evaluating the scholarly methods applied to the investigation of Josephus' literary practice?

If these questions are ignored during the course of an examination of Josephus' Rahab story – or, for that matter, of any Josephan narrative – the conclusions reached may be subjective, speculative, and ultimately invalid.

This study works with the assumption that a multi-dimensional approach will yield more valid interpretations of diverse aspects of Josephus' literary practice than the one-dimensional, bilateral comparison found in studies like that of Begg (2005:113–130) or Feldman (1970 – see below). Its aim is to give a practical illustration of the worth of a more nuanced intertextual approach. The study will focus on the Josephan “insertions”, “added elements”, “expansions”, “elaborations” and “expatiations” which Begg identified by comparison with the biblical versions of the Rahab story. It will attempt to interpret these distinctly Josephan elements of the story – not in terms of their intertextual relations with other authors (either ancient Jewish or early Christian), but by comparison with narrative elements characteristic of Josephus' own version of another biblical story, that of Esther.

Essentially Begg (2005:113–130) follows the same method of analysis with regard to Josephus' Rahab story as Louis Feldman did 35 years earlier with regard to his Esther story (Feldman 1970:143–170). Feldman's conclusions also seem rather speculative; he seems prone to subjective interpretations of Josephan “alterations” to the presumed source text. This study, therefore, will attempt to suggest, and to defend by practical illustration, an alternative approach toward the interpretation of Josephan narratives.

The intended approach may readily be described as ‘intertextual’. Robert W. Wall (2001:217–232) defines two types of intertextuality: that consisting of allusions and echoes between two discrete biblical writings and linking these texts together “as participants in a reflexive, mutually informing conversation” (2001:218); and another type that exists within the same textual field – “the full meaning of a theme unfolds within the entire composition, when the repetition of key words or phrases, used at different points of the author's argument, articulate different aspects of the whole theme” (2001:218). The particular type of intertextuality with which this study is concerned would constitute a third category, which may be seen as combining aspects of both types identified by Wall. The “reflexive, mutually informing conversation” – to employ Wall's terminology – between Josephus' versions of the Rahab story and the Esther story, on the one hand, and between Josephus' version (as the “newly composed text”) and the *LXX* version (as the “earlier text”) of both these stories, on the other, will be closely followed and recorded.

2. Esther in the *LXX* and in Josephus

Louis Feldman (1970:143–170) compared Josephus’ version of the Esther story to the biblical book of Esther. He asserts that Josephus “has made a number of changes which would render his work more attractive to his Greek readers and which would defend the Jewish people against anti-Semitic propaganda” (1970:143). Though it does seem inherently probable that the changes which Feldman identifies in Josephus’ “retelling” of the Esther story could have produced such results, his insistence on the “deliberate nature of these changes” (1970:144) and “that he attempted to remold the Biblical text into a specific pattern” (1970:144 n.1) seems subjective and speculative.

In the following analysis of Josephus’ version of the Esther story, relevant elements of his narrative will be identified by comparison with the *LXX* version. No attempt will be made to interpret these Josephan elements individually; rather, they will jointly be considered as a set of pointers possibly revealing consistent tendencies in Josephus’ handling of the source texts.

The *LXX* version of the book of Esther opens with an account of a dream in which Mardocheus (Mordecai) “saw” that “the whole just nation was upset, fearing their own doom, and prepared themselves to perish” (καὶ ἐταράχθη δίκαιον πᾶν ἔθνος φοβούμενοι τὰ ἑαυτῶν κακὰ καὶ ἠτοιμάσθησαν ἀπολέσθαι – Est.1:1[8]). Josephus – though not at all mentioning this dream – has a similar preview: he introduces his Esther narrative with the remark that during the reign of Artaxerxes, “the whole Jewish nation, together with their wives and children, were in danger of perishing” (ἐκινδύνευσεν τὸ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἔθνος ἅπαν σὺν γυναιξὶ καὶ τέκνοις ἀπολέσθαι – *AJ* XI.6.184). Thus both the *LXX* version and Josephus contain an early reference to the perilous situation of the Jewish nation. Having sounded this ominous note, the Greek Esther story then proceeds to relate how a single heroic woman won lasting renown for saving this imperilled nation.

In Esther 2 (in both the MT and the *LXX*) it is mentioned twice that Esther did not reveal her Jewish nationality (Est.2:10, 20). Josephus has the same note, but only once: “... not having made known to him the nation from which she happened to be” (μὴ ποιήσασα φανερόν αὐτῷ τὸ ἔθνος ἐξ οὐπερ εἶη τυγχάνουσα – *AJ* XI.6.203). Both Feldman (1970:167-168) and Begg

(2005:119) noticed a tendency on the part of Josephus to eliminate apparently needless repetition in his biblical source texts.

Josephus – immediately after relating how Esther was made queen – anticipates one aspect of her later dilemma by a curiously placed note: “The king also decreed a law that none of his people may approach him without being invited while he was sitting on his throne; and men with axes were standing about his throne, to punish those who would approach the throne uninvited” (“Ἔθηκε δὲ καὶ νόμον ὁ βασιλεὺς ὥστε μηδένα τῶν ἰδίων αὐτῷ προσιέναι μὴ κληθέντα ὀπηνίκα ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου καθέζοιτο περιεστήκεσαν δὲ τὸν θρόνον αὐτοῦ πελέκεις ἔχοντες ἄνθρωποι πρὸς τὸ κολάζειν τοὺς προσιόντας ἀκλήτους τῷ θρόνῳ – *AJ* XI.6.205). This seemingly misplaced note is a distinctly Josephan element; nothing of the kind occurs at this point in the biblical narrative, where the closest parallel to it is a reference to the custom regarding the young girls after spending their first night with the king (*Est.*2:14).

Haman’s indignation at Mardocheus’ refusal to pay him divine honour inspires his recommendation that the king should issue an edict of genocide against the Jewish nation. His suggestion – backed up by a promise to deposit 10,000 talents of silver into the royal treasury – is politely formulated in the *LXX* version: “if the king sees fit, let him decree that someone destroy them” (εἰ δοκεῖ τῷ βασιλεῖ δογματισάτω ἀπολέσαι αὐτούς – *Est.*3:9). Josephus has Haman address the king in a more coercive way: “if you want to invest some beneficence in your subjects, you will command that this nation be destroyed root and branch, and that no remnant of it be left, nor any of them be preserved, neither for slavery, nor by banishment” (τοῦτο τὸ ἔθνος εἴ τινα θέλεις τοῖς ὑπηκόοις εὐεργεσίαν καταθέσθαι κελεύσεις πρόρριζον ἀπολέσθαι μηδέ τι αὐτοῦ λείψανον καταλιπεῖν μήτ’ εἰς δουλείαν τινῶν φυλαχθέντων μήτε αἰχμαλωσίᾳ – *AJ* XI.6.213). In both versions, these recommendations are echoed in the words of the king’s first decree. The *LXX* has: “We therefore have ordered that they ... all, together with wives and children, be utterly destroyed by the swords of their enemies, without any mercy or relenting” (προστετάχαμεν οὖν ... πάντας σὺν γυναιξὶ καὶ τέκνοις ἀπολέσαι ὀλορριζεῖ ταῖς τῶν ἐχθρῶν μαχαίραις ἄνευ παντὸς οἴκτου καὶ φειδοῦς – *Est.*3:13 [6]); and Josephus has “I command that you destroy them ... all, together with their wives and children, showing no relent” (κελεύω ... πάντας σὺν γυναιξὶ καὶ τέκνοις ἀπολέσαι μηδεμίαν φειδῶ ποιησαμένους – *AJ* XI.6.218). Yet, despite these agreements, the balance is different: in the *LXX* the king’s decree is more explicit and elaborate than Haman’s recom-

mendation; in Josephus the king's decree (the part pertaining to the genocide) is briefer, and it would seem as if Haman assumes a more central role in having this edict issued.

This said, a note of caution should be added: intentionality or deliberate manipulation of the source text by Josephus is not to be assumed without first ascertaining whether supporting indications occur in the immediate context or elsewhere in the same work.

Josephus paraphrases the *LXX* version of Mardocheus' briefing of Esther phrase by phrase, introducing only one change of content: "remembering your days of humility when you were being brought up by my hand" (μνησθεῖσα ἡμερῶν ταπεινώσεώς σου ὡς ἐτράφης ἐν χειρὶ μου – Est.3:8b) is replaced by "for the sake of the nation's salvation not to disregard assuming a humble attitude by which she would avert the Jews' risk of being destroyed" (σωτηρίας ἔνεκεν τοῦ ἔθνους μὴ ἀδοξῆσαι λαβεῖν σχῆμα ταπεινόν ᾧ παραιτήσεται τοὺς Ἰουδαίους κινδυνεύοντας ἀπολέσθαι – *AJ* XI.6.225). Thus he has Mordecai directing the appeal to Esther in terms of the public interest of the Jewish nation rather than her personal interest. Note the verbal echoes of his introductory note, ἐκινδύνευσεν τὸ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἔθνος ἅπαν σὺν γυναιξὶ καὶ τέκνοις ἀπολέσθαι (*AJ* XI.6.184).

Esther's first response to Mordecai's appeal entails the objection that she has for a month not been invited to go to the king's inner room – a valid objection, considering the existence of a law that forbids any person to approach the king if not invited (or summoned), at a penalty of death, unless the king himself extends his golden staff to the transgressor. This is one of the exceptional cases where Josephus repeatedly reflects a detail that occurs only once in his biblical source – in contrast to his general tendency of eliminating repetition. This may be seen as an indication that he attaches particular significance to the law in question and the complications it involves for Esther: she is portrayed as knowingly, albeit reluctantly, undertaking to risk her own life for the sake of her nation's salvation. Her reluctance at this point amounts to outright refusal, and this elicits a second attempt from Mardocheus to enlist her aid.

Mardocheus' reaction to Esther's implied refusal to intercede with the king is presented in the same way both in the *LXX* and by Josephus (Est.4:13 // *AJ* XI.6.227): he sends a message back to her, sharply reprimanding her for placing her own safety before the help she could offer the Jewish people. A threat is appended to these words: if she refuses, help

will come to the nation “from elsewhere” (ἄλλοθεν – Est.4:13) – Josephus explicitly says “from God” (παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ – *AJ* XI.6.227); but in that case she would perish together with all her family. Mordecai’s rhetorical question – well-known from the biblical Esther story: “who knows whether you have become queen with a view to this occasion?” – is not reflected in Josephus’ version.

Esther’s second response is positive – but she starts by requesting supporting actions (three days of fasting) from her fellow Jews. “Then”, she says, “I will go to the king, defying the law, even if it means that I perish” (τότε εἰσελεύσομαι πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα παρὰ τὸν νόμον ἂν καὶ ἀπολέσθαι με ἦ – Est.4:16). Josephus reports this request and her resolve by way of indirect discourse: “She undertook then to approach the king, defying the law, and if she must die, to bear that as well” (τότε προσελεύσεσθαι τῷ βασιλεῖ παρὰ τὸν νόμον ὑπισχνεῖτο κἂν ἀποθανεῖν δέη τοῦτο ὑπομενεῖν – *AJ* XI.6.228).

Mordecai does as Esther has requested – a detail from the Hebrew text – instructing the people to fast; then he himself prays on their behalf. His prayer – not mentioned at all in the Hebrew, but given at length by way of direct discourse in the *LXX* version (Est.4:17 [1]–[9]) – is paraphrased as follows by Josephus:

(a) Petition: This is based on previous instances of divine grace and salvation: “He himself begged God not now to overlook that his people were perishing, but, as he had many times before provided for them, and had forgiven them when they had sinned, now also to save them from the destruction proclaimed against them” (τὸν θεὸν αὐτὸς ἰκέτευσε μηδὲ νῦν ὑπεριδεῖν αὐτοῦ τὸ ἔθνος ἀπολλύμενον ἀλλ’ ὡς καὶ πρότερον αὐτοῦ πολλάκις προενόησεν καὶ ἀμαρτόντι συνέγνω καὶ νῦν αὐτὸ ρύσασθαι τῆς κατηγγελημένης ἀπωλείας – *AJ* XI.6.229).

(b) Motivation: The people are claimed to be innocent, and the reason for their present predicament is given: “... for although they had not sinned in any way, they were in danger of dying dishonourably, but he himself was the reason for Haman’s wrath, ‘because’, he said, ‘I did not worship him, nor did I bear to pay him the same honour that I always paid you, Lord, he was offended, and planned these things against those who were not transgressing your laws’.” (οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀμαρτόν τι κινδυνεύειν ἀκλεῶς ἀποθανεῖν ἀλλ’ αὐτὸν γὰρ εἶναι τὴν αἰτίαν τῆς Ἀμάνου ὀργῆς ὅτι μὴ προσεκύνησα μηδ’ ἦν σοὶ δέσποτα φησὶν τιμῆν

παρεῖχον ταύτην ἐκείνω παρασχεῖν ὑπέμεινον ὀργισθεῖς ταῦτα
κατὰ τῶν μὴ παραβαινόντων τοὺς σους νόμους ἐμηχανήσατο –
AJ XI.6.230–231a)

Josephus then mentions that “the multitude uttered the same appeals”, but goes on to summarise the content of their petition as well: “... requesting God to provide for their salvation and to deliver the Israelites in the entire country from the impending disaster, for they had it before their eyes already and were awaiting it” (τὰς δ’ αὐτὰς ἠφίει καὶ τὸ πλῆθος φωνάς παρακαλοῦν προνοῆσαι τὸν θεὸν τῆς σωτηρίας αὐτῶν καὶ τοὺς ἐν ἀπάσῃ τῇ γῆ Ἰσραηλίτας ἐξελέσθαι τῆς μελλούσης συμφορᾶς καὶ γὰρ πρὸ ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτὴν εἶχον ἤδη καὶ προσεδόκων – *AJ XI.6.231b*). At face value this may seem to be just another unnecessary repetition; however, the use of different but closely related terms would rather serve to indicate a deliberate reinforcement of the theme. Note the parallel expressions occurring within the respective accounts of Mardocheus’ and the people’s prayers, consisting either of synonymous terms or of antithetical pairs of which one member is stated negatively: ἰκέτευσε // παρακαλοῦν; μηδὲ νῦν ὑπεριδεῖν ... τὸ ἔθνος ἀπολλύμενον // προνοῆσαι ... σωτηρίας; ῥύσασθαι // ἐξελέσθαι; κατηγγελέμενης // μελλούσης; ἀπωλείας // συμφορᾶς. Although it is not stated explicitly, these parallels suggest Mardocheus’ prayer to have a representative function – a prayer on behalf of the whole nation.

Esther’s prayer – also not mentioned at all in the Hebrew text – is likewise reported at length by way of direct discourse in the *LXX* version (*Est.4:17* [12]–[26]). Josephus summarises this prayer as follows: “Esther also petitioned God ... and begged God to take pity on her” (ἰκέτευε δὲ καὶ Ἐσθήρα τὸν θεὸν ... καὶ ... ἤτει τὸν θεὸν ἐλεθῆναι μὲν αὐτὴν – *AJ XI.6.231c–232a*), “and to grant her power of persuasion ... and more than her usual beauty, that she might use both ...” (δόξαι δ’ ... πιθανὴν μὲν ... τὸ δὲ εἶδος εὐπρεπεστέραν τῆς τάχιον οὖσαν ... ἵν’ ἀμφοτέροις ... χρήσαιτο – *AJ XI.6.232b–233a*) for a double purpose: to avert the king’s possible anger, and to obtain deliverance for her imperilled people; and “that the king may feel hate towards the enemies of the Jews and those who would contrive their impending destruction” (μισός τε γενέσθαι τῷ βασιλεῖ πρὸς τοὺς ἐχθροὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων καὶ τὴν ἀπώλειαν αὐτοῖς τὴν μέλλουσαν ... κατασκευάσοντας – *AJ XI.6.233b*). Three motifs in this summary are evidently taken from the *LXX* version:

- (a) Esther’s insistent, urgent pleading (βοήθησόν μοι ... ὅτι κίνδυνός μου ἐν χειρὶ μου ... – *Est.4:17*[12]);

(b) individual and community (ῥῦσαι ἡμᾶς ... καὶ ῥῦσαί με – Est.4:17[26]);

(c) reversal of fortune (στρέψον τὴν βουλήν αὐτῶν ἐπ’ αὐτούς – Est.4:17[17]).

Josephus integrates these motifs, however, into an anticipatory account of the royal interview for which Esther is preparing herself and interceding with God. The interests of an experienced strategist – awareness that the aesthetic (erotic?) aspect could reinforce the persuasive power of words, and that any shift in allegiance has its counterpart in disalliance – are evident throughout this Josephan paraphrase of the *LXX* version of Esther’s prayer.

Closely linked to the motif of a reversal of fortune is that of reciprocity – which some would call ‘poetic justice’. If only hinted at in Josephus’ version of Esther’s prayer, it is explicitly stated and elaborated in a narrator’s comment (in the first person) on Haman’s condemnation to death on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai:

By this I am compelled to admire the Divine, and to learn of his wisdom and his justice, not only in punishing the wickedness of Haman, but also in causing him to undergo the very same punishment which he had planned for another; and also in thereby teaching others this lesson, that whatever anyone contrives against another, he unknowingly prepares it against himself in the first place.

ὅθεν ἐπέρχεταιί μοι τὸ θεῖον θαυμάζειν καὶ τὴν σοφίαν αὐτοῦ καὶ δικαιοσύνην καταμανθάνειν μὴ μόνον τὴν Ἀμάνου κολάσαντος πονηρίαν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν κατ’ ἄλλου μεμηχανημένην τιμωρίαν ταύτην ἐκείνου ποιήσαντος εἶναι καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις μαθεῖν οὕτως [γινῶναι] παρεσχηκός ὡς ἂν καθ’ ἐτέρου τις παρεσκεύασε ταῦτα λαυθάνει καθ’ ἑαυτοῦ πρῶτον ἐτοιμασάμενος – *AJ* XI.6.268).

As Feldman notes, Josephus himself states in *AJ* I.1.14 that the chief lesson to be learned from his histories is that God “directs the universe, rewarding those who obey Him and punishing those who do not” (Feldman 1970:169); and his work contains numerous examples of this thesis. In the Esther story, it is expressed also in a brief passage towards the end of the king’s second decree: “for this (day) God has made for them one of deliverance in stead of destruction; it is a good day for those benevolent to us, and a reminder of the punishment of conspirators” (ταύτην γὰρ αὐτοῖς

ὁ θεὸς ἀντὶ ὀλεθρίας σωτήριον πεποίηκεν ἔστι δ' ἀγαθὴ τοῖς εὐνοοῦσιν ἡμῖν ὑπόμνησις δὲ τῆς τῶν ἐπιβουλευσάντων κολάσεως – *AJ XI.6.282*).

The motif of 'poetic justice' recurs shortly afterward as motivation for the specified day, the thirteenth of Adar: "that they could destroy their enemies on the very same day on which they were about to be in danger" (ὅπως καθ' ἣν ἡμέραν αὐτοὶ κινδυνεύσειν ἤμελλον ἐν ταύτῃ τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ἀπολέσωσιν – *AJ XI.6.286*).

In sum, one would be hard pressed to assert that Josephus' main concern in retelling the biblical Esther story was "to make his whole work more attractive to his Greek readers" (Feldman 1970:170) by turning it into a Hellenistic novel. Even if Josephus could be shown to "build up the stature of the hero and of the heroine" (cf. Feldman 1970:146), to have a "concern with the beauty of women" (1970:148), to "elaborate the descriptions of palaces and royal banquets" (1970:149), to add details "to enhance the romance and the drama of his narrative" (1970:150) and to emphasise dramatic irony (1970:154–155), there seems to be just as many indications that he utilises motifs and terminology characteristic of the biblical version of the book. As the above analysis has attempted to illustrate, the motifs he highlights are the same that the biblical text emphasises, and he employs the same terms as the *LXX*. The motifs occurring most frequently in the Esther story are danger (κινδυνεύειν/κίνδυνος), destruction/perishing (ἀπολέσθαι/ἀπώλεια), salvation/deliverance (σωτηρία), and the individual acting on behalf of the community. All of these are evident in Josephus' version, yet he integrates these elements in a narrative that reflects the typical interests of an accomplished story teller who combines the historian's perspective with his extensive experience as military commander and strategist.

3. Rahab in the *LXX* and in Josephus

In Begg's comparison between the *LXX* and Josephus' version of the Rahab story, the first Josephan "insertion" he notes is the "extended segment (*Ant.* 5.5–6) which makes clear that the spies did indeed carry out the mission given them" (Begg 2005:116). He remarks that this passage explains how the spies came by their knowledge of the Canaanites' situation, and notes also that Josephus addresses a question evoked by the inspection – how could the spies go about unchallenged? – and supplies "the historian's answer": the inhabitants of Jericho assumed natural curiosity on the part of the strangers, thus had no suspicion of any hostile intent. Begg seems to

interpret this whole insertion as being Josephus' way of dealing with the peculiar presentation of the spies' execution of their commission in Joshua 2:1 (MT and *LXX*). It should be noted, however, that Josephus gives no indication that he is deliberately improving the biblical version of the story by remedying a feature that could reflect negatively on representatives of his people. Neither would he necessarily consider the *LXX* version as presenting the scouts' conduct as improper execution of their mission. Tikva Frymer-Kensky notes that a prostitute's establishment was perhaps "a good place to blend in unobserved and listen to people" (Frymer-Kensky 2002:35).

The way the spies are introduced in Josephus' version differs markedly from that in the *LXX*. The introduction in Joshua 2 is very brief. Two young men are "sent out to reconnoitre" (ἀπέστειλεν Ἰησοῦς ... δύο νεανίσκους κατασκοπεῦσαι – v.1); they are reported to the king of Jericho as Israelite men "having come here to reconnoitre" (εἰσπεπόρευνται ὧδε ἄνδρες τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραηλ κατασκοπεῦσαι – v.2); they are defined by the king's envoy to Rahab as having "come to reconnoitre" (κατασκοπεῦσαι γὰρ τὴν γῆν ἤκασιν – v.3). This introduction, with its threefold repetition of the term κατασκοπεῦσαι, suggests no doubt in either camp as to the mission of these men; nor does it suggest anything negative about their execution of it. Josephus' version is different simply because he tells the story from a different narrator's perspective. The omniscient, omnipresent narrator of the *LXX* version presents the events as witnessed *in loci* – travelling, as it were, to Jericho and back together with the scouts. Josephus, in contrast, tells the story from the perspective of the Israelite camp across the Jordan. He records their mission and their return; then appends the whole account of their encounter with Rahab as if it were part of their report to Joshua.

Note also that the summary report given in Joshua 2:24 contains more than the scouts' mission as formulated in Joshua 2:1 requires. The *LXX* has Joshua telling them, "go see the land, and Jericho" (ἀνάβητε καὶ ἴδετε τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν Ἰεριχώ). Their report – admittedly echoing Rahab's words – reads: "the Lord has given the entire land in our hand, and everyone inhabiting that land cowers before us" (παρέδωκεν κύριος πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν ἐν χειρὶ ἡμῶν καὶ κατέπηκεν πᾶς ὁ κατοικῶν τὴν γῆν ἐκείνην ἀφ' ἡμῶν). Josephus seems to have noticed this indication that the scouts' mission was successfully accomplished; he transposes the content of the report to his introductory section, stating that the scouts were sent to Jericho "to find out their power and what disposition they had" (τήν τε

δύναμιν αὐτῶν καὶ τίνα διάνοιαν ἔχουσιν αὐτοὶ γνωσομένους – *AJ* V.1.2). Then he recounts how they obtained detailed information regarding the first of these aspects by their inspection of the city (*AJ* V.1.5) before retiring to Rahab's "inn", where during their exchange she portrays the imminent Israelite conquest of the city as something inevitable.

In the same vein, other Josephan "additions" identified by Begg may be understood in terms of Josephus' own military background. The fact that he adds an explanation of how the king knew the precise location of the spies (*AJ* V.1.8a – cf. Begg 2005:118); that his king issues more precise commands, and adds a statement of his intentions regarding the spies (*AJ* V.1.8b); that he "expatiates on <Rahab's> 'pursuit proposal', prefacing this with an allusion to the rationale for such a pursuit" (Begg 2005:118–9); that he "highlights the efficacy of Rahab's words" by "his expanded version of Josh 2,7.22" (Begg 2005:119) – all of these reflect the keen observation and attention to detail characteristic of a historian who is also an experienced military commander.

Yet Josephus, by his portrayal of the encounter between the spies and Rahab, shows sensitivity to the precarious situation of a woman caught up in the conflict between two nations. As Frymer-Kensky (2002:35) points out, Rahab is a triply marginalised woman. "From Israel's point of view, she is an outsider; from Canaan's point of view, she is a woman; and even from the Canaanite woman's point of view, she is a prostitute, outside normal family life." Begg (2005:120) notes the "much-elaborated version of her reminder about her having 'dealt kindly' with the spies" (*AJ* V.1.11), the "embellished rendering of the woman's plea that the spies swear to spare her" (*AJ* V.1.12), and the "explicit expression of gratitude by the spies". From the observation that such an expression "is conspicuously absent in the Bible's extended report of their words" Begg infers that "Josephus takes care to represent his Jewish spies as grateful and appreciative persons" (2005:122 n.40); and he concludes that Josephus' Rahab "is introduced as a more respectable figure than her biblical namesake and as such a more suitable hostess for the Israelite spies" (2005:128). This moralistic interpretation seems misguided; it takes the particular textual features as items of character portrayal, and isolates them from the narrative. When read in the context of the narrative, with due consideration of the dynamics of the exchange, these touches highlight the delicate nature of the negotiations between the Israelite spies and the Canaanite prostitute. Against this background, Rahab is seen more clearly as "smart, proactive,

tricky, and unafraid to disobey and deceive her king” (Frymer-Kensky 2002:35).

Due to Begg’s superficial reading of isolated elements of Josephus’ Rahab story, his conclusions tend to be vague and contradictory. For instance, from observations such as that “Josephus goes on to interject a further statement, likewise featuring the figure of Joshua, by the spies in *Ant.* 5.14a” (2005:123–4), he concludes that “the Josephan Joshua assumes a heightened importance vis-à-vis his biblical counterpart” (Begg 2005:128). However, he notes that “Joshua’s role is diminished ... in that he is not explicitly mentioned as the one to whom the spies go and deliver their report” – and continues, “Josephus does interject an additional reference to Joshua at the very end of his version in 5.15b, ... evidencing his exemplary piety and collegiality” (2005:128).

A similarly contradictory, almost meaningless conclusion is reached regarding the spies. They “carefully execute Joshua’s orders to them” and “there is nothing to raise readers’ eyebrows about the person whom they visit and the purpose of their brief stay with her” (Begg 2005:129). Towards Rahab they show themselves to be “both more explicitly grateful ... and less suspicious about her intentions” – however, they “disappear from the scene without getting to deliver the ‘last word’ attributed to them in Josh 2,24” (2005:129).

4. Rahab and Esther in Josephus

There are obvious differences between the characters of Rahab and Esther: the first is a harlot (or innkeeper?), the second a queen; and the first is a foreigner of unknown parentage, the second of Jewish birth and of royal descent. Despite these differences, there are quite a few striking similarities between them. Both are in the position of a single woman caught up in the cross-fire between the people of Israel and an enemy nation; both come to the rescue of the former despite their own perilous position; and both are eventually honoured for their brave actions and their “rescuing” or “saving” of God’s people. Although neither the *LXX* nor Josephus’ version of the Esther story contains any explicit allusions to that of Rahab, these similarities do seem to justify an intertextual approach involving the Rahab and Esther stories in “a reflexive, mutually informing conversation” (cf. Wall 2001:218).

The motifs identified as occurring most frequently in the Esther story, and the distinctively Josephan terms used to evoke them (cf. section 2 above), are: danger (κινδυνεύειν/κίνδυνος), destruction or perishing (ἀπολέσθαι/ἀπώλεια), salvation or deliverance (σώζειν/σωτηρία), and the individual acting on behalf of the community. To these may be added: reversal of fortune, reciprocity, and ‘poetic justice’ (all of which are presented in Josephus’ version of Esther, but without the use of specific recurrent terms).

By ‘reciprocity’ is meant the equitable compensation mutually expected and granted between individuals or groups. In the Esther story, for instance, the king realises at a critical moment that some reward is still due to Mordecai for informing him of the conspiracy by two eunuchs.

Closely related to this motif is that of ‘poetic justice’ – when reciprocity is effected by some external (divine?) agency, especially when malicious plans or actions eventually cause the downfall of the initiator. In the Esther story the most striking instance of this is when Haman is condemned to death on the gallows he has erected with the intention to have Mordecai executed.

In Josephus’ version of the exchange between Esther and Mordecai, the motifs of perishing, salvation, individual and society, reciprocity, and poetic justice, are all interwoven. Josephus relates that “<Mardochaeus> commanded her not to have such concern for her own salvation, but for the common deliverance of the nation; for [he said that] if she would now neglect them, help would surely come to them from God, but she, as well as her ancestral family, would be exterminated by those who had been disregarded” (ἐκέλευσεν αὐτῇ μὴ τὴν ἰδίαν οὕτως σκοπεῖν σωτηρίαν ἀλλὰ τὴν κοινὴν τοῦ ἔθνους εἰ γὰρ ἀμελήσειεν τούτου νῦν ἔσεσθαι μὲν αὐτῷ βοήθειαν παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ πάντως αὐτὴν δὲ καὶ τὸν πατρῶον οἶκον αὐτῆς ὑπὸ τῶν ὀλιγορηθέντων διαφθαρήσεσθαι – *AJ* XI.227).

These same motifs occur also in Josephus’ version of the story of Rahab – in terms of the intertextual approach followed here, the “earlier text” (Wall 2001:218) – although they are not as fully elaborated as in Josephus’ Esther story, obviously, because of the brevity of the Rahab story. However, their presence is made evident by the distinctly Josephan terms – for instance, in his presentation of Rahab’s words addressed to the spies after bringing them down from the roof:

She told them about the danger she had exposed herself to for the sake of their salvation – for if she had been caught hiding them, she would not have escaped punishment by the king, but with her whole household would have perished shamefully; and

¹² she begged them to keep this in mind when they should have obtained possession of the land of Canaan, when it would be in their power to requite her for her present salvation of them; and told them to go home, after having sworn to her surely to spare her and her family when they should conquer the city and massacre all its inhabitants ...

... τὸν κίνδυνον εἶποῦσα ὄν ὑπὲρ τῆς αὐτῶν ὑπέλθοι σωτηρίας ἀλοῦσαν γὰρ ἀποκρύπτουσιν αὐτοὺς οὐκ ἂν διαφυγεῖν τὴν ἐκ τοῦ βασιλέως τιμωρίαν ἀλλὰ πανοικὶ αὐτὴν ἀπολέσθαι κακῶς ¹² παρακαλέσασα διὰ μνήμης ἔχειν ὅταν ἐγκρατεῖς τῆς Χαναανίων γῆς καταστάντες ἀμοιβὴν ἐκτίσαι δύνωνται τῆς ἄρτι σωτηρίας χωρεῖν ἐκέλευεν ἐπὶ τὰ οἰκεῖα ὁμόσαντας ἢ μὴν σώσειν αὐτὴν καὶ τὰ αὐτῆς ὅταν τὴν πόλιν ἐλόντες φθείρωσι πάντας τοὺς ἐν αὐτῇ – *AJ* V.1.11b–12a.

Thus it is evident that Josephus, when writing his version of the Rahab story in Joshua 2, imagined the dynamics of Rahab's situation in a way very similar to that of Esther as he would later portray her story. Despite the absence of any explicit allusions, the similarities between these Josephan narratives – the common motifs, clusters of motifs, and the distinctive vocabulary – allow these texts to be read using an intertextual approach by which their respective interpretations are mutually enhanced.

5. Conclusion

The above comparison between the narratives of Rahab and Esther, as presented by Josephus vis-à-vis the biblical (*LXX*) versions, leads to the following conclusions:

(a) regarding the interpretation of specific features of the narratives –

Josephus may be regarded as creating “a streamlined, smoother-reading version” of his biblical sources (cf. Begg 2005:128) – but the motives attributed to him (*e.g.*, “modifying the data of his source that portrayed representatives of his people behaving in questionable fashion” – Begg 2005:117; and attempting “to combat anti-Semitic propaganda” – Feldman 1970:162) seem arbitrary and speculative. The general apologetic or

propagandistic tendency of the *AJ* need not be evidently visible in every detail of every story. The interpretations of Begg and Feldman disregard the effect of factors like Josephus' military background and the likely inclination associated with it, *viz.* to be specially interested in strategic aspects – not even to mention his much greater freedom of expression, given that he paraphrases his sources and is not bound by the same restrictions as the *LXX* translators.

Though not voicing explicit social criticism, Josephus does not neglect opportunities to sketch the predicament of women characters in his narratives, as victims of a society dominated by patriarchal values. In his very brief version of the Rahab story, as in his much more extended Esther story, the distinctly Josephan elements identified by this study include a marked tendency to highlight the predicament of women as marginalised individuals, especially in war situations, in what has always been “a man's world”.

(b) regarding theoretical and methodological issues –

Finally, the questions stated in the introduction have drawn attention to the dangers of unwarranted generalisation and subjective, speculative interpretation. The particular intertextual approach demonstrated in this study – a multi-dimensional comparison between Josephan paraphrases of different biblical narratives on the one hand, and between Josephus' version and the biblical version of the same narrative on the other – seems to provide a way of verifying conclusions regarding Josephus' literary techniques and practices.

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